



# Afghan Media in 2010

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## Priority District Report Sarkani (Kunar)

**October 13, 2010**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 District profile

Sarkani (also spelled Sirkanay) district is in the south of Kunar province. It is a small district with an area of 192km<sup>2</sup>, its territory lying on the east bank of the Kunar River and rising to the ridge of a Hindu Kush spur. The bottom of its valley (727m) is flat and fertile, but the forested mountains in the east rise to 2,576m.

Sarkani borders Khas Kunar to the south, Narang to the west, and Marawara to the north. To the east, it shares a 20km border with Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA): it borders both Mohmand agency and Bajaur agency.

The Kunar River is a significant river in the Kabul watershed. It flows through Sarkani, supporting agricultural livelihoods, and meets the Kabul River near Jalalabad.

The center is Sarkani, a low-lying village of 3,000 people in the middle of the district, on the asphalted main road 10km from the provincial capital Asadabad and 100km from Jalalabad. Heading over Nawa Pass into FATA, Khar town (Bajaur agency) is 50km away and Ghilanai (Mohmand agency) is 100km.

**Figure 1: Map of Sarkani district**



The district population is estimated at 80,000, spread over 31 villages. During the Soviet period, Sarkani was badly damaged, with roughly 75% of its houses destroyed. A very large proportion of the population (>75%) fled the district for refugee camps in Mohmand and Bajaur agencies. There remain strong ties between the communities on each side of the border. Tango village in Sarkani is noted as a “refugee area,” to which many Afghans returned after the fall of the Taliban. The population is over 90% Pashtun, and Pashto is the primary language. The main villages include Pasha (population 4,750), the district center (3,000), Tango refugee camp (3,000), Bahrabad (2,200), Bargay (1,500), and Donaye (1,500) (Central Statistics Organization 2003 figures, which are likely to have increased since).

The district's economy centers on agriculture and small livestock rearing, as well as on day laborers, who travel mostly to Jalalabad and sometimes to Pakistan for work. There is one market in Sarkani district center, with 30-40 shops. Most of the products come from the provincial center and Jalalabad. People often travel to Asadabad for their shopping.

The majority of the population in Sarkani does not have access to clean water (80%), instead using water from the river or a hand pump. There is no hospital in the district, but there is a Comprehensive Health Center in the district center. The highest level of education in the district is high school. Very few girls receive more than a basic education (there is only one girls' high school).

Health and education are relatively well supported, with Aide Médicale Internationale (AMI) implementing Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS) programs. Just for Afghan Capacity and Knowledge (JACK) is implementing the Building Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) program. US Agency for International Development (USAID) Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) programs are active building bridges, roads, and village water systems. Afghan Stabilization Initiative (ASI) has recently begun operations in Sarkani, supporting the governor and introducing projects to link *qawmemeshers* (village elders) to the district center administration. International Medical Corps (IMC) has been operational in Tango refugee camp, improving water supplies. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) is also present. Programs include the National Solidarity Program (NSP), which disbursed \$1,493,900 across 45 Community Development Councils; the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA); the National Area-Based Development Program (NABDP); and the Water, Sanitation and Irrigation Program (WATSIP).

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is active in Sarkani with a range of projects, including bazaar rehabilitation (solar power, micro-hydro power, and awnings), farm tools, and agricultural training, building the Pashad Bridge and the Nawa Pass road.

Sarkani's positioning next to Bajaur agency should be noted. After Waziristan, Bajaur is regarded as having the highest concentration of violent, ideologically driven insurgents, including Al Qaeda. Throughout 2008 and 2009, the Pakistani military conducted intense operations there to clear the insurgents, resulting in up to 300,000 fleeing the area (some to Kunar, but numbers are not known). The presence of insurgents in Sarkani is widespread, and fighters are a mix of local residents, Pakistanis, and Arabs. The insurgents reportedly do not control the district center, but they fully control Bargay and Ganjgal and have access to the entire district to threaten the population.

## 1.2 Methodology

A total of 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted in the district center with community leaders, including: a *malik* (village chief); a *mullah*; an elder of the traditional *shura* (council); an elder of the NSP *shura*; a businessman; and a teacher. No interviews were conducted with outlet managers. The interviewer is from Dara-e-Pesh.

Additionally, 150 interviews were conducted, which inform the audience section of this report.

## 2 Media landscape

Sarkani is not among the most remote districts analyzed, but it seems to be struggling to achieve comprehensive exposure to media. Given its geographical location, Sarkani has access to a relatively diverse range of broadcast media, including provincial radio stations based in Kunar and Jalalabad, border region radio stations, and one Pakistani station. TV channels are generally received from antennas located in Kunar, but penetration of TV is lagging, because of limited electricity. Cultural and security factors are also obstacles to TV viewership. Indeed, although a few households in the district have a satellite dish, threats from insurgents mean they generally do not watch TV during the day and cannot have satellite dishes visible on their houses.

There are no computer shops in the district. People who want to buy a DVD must go to Jalalabad or Asadabad. TV and radio are rarely present in public places such as *chaikhanas* (tea houses) or ice cream stores. There are five Public Call Offices (PCOs). Mobile phone services are reportedly provided by AWCC, MTN, and Roshan. The government has access to the local Government Communications Network (GCN).

In 2009, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and USAID handed out solar radios throughout Kunar, including in Sarkani, but only to those living closest to the district center.

### 2.1 Media outlets

Sarkani district has access to six terrestrial TV channels, none of which are local, and eleven radio channels, two of which are local. No newspapers and magazines are distributed in the district through formal networks.

#### 2.1.1 Television

Besides satellite channels, there are six TV channels available in the district through terrestrial signal, and no cable networks.

Name	Scope	Ownership	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Kunar RTA	Provincial	Government	Asadabad	-
Shamshad	National	Private	Asadabad	30-160km
Lemar	National	Private	Asadabad	35km
Kabul RTA	National	Government	Asadabad	-
Ariana	National	Private	Asadabad	35-75km
Tolo	National	Private	Asadabad	35km

#### 2.1.2 Radio

Besides the shortwave radio stations available throughout Afghanistan, there are 11 radio stations available in the district, 2 of which broadcast locally.

Name	Scope	Ownership	Frequency	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Sarkani Ghag	Local	Military	-	Qala Ghan (Sarkani)	-
Shariat Ghag	Local	Insurgents	87.5 FM	Ganjgal (Sarkani)	-
Kunar RTA	Provincial	Government	105.2 FM	Asadabad (Kunar)	45km
Nangarhar	Regional	Government	105.2 FM	Jalalabad	50km
Sharq	Regional	Private	91.3 FM	Jalalabad	60km
Safa	Regional	Private	89.7 FM	Jalalabad	60km
Deewa	Border region	Private	100.5 FM	Kunar	-
Mashaal	Border region	Private	100.5 FM	Kunar	-
BBC	National	Private	87.5 FM	Kunar	20-25km
Arman FM	National	Private	98.1 FM	Jalalabad	35km
Radio Peshawar	International	Private	101 FM	Peshawar	-

### **Sarkani Ghag**

Sarkani Ghag (“Voice of Sarkani”) is a radio station run by ISAF and broadcast from a US military base in Qala Ghan, 1km south of the district center. Unfortunately, the outlet manager refused to be interviewed. The station was launched when the base was established in 2008 and is broadcast across the entire district. The station broadcasts from 7am-9pm every day.

Broadcast content includes local and national news as well as traditional music. There are regular reports on military accomplishments and defeats of the insurgency. It is also possible to call in to the station to request songs. In the past, there have been awareness-raising campaigns on vaccinations and to counter poppy production.

### **Shariat Ghag**

Shariat Ghag (“Voice of Sharia”) is owned and run by insurgents and is broadcast from Ganjgal, a mountainous village in Sarkani, 6km west of the district center. The position and weakness of the antenna mean that it is not received in the whole district: villages in the south and east of have limited reception because of its low transmission power and the mountainous landscape. Unfortunately, it was too dangerous to interview the manager of the station. The station broadcasts 6-8am and 2-4pm every day, in Pashto. The station was established in 2008 and broadcasts local news, including negative propaganda about the government. There is no live or interactive programming and recitation of the Quran forms a large part of the content.

The station takes its name from the official mouthpiece of the Taliban regime before it fell in 2001. Other insurgent stations called Shariat Ghag have been reported as transmitting from other provinces (e.g. Ghazni, Nuristan) in recent years.

### **Kunar RTA**

The state-run Kunar Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) was established in 2005. It has a 30m antenna located in Asadabad and a 45km broadcast radius.

### **Nangarhar**

Nangarhar radio has a 60m antenna and is located in Jalalabad. Its 10kW transmitter has a broadcast radius that ranges from 50km for FM to 150km for AM. The radio broadcasts 24 hours a day. See the Jalalabad report for further details.

**Sharq**

Sharq radio started in 2003 and is part of the expanding media group run by Mr. Shafiqullah Shaiq. Its 45m antenna is located in Jalalabad and its transmitter has a broadcast radius of 60km. The radio airs 24 hours a day. See the Jalalabad report for further details.

**Safa**

Safa radio started in 2009 and is run by Mr. Qarar. Its 45m antenna is located in Jalalabad and its 1kW transmitter allows for a broadcast radius of 60km. Programming runs 19 hours a day (5am-12pm and 1pm-1am). See the Jalalabad report for further details.

**Deewa/Mashaal**

Deewa and Mashaal are two radio stations that share the same frequency. Mashaal is administered by Radio Free Europe (RFE) and shares the same headquarters as Azadi. Deewa is administered by Voice of America (VOA)/Ashna and shares its headquarters in Washington, DC. These private radio stations were established in 2009 to cover the Pashtun belt areas. They broadcast through three antennas in Khost (200kW transmitter), Kunar, and Gardez. Content is tailored to a Pakistani listenership.

**National radio stations**

Additionally, the following national radio stations are received: the BBC and Arman FM.

**Radio Peshawar**

As Sarkani is on the border, Radio Peshawar (Pakistan) is broadcast into the district. Content includes mainly Pakistani news but also any important news about Afghanistan.

**2.1.3 Newspapers**

There is no formal distribution channel for newspapers in Sarkani, but it was reported that people occasionally read three newspapers, including Zala (private, weekly), Milli Wahdat (private, monthly), and Nangarhar (government, weekly). Maarif, a private bimonthly magazine, is also read sometimes.

**2.2 New media****2.2.1 Mobile media**

There are no computer shops and only a few PCOs in Sarkani. Sharing videos between mobile phones, including national songs and Indian songs, is quite popular among youth. Ringtones, videos, and songs are available in Asadabad and Jalalabad.

**2.2.2 Internet**

There is no internet in the district, including internet cafés. Most likely, the local population with (very limited) access to internet connects at work or when traveling to Asadabad or Jalalabad.

## 2.3 Media and information actors

### 2.3.1 Government

There are no representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) or Bakhtar News Agency (BNA) in the district. There is no public library.

### 2.3.2 Outlet managers and journalists

There are reportedly no journalists in Sarkani. At the military radio station, Sarkani Ghag, there is said to be one person in charge of news and reporting.

### 2.3.3 Other content providers

There are reportedly no other content providers in Sarkani.

### 2.3.4 Media NGOs

There are a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing basic services and conducting development activities, such as in health, education, and water and sanitation. However, none of these NGOs provides services to the media sector in Sarkani.

### 2.3.5 Traditional information sources

*Maliks* and *mullahs* provide alternative sources of information on topics such as agriculture (*maliks*) and religion (*mullahs*). They can also take issues to the district governor if necessary. Only men can access these sources of information.

The district has two types of *shura*, one set up by MRRD in 2003 and the other traditional. People prefer the traditional *shura*, as it is perceived as more independent. The population prefers to receive information from these sources of information, as they feel that the radio is influenced by different groups: there is little trust in any of the stations.

### 2.3.6 Insurgents

As mentioned above, there is one radio station run by insurgents, Shariat Ghag. A number of community leaders interviewed were positive about the content of this station and said there was interest in what was being broadcast. A smaller but still significant number acknowledged that it was propaganda.

*Shabnama* (“night letters”) are used by insurgents in villages outside the center. These are typically threats against people working with government, the Afghan National Army (ANA), and the Afghan National Police (ANP), or letters encouraging people to join the *jihad*.

### 2.3.7 Military

There is a military base in Qala Ghan, for the US military, ANP, ANA, and the border police. Military-run Sarkani Ghag is quite popular, most likely because there are few alternatives. A number of community leaders said it was not trusted because most programs are influenced by the military and government and perceived as propaganda.



### **2.3.8 Others**

No other media-related interest group was reported.

## 3 Audience

The following is a description of the audience in Sarkani, based on 150 interviews.

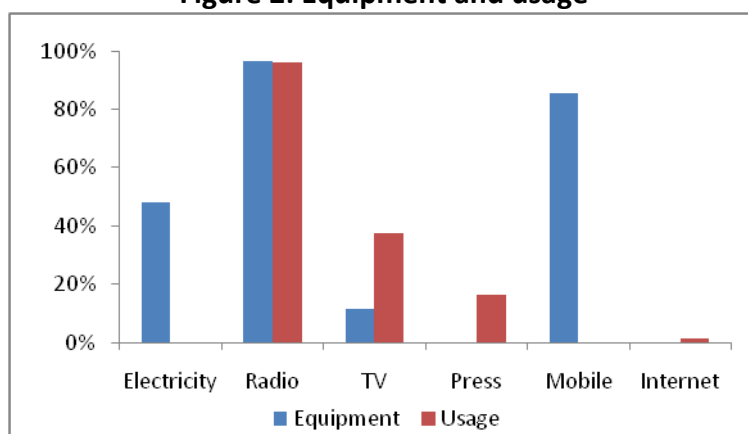
### 3.1 Equipment and usage

#### 3.1.1 Household equipment

Far away from the main cities, Sarkani has little access to media other than radio stations. Understandably, the equipment rate in the district is lower than that in other districts, with an important focus on radio. Nevertheless, people in Sarkani make do with what they have to a great extent.

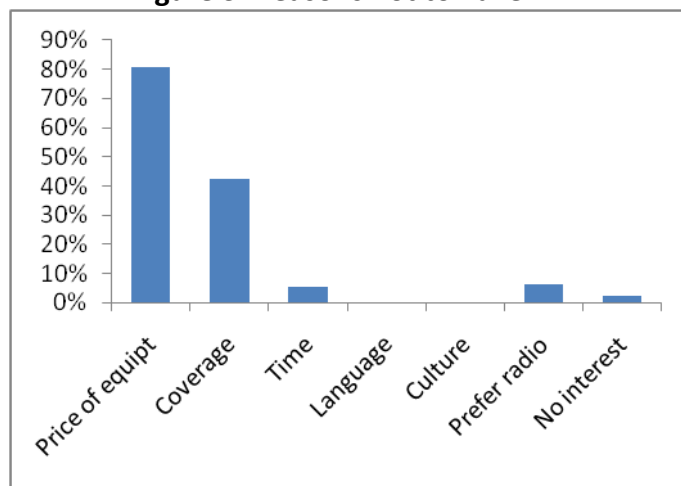
Most interviewed households declared having at least one radio set. A total of 47% claimed to have access to electricity, 14% of which came through “city” electricity (village generator or possibly micro-hydropower) and 33% through a generator or a solar panel. A total of 12% have a TV set and 9% have a DVD player. There are no satellite dishes among respondents. Around 86% of households have a mobile phone but none has internet access at home.

**Figure 2: Equipment and usage**



The main reason for not having a TV set is price. Here, as in other districts where there is no access to grid electricity, running costs for a generator are higher than the price of the TV set itself. In addition, 43% mentioned limited coverage of the over-the-air signal, which means there is even less desire to get the equipment. Note that culture/religion was not specified as a reason not to have a TV, although Sarkani is generally considered relatively conservative.

**Figure 3: Reasons not to have TV**

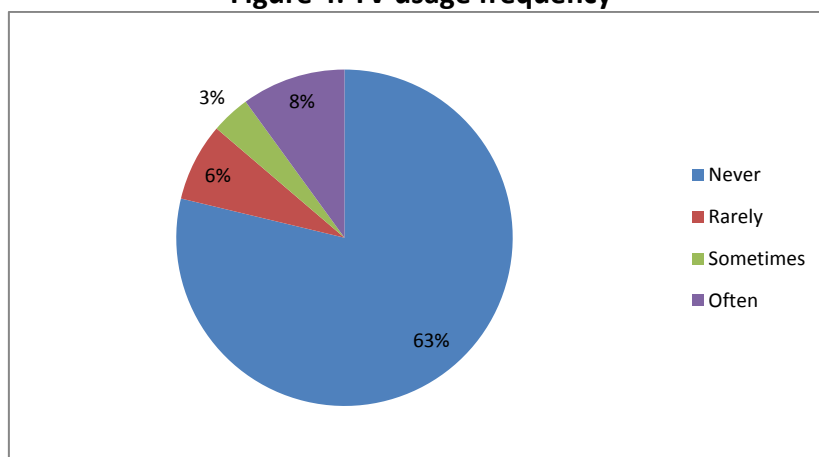


### 3.1.2 Sources of information and media usage

Radio is the preferred source of information for all topics tested (politics, religion, news, development, health, and entertainment).

TV is also a fairly highly trusted source of information for most users. Although only 12% of households are equipped, 38% of interviewees declared watching it at least from time to time. A total of 30% of interviewed households declared TV to be their favorite source of information in terms of international news, but only 9% said the same for information on the development of Afghanistan.

**Figure 4: TV usage frequency**

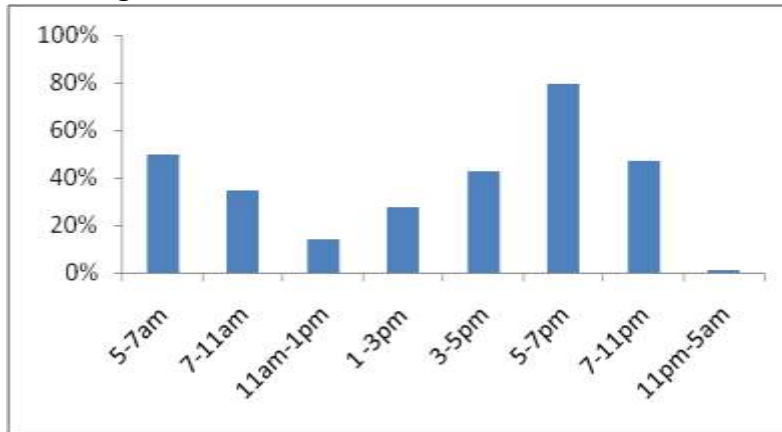


Only 16% of respondents declared reading the printed press, out of whom 38% read it with assiduity (more than once a week). The two internet users interviewed (young, possibly NGO workers, both having studied at university – one the son of a government clerk and the other the son of a teacher) connect at work every day.

### 3.1.3 Usage patterns

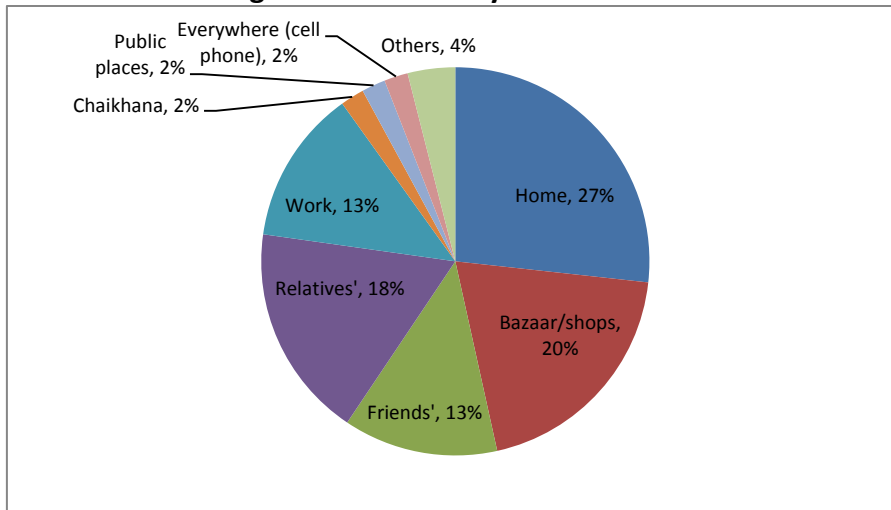
Preferred times to listen to the radio are in the late afternoon and during the evening, with a peak at dinner time (5-7pm). Radio is essentially listened to at home, with the whole family, with no discrimination between men and women.

**Figure 5: Preferred times to listen to the radio**



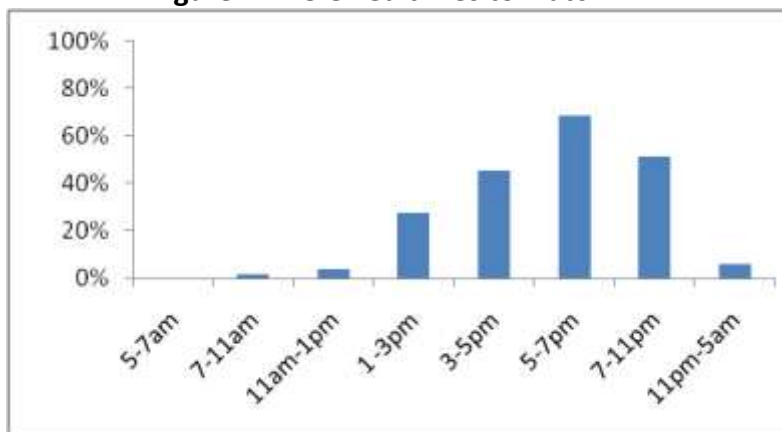
Many people do not own a TV set but still watch TV, and various places are listed for doing this: at home (27% of TV users), friends’ or relatives’ houses (31%), in shops (20%), at *chaikhana*s (tea houses) (2%), or at work (13%).

**Figure 6: Where do you watch TV?**



Similarly to radio, TV is watched preferably in the late afternoon and in the evening, with a peak between 5pm and 7pm.

**Figure 7: Preferred times to watch TV**



### 3.2 Preferences

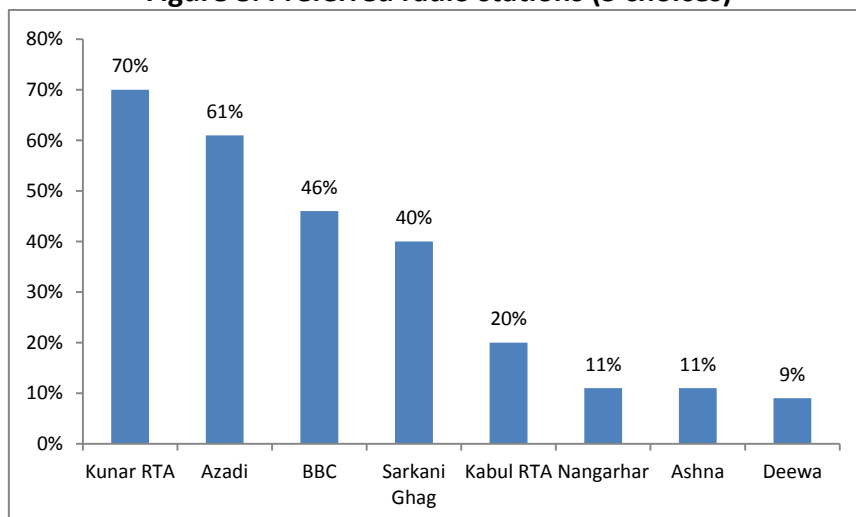
Generally speaking, Sarkani interviewees want more access to TV and newspapers, as well as greater access to electricity. Young people would like more music programs, whereas their elders seem to want more Islamic programs. It is a common perception among elders that music and movies are not Islamic and therefore are not acceptable in Afghan society.

#### 3.2.1 Outlets

##### Radio

Favorite radio stations for Sarkani interviewees are Kunar RTA (mentioned by 70%) and Azadi (61%). The BBC is also quite popular. The real local station, Sarkani Ghag, is among the preferred stations for 40% of interviewees. No interviewee mentioned Shariat Ghag, the insurgent radio station, but its signal is weak and it is not received well everywhere in the sampled areas.

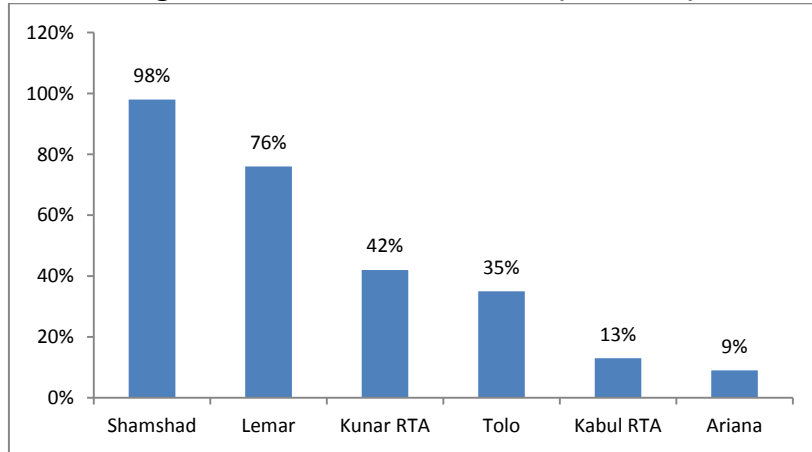
**Figure 8: Preferred radio stations (3 choices)**



##### Television

The favorite TV channel for Sarkani interviewees is Shamshad, mentioned by nearly all TV users, ahead of Lemar (76%) and Kunar RTA (42%). All three stations broadcast mainly in Pashto. Shamshad is preferred to Lemar in Kunar because its language is closer to that used in eastern Afghanistan, whereas Lemar is closer to southern Pashto.

**Figure 9: Preferred TV channels (3 choices)**



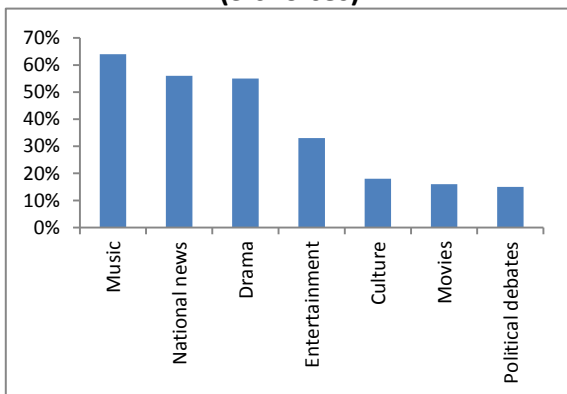
**Printed press**

Magazines and newspapers mentioned by Sarkani interviewees as preferred were Kunar (75% of users) and Zala (71%), followed by Milli Wahdat, Nangarhar, Maarif, and Sada-e-Azadi.

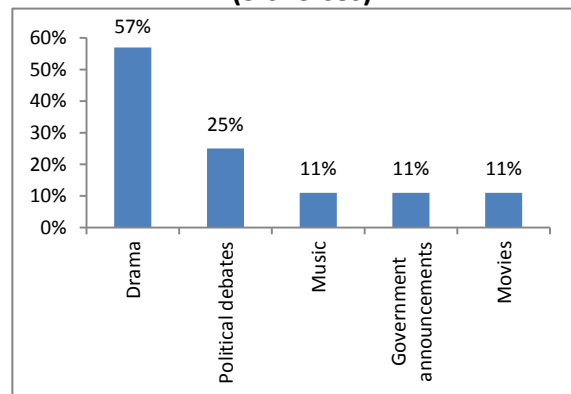
**3.2.2 Programs**

The preferred TV program type is music: people explained that they liked to listen to Indian songs and watch Indian movies. National news and dramas are also quite popular (more than half of TV users). Dramas were mentioned by 57% of interviewed TV users as their least preferred programs: this means that the same people like and dislike dramas. This is explained by the diversity of dramas, as well as their perceived differing quality and, mostly, their suitability to the local culture. As in many places in Afghanistan, many people follow Indian dramas attentively, the majority of whom object that they are not appropriate for an Islamic culture such as Afghanistan’s.

**Figure 10: Preferred TV programs (3 choices)**

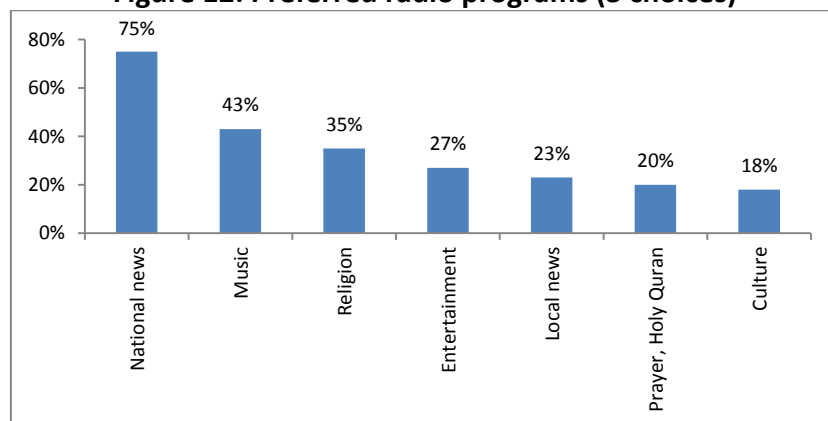


**Figure 11: Most disliked TV programs (3 choices)**



As for radio programs, most people prefer national news and music.

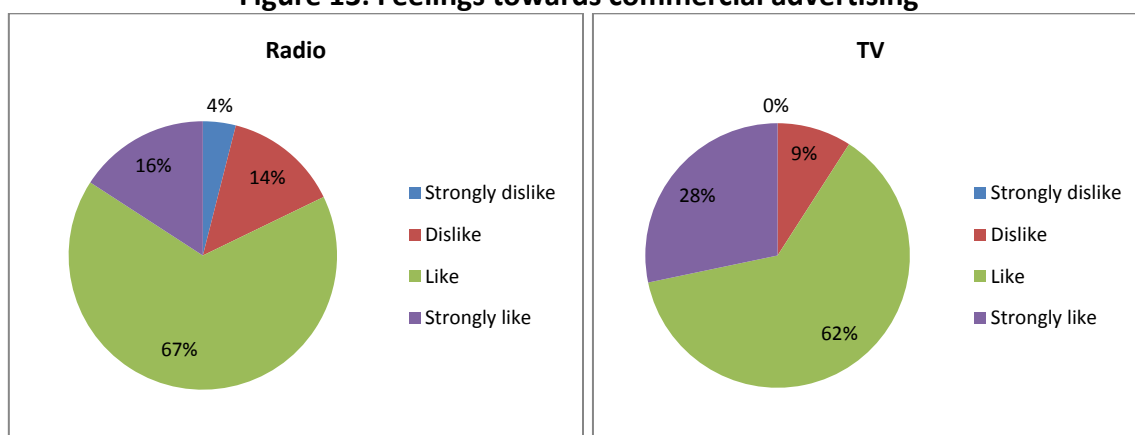
**Figure 12: Preferred radio programs (3 choices)**



### 3.2.3 Advertising

Sarkani interviewees are exposed to commercial advertising on the radio and on TV and generally like it. The most remembered commercial adverts are for mobile phone and banks, both on the radio and on TV.

**Figure 13: Feelings towards commercial advertising**



### 3.2.4 Personalities

Appealing personalities on TV and radio mentioned by Sarkani interviewees are President Karzai (mentioned by 64% of respondents), Fazelullah Wahedi (governor of Kunar province) (mentioned by 23%), and, to a lesser extent, Gul Agha Sherzai (governor of Nangarhar province) and Anwraulhaq Aha (a politician).

## 3.3 Perceptions and impact

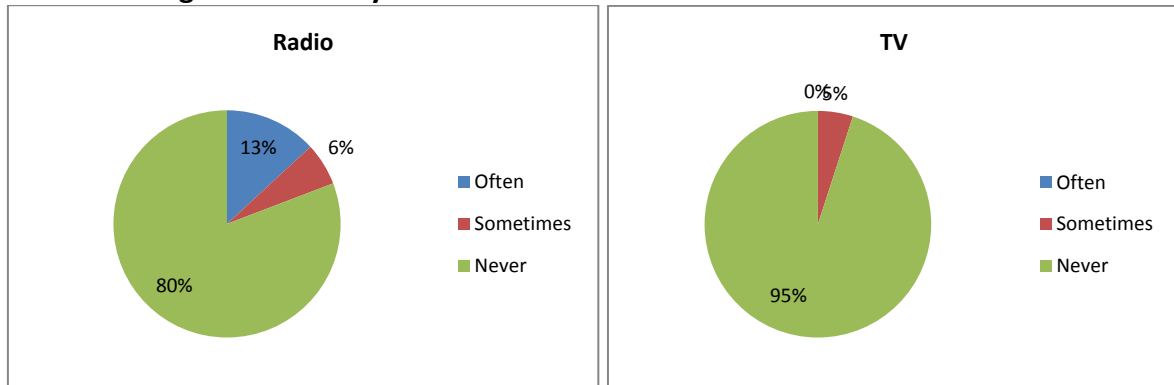
### 3.3.1 Comprehension

Very few interviewees mentioned having difficulty understanding the radio: only 20% declared having some issues, mainly because of pronunciation (38%) and language (34%) in programs broadcast in Dari (which is understood by only 42%) or in Urdu (virtually not spoken in Sarkani). More TV users declared having issues understanding TV programs from time to time, essentially in relation to language.

### 3.3.2 Participation

As the local radio stations are not very popular, and the closer TV channel, Kunar RTA, is not well received, Sarkani interviewees find it hard to relate to their local media, and thus do not often contact radio stations or TV channels. The vast majority have never tried to contact the media.

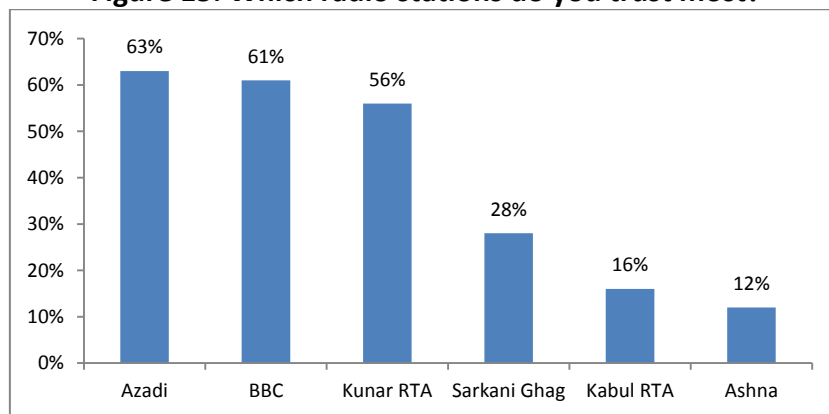
**Figure 14: Have you ever contacted radio stations or TV channels?**



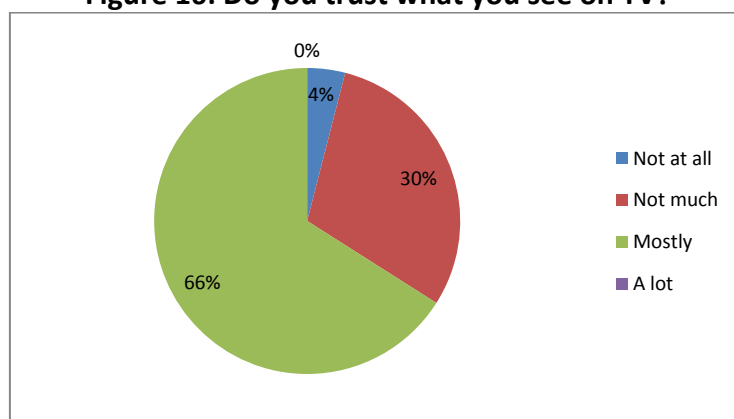
### 3.3.3 Trust

The most trusted radio stations in Sarkani are foreign stations, identified as being quite independent: Azadi and the BBC (6% and 11%). The state-run radio station Kunar RTA is considered to be aligned with the government. Similarly, Sarkani Ghag is rarely considered trustworthy, as it is well known as being controlled by the foreign military.

**Figure 15: Which radio stations do you trust most?**



**Figure 16: Do you trust what you see on TV?**





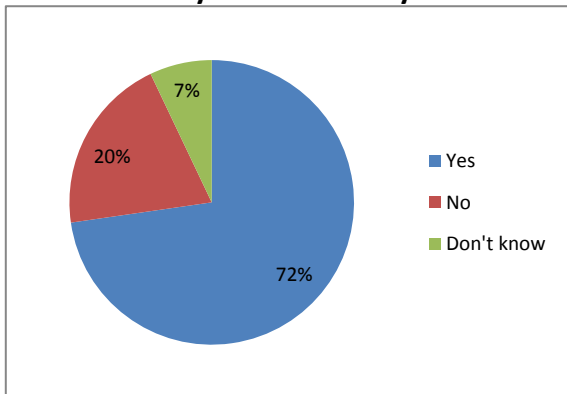
### 3.3.4 Perceptions of the local media

All interviewees named Sarkani Ghag, the foreign military station, when asked specifically about their local station. Most of them consider it biased. Even though a majority rated the station as of “good” (49%) or “very good” quality (26%), it is not among the preferred stations or the most trusted (ranking fourth in this regard). Still, it is considered useful for the amount of local news it broadcasts.

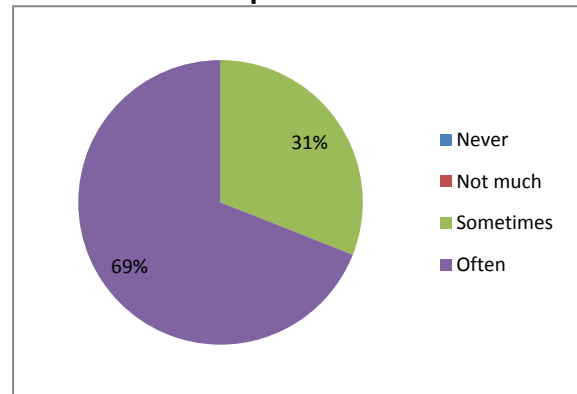
### 3.3.5 Circulation and impact

Sarkani interviewees explained that they often discuss what they hear on the radio or see on TV with friends and family – much more so for TV than for radio. They acknowledged that the media has a positive impact on their community: it can change opinions for the better and bring positive new ideas.

**Figure 17: Does local radio have an impact on your community?**



**Figure 18: Can TV make you change opinions?**



## 4 Conclusions and areas of opportunity

Compared with a few years ago, the media landscape has seemingly not changed much in Sarkani. The large majority of community leaders interviewed reported that they had seen no change in the district and pointed to a range of actors, including the government, NGOs, and the military, for their lack of effort in the media sector.

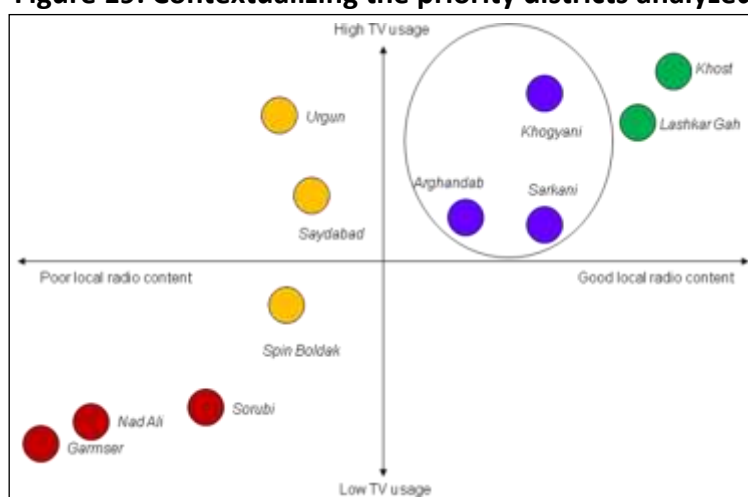
Sarkani is not among the most disadvantaged of the districts studied. The district’s location exposes the population to a range of provincial, regional, national, and also international radio channels. An aerial radio signal is received in Sarkani through antennas located in Asadabad (which lies only 10km from Sarkani) and Jalalabad. Given the distance from Jalalabad and the average broadcast radius of FM antennas, the reception of non-local radio channels in the district is unlikely to be strong. In terms of local radio stations, the villages closest to the district center have the best reception.

The foreign military radio station is not particularly trusted, given its military affiliations, and not very popular either, given its content. National radio stations are preferred for the most part.

A number of terrestrial TV channels are received in Sarkani through antennas located in Asadabad (Kunar). However, penetration of TV in the district is lagging because of limited electricity (and high running costs for generators) and also for cultural reasons.

Figure 19, which classifies the districts analyzed for this study into four groups on the basis of TV usage and quality of local radio content, illustrates Sarkani’s positioning in relation to the other districts.

**Figure 19: Contextualizing the priority districts analyzed**



In this context, a few areas of opportunity can be identified. The role of Sarkani Ghag, which already has relatively high coverage, could be significantly improved, for instance. The radio station’s programming grid is not available, since our interviewer could not access the radio station. However, given the station’s limited popularity, a few suggestions already made in relation to relatively unpopular military radio stations in other districts may help increase buy-in among the community in Sarkani as well: reducing music programming; diversifying broadcasting content; tailoring content to specific audiences (e.g. farmers, women);

supporting participation and interaction so as to allow the community to feed in content; and networking military radio stations for common program production.

Additionally, repeaters could be set up to support the current weak reception of non-local radio stations in the district. The broadcasting of “suitable” TV channels, such as Ariana TV, could also help address cultural issues hindering TV viewership (which, in our view, is a transitional issue). Supporting electricity coverage goes beyond the scope of our recommendations but obviously would further increase penetration of TV in the district.