

Media *is* Development

A f g h a n i s t a n M e d i a a n d C i v i l S o c i e t y F o r u m

Report of Proceedings



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ABOUT THE KILLID GROUP

The Killid Group (www.thekillidgroup.com) is a public interest initiative of the Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA), a registered Afghan not-for-profit, non-governmental organization.

The mission of DHSA and The Killid Group is to significantly improve literacy and educational services and public awareness levels by increasing opportunities for education and access to independent media. TKG's corporate philosophy is to inform, educate, entertain and encourage broad civic participation and accountability through research and communication for development.

DHSA prides itself on more than 15 years of service to the people of Afghanistan. Its highly qualified staff and volunteers have led the design, implementation and evaluation of projects ranging from education and preservation of cultural heritage to social and economic re-integration and infrastructure development.

Since 2002, DHSA has done ground-breaking work in primary education through accelerated learning and training of teachers. Its work in the field of cultural heritage include the rehabilitation of two historic sites in Kabul, the 19th century Bagh-e-Babur Pavilion and Gardens and the 17th century Mullah Mehmood Mosque.

The Killid Group has undertaken major initiatives for the development of independent media, public outreach and communication. DHSA and its media and communication arm – TKG - played a crucial role in civic

education activities during the constitution making process and presidential and parliamentary elections. Our education, media and public outreach and communication work are examples of both our ability to deliver nationally and to deliver quality outputs.

DHSA's media and public communication activities were launched in 2002. TKG owns and operates Radio Killid, broadcasting on 88 FM in Kabul (also reaching neighboring provinces) and Herat. It has over six million listeners. The station also provides content to and re-broadcasts via 30 provincial radio stations reaching many more millions. The group also publishes the country's most popular cultural quarterly magazine, Sapaïda and two national weeklies. Killid (25,000 copies) and Mursal (15,000 copies), a women's magazine, reach every province.

Nye Express is a key institutional capacity in Afghanistan with nationwide reach distributing, among other products, independent press and media resources. It has capacity to distribute goods in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

In 2005 and 2006 TKG worked with three Afghan media outlets and an international news agency to improve coverage of key development issues in Afghanistan, foster media industry sustainability and break the country's isolation. The initiative was led by TKG. The project partners included Centre for International Journalism (CIJ), Pajhwak Afghan News (PAN), Sayara Media and Communications and Inter-Press Service (IPS). (Details on the project are available at: http://www.thekillidgroup.com/c/highlights/highlights_media_capacity.html).

Late last year, TKG successfully completed a one-year media campaign on family/domestic violence alongside other civil society groups. The European Commission supported the project. The activities undertaken by TKG include the production and broadcast of a series of public service announcements and radio dramas, organization of roundtables and publication of special editions of the Killid and Mursal weeklies aimed at raising awareness on the impact of domestic violence on Afghan society. These outreach programs also suggested ways of addressing the is-

sue both within households and at the community level. The radio programs were broadcast nationwide by Radio Killid and 30 affiliated stations. (Details on the project are available at: http://www.thekillidgroup.com/c/highlights/highlights_domestic_violence.html.)

Radio Killid's oral history project "*Afghanistan in the Last Four Decades*" has been on air for nearly two years and continues to be one of the most popular radio programs in the country. The program began with a series of roundtable discussions produced and broadcast by Radio Killid in the run up to the presidential elections of 2004.

The objective is to produce a public record of Afghanistan's recent history, giving all those who participate in the program a chance to share their views and experiences in a way that has never been attempted before. As expected, crimes committed in the past and the need to hold perpetrators to account came out strongly in the discussions. The issues raised prompted us to launch an awareness campaign on transitional justice in partnership with the Afghanistan Justice Project.

Our goal for 2007 is to compile our history programs into a multi-CD collection for national distribution via 30 local and regional radio network partners and the state-owned Radio Afghanistan, thereby maximizing reach – and hopefully the impact. A related plan is to compile the discussions into a multi-volume book, which we hope to make available in Dari, Pashto and English.

In late 2006 TKG produced and broadcast a series of radio programs on transitional justice and accountability for past and continuing human rights abuses. The programs included debates and discussions, mini-dramas, public service announcements and first-hand accounts of the victims of abuse. The project was implemented at a time when neither the international community nor the Afghan government was serious about dealing with and addressing the human rights abuses committed in the past. The project allowed ordinary Afghans to have a say in the process. Through the participation of victims, alleged perpetrators, experts and human rights advocates, the project deconstructed the issues and took

the debate to the ordinary man and woman helping breakdown the suffocating silence on transitional justice.

In 2007 TKG and the Crimes of War Project would be implementing a year-long program to raise awareness on human rights and humanitarian laws. The project is funded by the Open Society Institute and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The project aims to improve the understanding of human rights and international humanitarian law by producing and disseminating content nationally and internationally. The messages would be aimed at reaching journalists, politicians/decision-makers, civil society, human rights defenders and the general public. The overarching goal of the project is to ensure that violators of human rights are made accountable for their (mis)deeds.

ABOUT THE IPS – Inter Press Service

Organization

IPS- Inter Press Service is a non-profit international non governmental organization dedicated to communication and development cooperation. Its core business is a global news agency producing independent news and analysis about events and global processes affecting economic, social and political development, especially in the South.

The approach of IPS journalism is to give specific and overt prominence to the voices of the marginalised and the vulnerable, to reflect the views of civil society, and to mainstream gender in all reporting. Examining the impacts of globalisation and its governance is a priority. IPS puts issues and perspectives usually missing from the global news map onto the agenda.

The IPS audience encompasses media, civil society and the international community, reached both by traditional and new communication mediums, (print, radio, email, Internet and publications). IPS has significant experience of training journalists, and project partnerships with NGOs, social movements and broader civil society.

IPS- Inter Press Service is a registered as an international, not-for-profit non governmental association with its headquarters in Rome, Italy; it has 'general' NGO consultative status with ECOSOC at the United Nations, and the OECD status of "ODA eligible international organization". Its main implementation agency in the media market is the IPS International News Agency, a non-profit co-operative consortium registered in Rome (Italy) with regional desks in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America.

IPS derives income from the market, is a beneficiary of multi-lateral and national development co-operation programmes and receives project financing from NGOs, foundations, the EU, the UN and others.

Rationale for the IPS approach

Being invisible and unheard has long been both a major cause, and effect, of poverty. IPS is convinced that information and communication are essential to effective, accountable and empowering development, and thus contribute directly to poverty reduction.

IPS is about keeping the voices and concerns of the poorest on news agendas, South and North. Strengthening the voices of women is an important dimension of this commitment. Africa is where many of the development challenges are starkest and IPS reflects that.

Good journalism can empower citizens and their leaders to act for change. The public is often ahead of its leaders. Major social changes from ending slavery to bringing down regimes and walls have come about, at least in part, through a critical mass of people power. Polling exercises in both rich and poor countries have revealed that citizens want their governments to be more active in the fight to eradicate poverty. IPS is about informing and involving those citizens so they are equipped to act for change.

Forming strong communication bridges and platforms with civil society is vital as they have a pivotal role in proposing, implementing and critiquing official poverty reduction strategies, and backstopping community efforts.

Making sure that targeted, relevant information reaches the desks of those with power is essential to good decision-making. In this respect IPS makes a critical contribution to good governance and accountability – a key role of free media in any society.

IPS recognises the Millennium Development Goals as an important anchor and reference framework for development reporting. IPS has taken the lead amongst news agencies in developing extensive reporting

strategies, communication products and networks, partnerships and training about the MDGs.

IPS Niche

IPS content within the communication sector is different in the following ways:

The global, daily news service offers wide-spectrum, independent coverage focused on development issues:

- IPS is an independent, international news agency, but almost all of its journalists and editors in the South are actually from the country or region concerned. Many of the staff writing and editing for IPS in the North are from developing countries.
- IPS news is written with a globalised perspective, distinguishing it from other national, local or regional news services.
- IPS gives specific emphasis to reporting the concerns /views of civil society.

IPS has identified a unique set of constituencies and audiences, in order for it to have the maximum impact in its field:

- IPS targets citizens through reaching out through the mass media, and increasingly directly through the Internet.
- IPS targets civil society as a key development actor and bridge between citizen and leader
- IPS targets decision-makers in the international community.

Other media or NGOs target some of these audiences. IPS is innovative in being a professional media organization, with all that implies in terms of the resonance of its material, but it also has a direct relationship with civil society and with decision-makers.

IPS is an actor in media development and supporting free expression:

- IPS organises training workshops for journalists in the South, as well as offering mentoring, internships, on-line training and thematic training manuals. In 2007 IPS is establishing a specific centre of excellence in this field.

- IPS reflects upon and analyses the role of information and communication regionally, globally and within specific forums, and fosters effective and innovative partnerships.
- IPS is a source of independent, professional journalism to free media in the South.

FOREWORD

Neither democracy nor sustainable development can work unless people are driving the process and feel that they are involved. A free and accessible media can provide the link between the people and state which is needed for enhancing ownership and involvement in the process. This was the philosophy guiding The Killid Group and IPS-Inter Press Service in the organisation of the two-day, “Media is Development - Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum.”

The conference had three objectives. We wanted to reflect on the crucial role played by the media and civil society in the democracy-building process in Afghanistan; review the increasingly hostile political and security environment facing the sector; and to flag-off the dangers that could result from a decline in neutral funding for the independent press.

The conference took place at a time when an Afghan media worker, Sayed Agha, had been beheaded by Taliban fighters, while another was still in captivity. Two weeks after the Forum, another media worker Ajmal Naqshbandi was beheaded. These deaths are cruel reminders of how civil society becomes the first victims of war and violence.

There are also other obstacles to carrying out the profession. Independent reporting and verification of facts on the ground have been limited where NATO and the Afghan forces have been fighting the Taliban. Access of Afghan reporters to independent sources of information is also shrinking. As result, no real dialogue for peace-making is taking place as this would require serious discussions and negotiation with the people at all levels of society. Peace therefore may remain a mirage as

long as the parties in conflict continue to harass and threaten civil society, including the messengers - the independent media.

I believe that the conference has succeeded in encouraging a better understanding of how independent media can contribute towards making a better-informed civil society and how the society can help itself in the building of more stable, equitable and peaceful Afghanistan for all its citizens, and for the world.

Shahir Zahine
Chairman, The Killid Group
Kabul, Afghanistan
May 2007

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We also thank our staff, the wonderful people at Killid, including Najiba Ayoubi, Afsana Rahimi, Daad Noorani, Shafi Atal and many others. Outside of Killid, we extend special thanks to Ricardo Grassi, Binod Bhattarai, Massoumeh Torfeh and Roya Aziz.

Finally, we thank the Afghan and international media organizations who were able to see “news” in the effort by media and civil society groups to try to create a fairer and broader working space for all who believe in the freedom of information. The media organizations that believed in our cause and helped us spread the word that need to be specially thanked are IPS, Pajhwak Afghan News, Radio Killid, Killid and Mursal weeklies, RTA, Shamshad TV, Good Morning Afghanistan, Ariana TV, Tolo and Lemar TV, BBC and the VoA.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Afghanistan Development Association
ANJU	Afghanistan National Journalist Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIA	Bakhtar Information Agency
CHA	Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
CI	Counterpart International
CIJ	Center for International Journalism
CPAU	Cooperation for Peace and Unity
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EC	European Commission
DHSA	Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan
ERTV	Educational Radio and Television
FES	Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IPS	Inter Press Service
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MP	Member of Parliament
MSPA	Media Support Partnership Afghanistan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
OSI	Open Society Institute
PAN	Pajhwak Afghan News
PSM	People's Science Movement
RTA	Radio Television Afghanistan
SAFMA	South Asian Free Media Association
SOAS-LSE	School of African Studies - London School of Economics
TKG	The Killid Group
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VOA	Voice of America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The independent media is not just an isolated success story in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Instead, it has been the main contributor to all other achievements made in the road to peace after the change in regime in late 2001.

The country's media law remains one of the freest in the region. Afghanistan has dozens of independent broadcast outlets and print publications, and more media companies are entering the market. Still Afghanistan remains one of the world's most insecure places for the media. The insecurity is not only related to threats of physical harm, it is more about sustainability of the media organizations because advertising alone cannot support the media in a country where economic growth has been slow and has a still "hesitant" advertising culture. The independent media continues to be threatened and attacked and various state agencies (including the security forces) have continued to use every means to exert more control on the press. The general lawlessness in a state that is still very weak, and the continuing Taliban insurgency, have also resulted in violence against the media.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, the focus of foreign aid was on providing funds for "quick impact" projects aimed at addressing the short-term communication needs of the donor agencies. Five years later the same donors have cutback direct funding to the independent media which threatens not just the sustainability of the media but also continuity of the communication effort (and the resulting benefits).

The European Commission and USAID are two donors that have dramatically reduced direct funding to the media. The cumulative budget

for supporting the independent media was US\$30 million between 2002 and 2006. Funding had been cut down to US\$6 million for the period between 2007 and 2010 – a 80 percent reduction. A recent decision to establish new radio stations and upgrade existing stations resulted in allocation of additional US\$ 5 million, bringing the total funding to US\$ 11 million. The European Commission’s strategy for Afghanistan 2007 to 2013 does not include direct funding to the media. As result there is a strong possibility that many of the media organizations that had been around to facilitate the transition with informed coverage in the local languages could collapse or be forced to seek support of powerful individuals and political parties and compromise their independence. Such a scenario can be averted through continuous – targeted and well-monitored – support to the media. Continuing support to the media is justified by the public support it can help to build for the peace process, which a majority of Afghans want to see ending in lasting peace.

The Afghan media remains as the last line of defense of public interest in a country that is still dominated by factionalism and violence. More so in a situation where civil society still remains confined to the capital and other cities that are deemed to be “safe”. Continued investment in the media is investment for peace and the growth of civil society.

Main themes discussed at the “Media *is* Development” Forum:

The media law

The media law, issued as decree in December 2005, was being reviewed by the Lower House of Parliament when the Forum was held. (It was being discussed in parliament when this report was published). The media law was therefore a major issue discussed at the conference. Many speakers expressed concerns on the proposed amendments. The general fear among media advocates was that the changes parliament was considering would limit the media’s editorial independence and freedoms. Government and parliament members at the meeting either tried to defend their plans or tried to reassure media leaders saying that both government and parliament would uphold media freedoms.

Donor assistance to the media

Although sustainability of media organizations was a shared goal of donors and media organizations, the conference concluded that the media was still far from reaching that ideal. The participants said there has been no coordination between donors and implementing agencies for supporting media projects for lack of a commonly agreed strategy. Speakers argued that Afghanistan was not a “post-conflict” country yet and therefore there still was the need for both long- and short-term programs on media development to prevent the country from slipping into instability. They called on donors and media leaders to re-engage and re-think their relationship.

Two of the main donors that had supported media in Afghanistan, USAID and the European Commission, participated in the Forum. The EC pledged assistance for reforms at the RTA, provided the government made appropriate legislation for making it a public broadcaster. The representative of the EC said it could continue funding media through sector programs – governance, health and rural development, etc. – but not as a separate sector. Others suggested that the media needed to think of and propose creative solutions and alternatives, such as subsidies on newsprint for the print media, to tackle the issue of declining donor funds. Diplomats at the meeting said that the issues of public morality are best decided by Afghans but the right to criticize state policies and government officials is a fundamental, non-negotiable, right of all citizens in a democracy.

RTA reform

Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) is supposed to be overseen by an independent commission. However, the commission has been ineffective and the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs has been controlling the state broadcaster. The participants noted that RTA needs to transform into an independent public service broadcaster, according to the media law and demanded that the process should move forward without further delays.

Attacks on the independent media

Threats against the media made up a major conference theme. In 2006 there were 50 recorded cases of harassment, beating and other threats.

The number of unreported cases is much higher. In 2007 two media workers were killed and several more were threatened as a result of Taliban violence and actions by foreign military forces. The participants condemned the attacks and urged for greater international moral support and diplomatic pressure on the government and other anti-media actors.

Media capacity

Media representatives agreed that more training and capacity-building was needed, especially in the areas of business development/marketing, management training and beat-specific journalism, including investigative journalism and economic reporting. The general opinion was that while content quality has improved, there is room for improvement and professionalism – and informed and improved media content can help ease the transition.

Provincial media

The general opinion was that freedom of the press and freedom of speech were more restricted in the provinces where media workers are more vulnerable to attacks and face greater obstacles in terms of access to information. Support to provincial media has been limited. The decline in funding, coupled with non-existent markets in most rural areas where community radio exist, has made it extremely difficult for the stations to continue broadcasting. In some cases, local radios are unable to compete with military-funded stations or Kabul-based FM content rebroadcast via satellite. Furthermore, there is also a need to clarify the ownership of the “community radios” set up by NGOs. The provincial print media remains weak.

Regional cooperation

The domination of information dissemination by Western media organizations and almost non-existent interest of the regional media has led to one-dimensional perspectives and limited understanding about Afghanistan and its development. Afghanistan’s role in the region and the region’s role in Afghanistan, have been rarely explored. There was general consensus on the need to increase reporting and coverage, and cooperation, among South Asian media organizations.

Civil society

Civil society organizations are not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. The earliest forms of civil society groups such as the *shoras* or *jirgas* (councils) existed before the modern Afghan state was created. Because of the inflow of aid money, dozens of new civil society groups and NGOs have been set up in the last five years. These groups have largely been service and emergency aid deliverers for international donors. Today, many act as “contractors” of programs that were planned without their direct input. This top-down approach between donors and civil society groups is detrimental to building a self-sustaining Afghan civil society. There was agreement on the need for actions for mobilizing the public around political and social issues for engendering real and increased participation of the people.

Civil society and the media

Both the representatives of media and civil society agreed that much greater cooperation was needed in order for the two groups to play greater roles in the Afghan process. Civil society representatives said the media can serve as messengers to carry development messages and also help provide feedback on progress and obstacles. There was general agreement that civil society had been undermined over the past years and there also existed a misperception among the public that they were only conduits for disbursing donor funds. The media and civil society agreed on the need to work closely in order to bring about transparency in the spending process and to clarify the role of civil society in the development process – including, monitoring of foreign assistance.

FORUM DECLARATION (Excerpt)

The Forum adopted a declaration that was prepared and discussed prior to approval. The Declaration of the Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum commits to:

Organizing the “Media *is* Development Forum” at least once every year to evaluate progress and discuss ways to address new challenges;

Developing a Code of Conduct for media to self-regulate the production and dissemination of content;

Working towards the institutionalization of the Afghan Media and Civil Society Forum to follow up on progress and engage in dialogue with the government and parliament and the international community on issues affecting media and civil society;

Expanding and enriching the partnerships developed among Afghan media organizations and their international partners and work towards joint programs for media development and for enhancing Afghan influence in international coverage;

Seeking the means needed to improve awareness and skills of journalists and media managers and to develop the communication skills of the civil society organizations through a capacity building process that is locally owned and empowering.

The forum recommended:

The creation of a policy and legal environment that guarantees freedom of the press, independent regulation and the creation of a public service broadcaster to support and encourage increased engagement of media and civil society for taking Afghanistan towards peace, democracy and development;

That all sides involved in armed conflict must protect and respect the freedom of information and facilitate the activities of the media, while ensuring the immediate release of all media workers in captivity; and

The recognition of the media as an involved and important partner in the Afghan process as first step towards the creation of a Special Fund for supporting its development and growth.

THE STATE OF THE MEDIA IN AFGHANISTAN

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has among the freest media laws in the South Asia region, made possible by conscious efforts for establishing democratic frameworks following the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban regime in late 2001. The interim administration announced a media law guaranteeing a free press in February 2002. The country's Constitution, ratified in 2004, endorses press freedoms, stating that "every Afghan has the right to print or publish topics without prior submission to the state authorities in accordance with the law."¹

Media entrepreneurs and organizations with the goal to support media development took advantage of the openness and a number of new independent media outlets were set up supported largely through foreign aid. In 2001, there was only one radio broadcaster, Radio Shariat,² run by Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), the national television and radio authority. In early 2007 there were at least seven private television networks³ and more than 50 independent radio stations. In number terms, there are several hundred magazines and newspapers registered at the Ministry of Information and Culture, but only a small fraction of them publish regularly. Historically, the Afghan press has always been the domain of the state. The few private newspapers allowed by some regimes were frequently censored by the authorities. There was no private broadcaster in Afghanistan before 2001.

1 The constitutions of 1923 and 1964 also guaranteed press freedoms, but in practice, censorship was common. Newspapers were frequently banned and editors jailed. The Afghan state has controlled printing presses.

2 Shariat means Islamic Law.

3 According to the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs officials at least six more TV licenses have been issued.

The media law

The government issued a detailed media law in December 2005. It comes with a series of guidelines and establishes five independent media commissions, including a Media Complaints and Violations Handling Commission tasked with reviewing complaints, addressing violations and recommending actions against media to state authorities. The commission is still active but state authorities often bypass it and take unilateral legal actions. The media law also created an Independent Commission for Radio Television Afghanistan, but this commission has been more or less dormant.

Alongside many provisions that support a free media, the law prohibits publication of “matters contrary to the principles of Islam and offensive to other religions and sects.” The language used is too broad and exposes the media to attacks as was evidenced in 2005 when Mohaqiq Nasab, editor of a magazine was jailed on charges of blasphemy. Nasab was sentenced to two years in jail but was released under international pressure. Many journalists have been arrested or detained by prosecutors without a review or recommendation of the media commission. The media law also makes no distinction between community and commercial radios. This means that the government charges the same license fees to both commercial ventures and stations seeking to serve the community as non-profit organizations.

The media law was under parliamentary review at the time of the conference. The largely conservative legislature has publicly differed with independent broadcasters over coverage of parliament, the entertainment programming (including music videos and films) and has been trying to introduce ways to control content. There is a general fear that the media law would be made restrictive, which would be a major impediment in the Afghan process.

Broadcast media

FM radio is the dominant media in Afghanistan in terms of reach and audiences. Television is limited in urban centers and in areas with electricity and is becoming a medium of both information and entertainment.

Radio in Afghanistan can roughly be divided into the following categories: the state broadcaster RTA, which has affiliates in many provinces; more than 50 independent, local FM stations, including those based in Kabul that rebroadcast content in the provinces via satellite; a national radio show funded by Internews and rebroadcast by 30 independent stations via satellite; international broadcasters BBC, Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America; and stations and programming funded by NATO and the U.S. Coalition forces.

The largest television networks are the RTA, Tolo TV and Ariana TV.

Media coverage

In 2006, the The Killid Group and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) conducted a survey on media coverage, the reach and the main sources of information (see: Appendix-I). According to the study:

- The continuing war attracted the highest coverage (17.36%), human rights (10.7%) and reconstruction (9.50%), though the latter increases to 15.42% if combined with the economy (5.92%), which was considered as a separate category.
- Reports on people's needs and claims followed reconstruction (8.20%), followed by politics (7.96%) and social behaviors (6.96%).
- The other thematic areas included in the survey comprised of less than five percent of overall coverage, even though narcotics accounted for 4.93 percent of the stories covered. Corruption accounted for 4.8 percent, international aid 4.61 percent, environment 2.7 percent and accountability of government institutions, just 0.82 percent of coverage.
- Three aspects were considered while looking at reports on human rights: Human rights in general (4.33%), women's rights (4.30) and democratic rights (2.07%).
- The sources of the information were overwhelmingly government; almost 40 percent of published information was attributed to government sources – central government (26.92%) and local governments (12.84%). However, coverage rose to 52.60 percent when intergovernmental organizations (10.65%) and foreign governments (2.19%) were grouped together.

- Other sources of information were: Individuals (8.53%), the civil society (8.23%), other institutions (7.80%) and local actors (5.46).
- International news agencies accounted for 16.76 percent of the coverage in the Afghan media. This figure was explained by the use by media of services provided by the state-run Bakhtar Information Agency's (BIA) international service. (The BIA relies extensively – 85% – on translating foreign agency copy.) When the BIA was excluded, international news agencies accounted for 10.23 percent of the coverage.
- The media included in the study used content from Afghan news agencies – 24.76% of information published or broadcast. Most information was provided by the Pajhwok Afghan News and the BIA, the latter almost exclusively in the case of the government media.

Threats against journalists

Afghan reporters work under intense pressure owing to intimidation and harassment from a range of actors including security forces, politicians, government officials, local strongmen, Taliban groups and others. According to the Association of Afghan Journalists, in 2005 two journalists were killed and there were 45 registered cases of intimidation and actions against journalists. The number of registered cases of intimidation rose to over 50 in 2006, which is also an underestimate of the threat because a majority of cases go unreported. In early 2007 two media workers were killed by the Taliban.⁴

The media in Afghanistan has remained caught in the crossfire between the Taliban and the government/ NATO/ US-led forces. The Taliban accuse journalists of working for the government while the government has issued orders barring journalists from interviewing opposition com-

4 The cases had attracted worldwide press attention. The murdered media workers were accompanying Daniele Mastrogiacomo, a reporter at La Repubblica, Italy when they were kidnapped by the Taliban in Helmand on March 4. Syed Agha, a fixer and driver, was beheaded first. One week later, the Afghan government released five Taliban prisoners in exchange for the release of Mastrogiacomo. The interpreter Ajmal Naqshbandi, a journalist, was still in Taliban captivity and was beheaded after the release of the Italian reporter.

manders or portraying Afghan security forces in “a negative light”.⁵ The information and culture minister has even ordered editors to refer to slain police officers and soldiers as “martyrs.”⁶

A general lack of awareness about the media’s role and rights has led to suspicion and harassment of journalists. American and NATO-led forces have also controlled access of media to the battle zones and prevented reporting by Afghan reporters. In one example, the U.S. army confiscated cameras from journalists following a suicide attack in the eastern city of Jalalabad, where 10 Afghan bystanders were killed in a subsequent shoot-out. Generally, media in the provinces face greater insecurity and difficulties in information gathering compared to their counterparts in Kabul.

Journalists have formed several unions and Afghanistan has at least two media watchdog groups but the country lacks formal structures for protecting and defending journalists. The insecurity of journalists – both real and perceived – has resulted in self-censorship. Still the media have continuously tackled controversial political and social issues and would be able to perform better through training on specialized reporting. Donor support after 2002 helped to provide Afghan journalists – who largely represent a younger generation – basic training on journalism skills. They now require training on specialized techniques such as investigative reporting and specializations for covering – among others – politics, economics, the environment, corruption, governance and human rights.

Sustainability concerns

Apart from threats and intimidation of journalists, doing journalism in Afghanistan is constrained by the imperfect market for advertising and the general lack of an advertising culture. The still recovering economy does not have enough products that require advertising making it impossible for media to survive solely on advertising revenues. Direct donor funding to the media has also been drastically reduced. As an alterna-

5 In June 2006, the National Security Department sent an unsigned directive to several media outlets listing a series of dos and don’ts that the media was asked to abide by.

6 This letter was sent to media organizations on November 14, 2006 and it was signed by Abdul Karim Khuram, Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs.

tive, some media organizations have turned to political parties or individuals – including former warlords – for funding, which could cause media to compromise their integrity. The trend applies to both the print and broadcast media.

Many of the provinces still lack independent media for a variety of reasons, including the ongoing military battles and a lack of donor or private sector support. The provinces without local media are Uruzgan and Zabul in the south, Nimroz and Farah in the west, Sar-e Pul and Jowzjan in the north and Kunar, Laghman and Nuristan in the east.

CONCEPT NOTE⁷

Background

Five years after the Taliban government was overthrown by U.S. military forces, Afghanistan remains a country still mired in armed conflict. The year 2006 marked the beginning of a sustained military response by Taliban insurgents — hit and run attacks, suicide bombings and assassinations and conventional and guerrilla battles. The increasing level of violence is a concern with respect to reconstruction and development projects. More importantly it has been undermining Afghanistan's stability and threatens both democracy and long-term development. Pitched battles between Taliban and NATO and Afghan government forces in Kandahar and Helmand provinces in summer and autumn of 2006 completely shattered the myth of Afghanistan being a “post-conflict” country now engaged on rebuilding after three decades of bloodshed and destruction. The anticipated Taliban spring 2007 offensive and the expected response from NATO and the Afghan government are unlikely to result in a decisive military victory for either side.

The war will not be won militarily. Instead, working towards a political solution, strengthening democratic institutions and speeding up development are surer ways to end fighting and head towards peace. This outcome is attainable through a process of deeper dialogue among Afghans themselves and their international allies. Providing a new vision and direction to the country requires the development of an independent and professional mass media and the commitment and engagement of civil society actors.

⁷ The note contains the guiding philosophy of the Forum. It was written before the conference.

Afghanistan's democracy is extremely fragile and freedom of expression and media development are fundamental to the democratic process. The country is in a transition from three decades of war to a new democratic order in which the development of the independent media – which still faces major challenges – is vital.

The independent media faces many challenges. An all-powerful government and a complying parliament have jointly adopted restrictive laws that are undermining the independent character of media. With security deteriorating in 2006 and under mounting pressure because of indecisive battles with the Taliban, the government has resorted to scapegoat the media more than once. It blamed the media for emboldening the Taliban and demoralizing the people by reporting, which it claimed showed Taliban gains and downplayed government strength and “successes”. The results have been greater restrictions on the media. The government's moves, supported by powerful elements in parliament, are aimed at removing clauses that sought to support the independence of the media from the draft Mass Media Law. The Mass Media Law being reviewed by parliament has already been subjected to substantive amendments.

Legal protection and continued government support are essential for the development and growth of the independent media. The media must also make maximum use of existing opportunities to justify its utility as well as to enhance its capacity in order to minimize the risks of being victimized in the changing political circumstances. Only then would it possible for the media to confront issues of sustainability emanating from a lack of funding, competition and market dynamics.

Donor funding assisted the emergence of an independent media sector. Today, international donors have stopped direct funding of media projects and it is unlikely that most print and broadcast media will be able to survive the funding cuts. There may be some exceptions, however, but the reality remains unchanged – the limited economic development has yet to support growth of an advertising culture.

Generally, advertisers prefer entertainment programs on TV and radio.

The print media, with limited capacity to “entertain”, either gets very little or no advertisements. Advertisers also prefer media outlets with large audiences. These would typically be dominated by entertainment programs — music, movies and soap operas or have been changing towards having more entertainment and less space for educational, cultural and sensitive but important social issues. The result has been the building of profitable businesses amidst ignorance and apathy.

Advertisers generally prefer media with large circulations. In terms of the print media only a few weekly publications are able to meet their standards. Afghanistan does not have a daily national newspaper. It has a delivery and distribution agency, which has been assisting media to raise circulation and promote a reading habit. But the efforts to raise circulation have not translated into advertising growth.

Afghanistan has a handful of private commercial television and radio stations but their programming is aimed largely at urban audiences – and is often dominated by entertainment. They thus do not only ignore the information needs of the large rural population, but the opulent lifestyles portrayed in their programs could also be contributing to the increasing alienation of the rural population.

The lack of donor funding, small advertising market, low professionalism of journalists, poor content quality, limited outreach, distribution and a largely illiterate population remain the major obstacles the independent media has to overcome in order to fulfill its constitutional responsibility to serve the public interest. These factors – individually and collectively – have prevented the independent media from adequately performing the classical “watch dog” function. This has resulted in failure to expose and challenge corrupt and abusive systems and authorities; compromise in the quality of content and dissemination of information, including information on the developmental processes; all of which threaten hinder the ability of media to assist the transition by promoting social cohesion and shaping public opinion and discourse for peace and development.

Despite problems, the independent media remains a rare success story in

post-Taliban Afghanistan. It has been a development that has been welcomed by the Afghan people. The Afghan media is diverse but unifying and has potential for further growth and added influence in the changes taking place in the country.

The new challenges facing Afghanistan today threaten to undo the substantial progress made by media and civil society since 2002. The shift in donor attention from independent media and civil society to psychological operations (military propaganda), quick-fix development interventions or outright warfare have undermined the contributions these two institutions have made and could make in the country's transition. Sustainable development will not be possible without Afghan media and civil society playing an active role to facilitate constructive dialogue. Many of the most successful and trusted Afghan media institutions face the threat of closure or of being overtaken by partisan interests. The Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum is an effort to redirect government and donor attention on the role media and civil society can play to facilitate a peaceful transformation and sustainable development in the country.

Objectives

The main objective of the Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum was to reflect on the pivotal role played by the media and civil society in the country's efforts to transform from a war-torn country towards the building of a peaceful democracy, and to assess how these can help to prevent a regression to conflict. The possibility of Afghanistan regressing is real and could be accentuated in the absence of Afghan-led confidence-building efforts facilitated by the media and civil society.

The process

The Forum a) reviewed the achievements of Afghanistan's media sector and reflected on its needs, in the context of the challenges it must overcome if it is to play a central role in rebuilding public confidence through facilitation of independent, professionally-led debate in the public sphere; b) objectively assessed the current state of the Afghan media including existing and future opportunities and challenges; c) discussed specific threats facing the media and civil society and recommended measures to

avert these while identifying concrete steps to facilitate sustainable growth and development of the two sectors; and d) served as a platform for open interactions between various stakeholders, including donors, policy makers, government, civil society and private sector representatives with the aim of placing media and civil society at the center of debate for development and better governance.

Specifically, the Forum attempted to:

- Review the achievements of Afghanistan's media sector in terms of audience reach and coverage and highlighted the expectations of the public with regard to the role of the media, which also provides a unique means for people to vent frustrations at the slow pace of change and corruption in public life ;
- Explore Afghan-led, civilian potential to contribute to the country's transformation from war to sustainable peace;
- Review the role of public policy and donor support in the context of the need for support to further develop and sustain an independent and professional media;
- Outline and discuss challenges to financial self-sustainability, including plans and time frames;
- Explore potential partnerships between media, civil society groups and donors and government for complementing efforts, towards building a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan; and
- Assess the role of the private sector as a potential partner in media development and the public policy requirements for facilitating this process.

Methods

The conference provided an opportunity to discuss and critique the developments of the past years for recommending measures for assisting media and civil society groups in the continuing transition. It combined structured, thematic sessions with discussion between Afghan media professionals, civil society actors, and government and donor representatives. All sessions were open to Afghan and foreign journalists.

Around 15 regional media development professionals and journalists were

invited to the Forum. They shared their experiences and provided inputs in the discussions that were attended by more than 190 media and civil society representatives, government officials and Kabul-based donor representatives.

The “Media is Development: Afghanistan’s Media and Civil Society Forum” served as an opportunity for donors to showcase their activities in Afghanistan and also provided an opportunity for building networks with media and civil society groups for coordinated, complementary actions they could undertake in the future.

Outputs

Specifically, the Forum culminated in the following outputs:

- Open interaction between media, civil society groups, government and donors for attaining shared goals.
- An objective Afghan-led assessment of the state of the media in post-Taliban Afghanistan in terms of covering the country’s developmental issues.
- Summary report of the discussions and recommendations to government and the donors regarding their roles for supporting and facilitating the development of a professional and sustainable media industry.
- A Kabul Declaration of Afghan Media and Civil Society 2007, which charts a course for follow-up actions.
- A final report detailing Forum discussions and recommendations for action.
- Complete audio and video recording of the proceedings and production of audio archive and video documentary.
- A dedicated Forum website where all documents have been posted for public review <http://www.thekillidgroup.com/Forum/webpages/home.html>.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The “Media is Development” Forum was held at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul on April 28-29, 2007. The Forum was attended by more than 190 people, and guest speakers, including journalists and representatives of media organizations from Nepal, India, Pakistan and Japan. The Forum had two components – platforms for the media and civil society to discuss issues affecting their work.

INAUGURAL SESSION

The conference began with a message from Shahir Zahine, chairman, The Killid Group who dedicated the Forum to civil society and media workers in Afghanistan and the world who had sacrificed their lives for bringing information to people.

Ricardo Grassi of the Inter Press Service (IPS), the co-organizer, read out a welcome message from Mario Lubetkin, director general, IPS. Mr. Lubetkin spoke on the cooperation between IPS and The Killid Group, the Center for International Journalism, Pajhwok Afghan News and Sayara Media and Communications.

Key messages

His Excellency Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The message from His Excellency President Hamid Karzai to the conference was delivered by Minister for Information and Culture, Abdul Karim Khuram. President Karzai said the laws in Afghanistan support

freedom of expression, and to the degree possible, the state would continue to support and encourage the press and civil society organizations.

Ambassador Francesc Vendrell, Special Representative of the European Union for Afghanistan: Ambassador Francesc Vendrell applauded the government for “ensuring that the media is remarkably free” across Afghanistan. He said that foreign government support for freedom of expression and freedom of the press was not tantamount to imposing external ideas and that issues such as those related to public morality were “best decided by Afghans”. He added that the rights to criticize the government and freely express one’s views were essential to any democracy hoping to comply with the universal right to freedom of expression and information.

Ambassador Hansjorg Kretschmer, Head of Delegation, European Commission Delegation to Afghanistan: Ambassador Kretschmer said the growth of independent media in Afghanistan underscores the understanding of the importance of civil society engagement with the state through the media. The existence of 50 independent radio and 11 television stations licensed were evidence of the understanding. He added that there is a distinction between voicing political opinions and criticizing public policies and the broadcast of material relating to morals, customs and traditions. He was wary of some amendments suggested in the media law, especially clauses with vague terminologies such as “information disrupting public opinion,” and added such changes would pose a threat to freedom of expression. He confirmed continued EU support to the media, specifically to assist the RTA transform into a public service broadcaster. “But”, he added, “The body under which the PSB should operate should not be the government or a Ministry, but a body representative of Afghan society.”

Ambassador Ettore Francesco Sequi, Message to the forum from Ms. Patrizia Sentinelli, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy: Ambassador Sequi began his remarks by noting that Afghan journalist Ajmal Naqshbandi was still in Taliban captivity. Mr. Naqshbandi was kidnapped in March along with an Italian journalist (the latter was later

released). He said the Italian government, press and the Italian people were following the case “very carefully,” adding that “life has no nationality.” And every life is important. Ambassador Sequi said that he held a press conference earlier in the week to announce joint initiatives between the Afghan and Italian press. He praised the gender-equality programs underway, citing the example of a domestic violence awareness-raising campaign on Radio Killid and pledged continued Italian support to the media through UNESCO and UNDP-funded projects.

THE MEDIA FORUM

DAY ONE, SESSION A

The opening session was followed by Session A which was chaired by Shahir Zahine, chairman, TKG and had the following speakers:

Imtiaz Alam, Secretary General, South Asian Free Media Association

Kanak Dixit, Editor, Himal South Asian (magazine), Nepal

Fazel Sancharaki, President, Afghanistan National Journalist Union

Rahimullah Samander, Director, Center for International Journalism

Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq, MP and Chairman of the Culture, Media and Religious Affairs committee

Abdul Hamid Mubariz, writer and former Deputy Minister of Information and Culture

Ricardo Grassi, Inter Press Service

Emmanuel de Dinechin, Director of Marketing, Altai Consulting

Antoine Heudre, Director, Sayara Media & Communications

Session A was moderated by Shirazuddin Siddiqi, director of the Afghan Education Project (BBC).

Mr. Siddiqi launched the panel discussion with a short introduction: “Against the backdrop of insecurity in Afghanistan, the media represents one of the key successes that Afghans - the Afghan government, the Afghan parliament and Afghans across the country - are very proud of. We’ve seen enormous growth in the private sector, and there are some significant moves towards real and solid development in the public sector. The initial steps have been taken, laws have been drafted and the parliament is

debating and discussing the media law. Against that I think it is a very opportune time to have this forum and to put this on the agenda of journalists, media, parliament and the government.”

Session A: Brief summary of presentations and discussions:

“Regional assessment of growth trends, constraints and opportunities”

Imtiaz Alam, Secretary General, South Asian Free Media Association

Mr. Alam noted that some parts of South Asia were locked in conflicts and the media remained an easy target for attacks by both state and non-state actors. He gave summaries of the media situation in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and India. Mr. Alam said in 2006 Pakistan topped the list of countries in South Asia that had the largest numbers of journalists abducted and killed. He added that the media in Afghanistan was “young” and that there were limitations in its media law. Mr. Alam advocated the need for “training, defending freedom of information and integration with the South Asian media,” while acknowledging that the press freedoms in Afghanistan were comparatively better compared to some South Asian nations. He said SAFMA has proposed setting up a broad-based, regional media monitoring body to monitor attacks on the press and to audit content.

“The Nepali media experience”

Kanak Dixit, Editor, Himal South Asian

Mr. Dixit spoke about the struggle of Nepali media for freedoms during direct royal rule in the country (February 2005-April 2006). Stressing that no two societies are alike, Mr. Dixit said, he hoped participants at the conference would compare and take lessons from the Afghan and Nepali experiences. The Nepali media became free only in 1990. He said both Afghanistan and Nepal – unlike India – don’t have an English language media representing the “upper crust” of journalism, which he said was an opportunity for having serious discussions in the local languages with ordinary people. The strength of both countries was the local FM

radios that reach rural populations in local languages. But, he added, that there is no “short-cut” to media development and it comes through a long process of learning by doing. His talk reviewed the challenges faced by the Nepali media during recent political upheavals and its present transition, adding that it was Nepal’s independent journalism – even though frequently harassed by the state – that kept alive the desire for democracy even during the autocratic era.

“From boom to uncertainty: An assessment of the media in Afghanistan”

Fazl Sancharaki, President, Afghanistan National Journalist Union

Mr. Sancharki, who heads a union of more than 1,000 journalists and media workers, began by condemning the Afghan government for negotiating the release of the Italian journalist while letting Ajmal Naqshbandi remain at the mercy of the Taliban. He said Afghanistan had its first press law in the 1960s and that the international community was reason for the “breathing room” that the media has today. He added that the press freedoms after 2002 have no parallel in the country’s history. He said restrictions on the media have grown alongside the growth of government institutions and that the media also faces problems resulting from Afghan culture and traditions. Much of his presentation focused on the security of journalists and while praising the media for the coverage they had begun to provide he added that there was much improvement still needed in content quality.

“Press freedom in Afghanistan: An assessment of the challenges on the ground (including skills and capacity building)”

Rahimullah Samandar, Director, Center for International Journalism

Mr. Samandar heads a training center that has trained hundreds of journalists in Afghanistan. He said Articles 34 and 50 of the Constitution clearly state that Afghans have the right to access public information, which, however, has been denied to journalists. Government officials particularly in the provinces do not respond positively to media requests, claiming that they are not allowed to speak to reporters. He added that local

strongmen and international security forces also deny access to the press, and by extension, deny access to information to ordinary Afghans. He said annual press freedom reports show an increase in threats against media workers, and that journalists are arrested, harassed and beaten regularly. In 2006, there were 50 recorded cases of threats and harassment, and three media workers were killed. Even MPs have resorted to this behavior. Mr. Samander added that the capacity of journalists remains weak, especially in the area of investigative journalism, business development and management – areas that require further donor assistance. He said social issues were still not getting the coverage they deserve even though the people were tired of reports on bomb blasts and the killings. He warned that there was now a danger of the media becoming influenced by politicians as they owned and controlled many media outlets.

“The proposed media law”

Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq, MP, chairman Culture, Media and Religious Affairs committee

Mr. Mohaqiq began by saying he supported media freedoms and that a free press is part of the new order in the country. The Parliament is reviewing the media law as part of the processes of the new order. However, he warned that the media must also not act to undermine the current order because the media would be the first targets if the system is destabilized. Mr. Mohaqiq was also critical of the media saying it was unaware of its own power and influence and questioned whether the press freedoms in the country was driven by the presence of the international community or if it reflected the degree of openness of the Afghan society. He said the goal of the parliament while reviewing the law was to bring “improvements” not to block growth, adding that 14 amendments had been proposed – including one from the parliament’s environmental commission asking all media to devote five minutes for coverage of environmental issues. Other amendments proposed are the setting up of a special court to address media-related matters and to reduce the number of commissions outlined in the original media law. He assured the gathering that there was no threat to the press or an intention to censor the

media but also said there were three limitations on the press: according to the Constitution the media must not publish or broadcast material that is against Islam, material that slanders individuals, ethnic groups, tribes and others and that the media must not undermine the democratic order. At the end of his statement, Mr. Mohaqiq sought suggestions from participants, which he said would be of use to parliament before the changes in the media law were approved.

“A critical review of the proposed media law”

Abdul Hamid Mubariz, former deputy minister of information and culture

Mr. Mubariz said no other country in the region has the freedoms the press has in Afghanistan arguing that it was the media that enabled the country to leap from the 19th century to the 21st century. The media in Afghanistan represents a generation of young Afghans and displaced returnees; and there was commitment for transforming the RTA into a public service broadcaster. But he said the laws needed to be enforced and existing arrangements, such as the independent commission for RTA and the independent review commission for media violations, need to start functioning. In the absence of this, he said the RTA was losing audiences and viewers to the independent media and the trend also applied to the 60-year-old Bakhtar Information Agency. He also welcomed Mr. Mohaqiq’s comments, saying the latter’s words signaled a hope for the media alongside the support to free press that President Karzai had spoken about in his message. He had a word of advice to the parliament – to ensure that the changes it would make in the law would not require the next parliament to amend it again.

“Media *is* Development”

Ricardo Grassi, Inter Press Service

Mr. Grassi said despite developments in the media, millions of Afghans were not receiving information on what is going on in the country and many millions more did not have access to media and as result, were still voiceless. He said access to information and communication are critical, citing the example of former NATO General Richards, who upon arriv-

ing in Afghanistan, immediately set out to understand the local media. However, he added that the NATO and PRTs were not the models for information and instead sought to control what the people were receiving. Mr. Grassi added that it would be almost impossible to undertake development activities without mechanisms for information and communication, as these were basis for engendering the participation of the people. He was also critical of “community radio stations” set up by donors and asked if they were “community” in the real sense. Mr. Grassi said it was time to define the local ownership of such stations. Amidst the developments taking place in the media in Afghanistan, Mr. Grassi said he perceives a “noisy Western monologue” and a “very silent Afghan monologue” (or no effective communication). For effective communication, Mr. Grassi suggested the need for civil society and media to learn to communicate with each other in order to ensure that the media is able to retransmit the developmental messages to wider audiences. He was of the opinion that “public opinion” in Afghanistan was being “delivered” by the powerful international media, when it should have been done by national media with international reach. With that not happening, he said what the world thinks about Afghanistan is based on information delivered by foreign media. Mr. Grassi advocated the need for an Afghan opinion-making process saying that in the absence of that the understanding of Afghanistan has been built around one-dimensional words and concepts, such as bombs, *burqas* (veils) democracy and freedom.

“What advertisers want in terms of media availability, government policy and regulation?”

Emmanuel de Dinechin, Director of marketing, Altai Consulting

Altai is the largest marketing and consulting company in Afghanistan and conducts regular surveys on media use. Mr. Dinechin made a presentation with numbers – to show that the advertising market was not large enough to support the media. He said that with the exception of some women-specific media, all media were targeting the same group: a mass audience and advertisers found difficulties with targeting specific social groups. The lack of sophistication was a barrier to advertisers and also translated into inability of media to generate advertising revenue. He

was also of the opinion that quality of media content had improved significantly but foreign advertisers were still unable to differentiate between good and bad media, and the generalization hurts all media. He added that advertisers were also worried about the direction the media could take in the future. Mr. Dinechin was worried that decline in donor funds, coupled with the small market for advertising could lead the media to seek funding from political parties or foreign governments. His suggestion to donors was not to “pick the champions” as it is better to fund initiatives that benefit everyone.

“What advertisers want in terms of media availability, government policy and regulation?”

Antoine Heudre, Director, Sayara Media & Communications

Mr. Heudre said channeling clear information to the public on social, economic and political issues underpinning the reconstruction and development processes remain critical and only investors, who have created markets, jobs and wealth, can play a pivotal role in the long-term development of Afghanistan. He said that these investors will need to promote their products and services through advertising. “We need strong Afghan media as much as they need strong advertisers,” said Mr. Heudre. According to him the Afghans were increasingly looking for entertainment, but there were also those seeking news and information on serious issues. Sayara is a major advertising space buyer and said his company generally looked for best possible quality, combined with the best coverage and the best prices. He added that his company also needed smaller media because they add to the diversity and help in targeting specific messages to specific groups.

“Challenges and opportunities for the independent media”

Shahir Ahmad Zahine, Chairman, The Killid Group

Mr. Zahine said Afghanistan has seen successive authoritarian regimes where there was no freedom of expression. This legacy explains the self-censorship that is still being practiced. He argued that while Afghans were allowed to speak out, the self-censorship combined with irrespon-

sible reporting and reports influenced by threats had made the situation complex. The “rush to accomplish in one day the task of generations” in terms of reconstruction and re-development and lack of information and transparency, he said, has benefited the warlords rather than the young democrats. He said democracy was not about feeding people in a country that still faced basic security challenges.

He also outlined some of the major challenges faced by the media: difficult working conditions due to the ongoing war, the absence of a consistent legal framework and enforcement; and the uncertain economy. Another major challenge was the inability of the public to differentiate between independent media and media and content produced by the ISAF and coalition forces. He added that international support to the media was focused on addressing the short-term communications needs of the donors rather than supporting a well-planned strategy for media development, which had pushed many media organisations to the brink of closure.

Mr. Zahine said the conference provided an opportunity for the representatives of Afghan civil society and media to propose a “new beginning” for driving the Afghan process. “The Afghan civil society and media propose to be the players that will make a difference for the life of ordinary Afghans and [to] win hearts and minds, and most of all, give hope for the future of their children,” he said.

DAY ONE, SESSION B

Session B was chaired by Aziz Hakimi, TKG and Kanak Mani Dixit, Himal South Asian and had the following speakers:

Richardo Grassi, Inter Press Service

Mubarez Rashidi, Deputy Minister of Culture and Youth

Elisabeth Rousset, European Commission

Shigeru Aoyagi, UNESCO representative

Tsuneo Sugishita, JICA

Massoumeh Torfeh, research associate, School of Oriental and African

Studies-London School of Economics
Aunohita Mojumdar, Journalist, India
Sakhi Munir, Anis Daily (government newspaper)
Ann Ninan, Inter Press Service, India

Session-B: Brief summary of presentations and discussions

Overview of state and donor support to media after 2002

Ricardo Grassi, Inter Press Service

Mr. Grassi said there was no coordination in donor support in Afghanistan except some coordination between some bilateral donors. He said donors had provided about US\$60 million to media between 2002 and 2004, mainly to the government owned Bakhtar Information Agency and RTA. Funding to the independent media by USAID and the EC was around US\$30 million through 2006, of which about US\$15 million was spent on activities related to the presidential elections. In 2006 funding for independent media was reduced to around US\$3 million and such a budget line did not exist in 2007. The EC funding for media in 2003 was €5 million, which was reduced to €1.2 million in 2006 and €300,000 in 2007.

Government media: Where do we go from here in terms of policy, legislation and regulation?

Mubarez Rashidi, Deputy Minister of Culture and Youth

Mr. Rashidi said as a representative of the government, he was attending the Forum to assure the media that there was no plan to censor or limit the independent media. He said there is a distinction between censorship and respecting the laws of the country. He said the media takes many liberties, and violates laws by slandering individuals. Mr. Rashidi said the media also needed to look at itself saying that even illiterate individuals had come to register publications at the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Donor support/media projects in post-2001 Afghanistan: Experiences/reflections

Elisabeth Rousset, European Commission

Ms. Rousset said that while EC funding to the independent media has been reduced, the EC will continue to support the media, particularly the transformation of the RTA into an independent public service broadcaster. She said a public broadcaster was essential for addressing cultural, political and social issues and for reducing the perceived gap existing between the people, state officials and development agencies. Ms. Rousset explained that the EC no longer has “quick impact” funding and it was unlikely to change because its aid policies were determined by the body representing 25 member states. She added that the priorities for the EC for the 2007 to 2013 period were: governance, rule of law, public administration reform; health; and rural development. The RTA reforms are planned under the reforms of the public sector. Three other sectors for EC funding are social protection, de-mining and inter-regional cooperation. She said even though the EC cannot directly fund media projects, it can support civil society and media initiatives under the aforesaid sectors, which have small budgets for media components.

UNESCO’s support to media freedom

Shigeru Aoyagi, UNESCO representative

Mr. Aoyagi said UNESCO recognized that it was a critical time for the media in Afghanistan and that it was supporting the ERTV and RTA with financial assistance from the Italian government. He spoke about trends in international media development and reiterated that UNESCO’s commitment and support to media freedom and pluralism is based on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to freedom of expression is unalienable and non-negotiable, he said, adding that the right could not be compromised even in a state of war or other emergencies. He said media professionals in Afghanistan faced challenges from three fronts – the Taliban, national authorities and conservative elements in society who do not understand the vital role the media can play to rebuild the county. He added that UNESCO is com-

mitted to supporting the Afghan media and to work with authorities to create a safe environment for work and that his organization condemns all forms of attacks on journalists and threats to freedom of expression. Mr. Ayoagi said UNESCO has worked with the legislature and journalists to provide training on media law issues and urged parliamentarians to consider carefully any decision they make that might affect media freedoms and pluralism.

JICA in Afghanistan

Tsuneo Sugishita, JICA

Mr. Sugishita said the Japanese government has expanded JICA's role by adding a reconstruction mandate to its mission in Afghanistan. JICA's philosophy is human security. He said, reconstruction assistance is designed to create freedom from want and fear and focuses on basic human needs.

Coverage of Afghanistan on the BBC and Radio Free Europe before and after 9/11

Massoumeh Torfeh, researcher, SOAS-LSE

Ms. Torfeh began with an anecdote that illustrated just how much respect the BBC and its radio personalities have in Afghanistan. While free and professional, the international broadcasters have specific agendas tied to improving the image and promoting the viewpoint of Western governments. BBC and Radio Azadi have around 60 to 65 percent of the audiences in Afghanistan and both are also involved in training journalists and supporting the media. Following 9/11, 2001, Ms. Torfeh said that the BBC put out a three-hour special program; a 12-hour BBC for Afghanistan was created in 2003, incorporating local language broadcasts. Today, there are 18 FM stations broadcasting 24 hours. In another example she used, she said the US First Lady Laura Bush spoke to the women of Afghanistan through Radio Azadi after 9/11. The Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Broadcasting Board of Governors' agenda for Afghanistan has three components: harmonize Radio Free Afghanistan and VOA in the Afghanistan Radio Network; pioneer anti-terrorism

broadcasting; and revitalize “telling America’s story” to the world. She concluded that while the international media have high standards of reporting, advocate democracy and freedom, they are also guided by their own values and benefits, adding that the backbone of any democratization process must be the local media. Her argument was that if local media continues to be weakened – as it seemed at present – it was an indication of civil society becoming gelatinous. For example, allowing Kabul Weekly, one of the most successful newspapers or Pajhwak, the most successful private news agency to fold up for lack of funds, would indicate lack of attention to the vital component of the democratization process, she said. The problems of the media that she listed included lack of attention to provincial media and lack of adequate training on specialization and management.

Afghanistan in South Asia: The missing regional media link

Aunobita Mojumdar, journalist, India

Ms Mojumdar said the domination of media by US and European organizations and the lack of linkages between the media of the region and those in Afghanistan has influenced regional outlook towards Afghanistan and its development problems. She added that Afghanistan’s role in the region or the region’s role in Afghanistan was reported rarely, apart from the now frequent references to the role of Pakistan in fueling instability in Afghanistan. Greater regional cooperation would help reduce many of the problems being faced by Afghans, she added. Ms Mojumdar said the Pajhwok News Agency was an exception as it was emerging as the primary source of news on Afghanistan, despite the competition it faces from international news agencies. She suggested that the regional media could subscribe to each other’s content rather than rely on the Western agencies for their regional coverage.

The coverage of Afghanistan by the government media

Sakhi Munir, Anis Daily (government newspaper)

Mr. Munir noted that the government media need not necessarily always have to be outlets for state propaganda. He said state-run press has proven

that it too can critically review government policies and actions during the transition. The critical letters and demands of the public published in the government press are indicators of this, he added. He said the fundamental role of the press is to reflect the pluralism of thought that exists in society and provide balanced coverage to all views.

Afghans reporting on Afghanistan regionally and internationally: The experience of TKG, Pajhwak and IPS

Ann Ninan, Inter Press Service, India

Ms. Ninan has been involved in organizing regular coverage of Afghanistan by Afghan reporters in her role as IPS editor in India. She described how IPS relies on news produced by Pajhwak and TKG against reports by foreign correspondents based in Afghanistan. IPS carried out a project where it took content from Afghan journalists, edited and distributed it to its subscribers in different languages. She said IPS stories also reach officials in the United Nations in New York. She used an example of how IPS had taken up reports on the burning of schools across Afghanistan to put together a larger, background report how these events signaled the revival of Taliban violence.

CONCLUDING REMARKS, DAY ONE

Aziz Hakimi, Executive Director, The Killid Group

Kanak Dixit, Himal South Asian Magazine

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Hakimi said he understood that donor attention had been on quick interventions and “quick impact” projects. He added that the main objective of the Forum was to bring together government and donor representatives and the Afghan media and civil society to discuss how each of them could contribute to a transition to lasting peace. He added that Afghanistan was in no way a “post conflict” country yet and stressed the need for a long-term strategy for the independent media, which he said is crucial for ensuring peace. Mr. Hakimi said the Afghan media, instead of fighting for a few hundred thousand dollars or euros needed to prioritize their needs and explain to donors and government what role it sees for itself in the Afghan process.

“If we believe in Media is Development, then I think it is important that we re-think and re-engage with the Afghan media on a long-term basis so that real sustainable development can be possible,” said Mr. Hakimi. Doing that requires moving away from short-term projects, he added. He argued that donors needed to continue supporting the media until the economy was able to support the ventures. “That”, he said, “has not happened yet”.

Mr. Dixit said that the Afghans need to debate and discuss the media law in the press. He said that the donors said they faced a shortage of funds for the media, and therefore the question of coordination did not arise. However, if the media is to be part of the governance improvement process, then the donors should reconsider how much funding is going to the sector, he added. He also suggested that the media should explore other alternatives for sustenance such as government subsidies on newsprint, for example. He said training on journalism skills was important, but more importantly, Afghan journalists needed quality liberal arts education in order to become better reporters.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

DAY TWO, SESSION C

Session C was moderated by Abdul Salam Rahimi, General Director of the CHA Network and the speakers were:

Mohammad Halim Fidai, Media and Communication Coordinator, Counterpart International

Vinod Raina, Peoples Science Movement of India

Najibullah Manalai, Cultural Advisor to the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs

Dr. Mohammad Akbar, Director, Media Support Partnership Afghanistan

Jailani Popal, Chairman, Afghan Development Association

Mirwais Wardak, Programme Director, Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)

Zahid Shah Angar, Station Manager, Da Suley Paigham Radio, Khost

“The evolution of ‘new’ civil society actors in the post-2001 Afghanistan”

Mohammad Halim Fidai, Media and Communication Coordinator, Counterpart International

The first speaker, Mohammad Halim Fidai said that civil society organizations were not new concepts in Afghanistan and that its *shoras* or *jirgas* (councils) existed long before the modern Afghan state was formed. These institutions were also active during the worst of times, when the state had collapsed. *Jirgas*, Mr. Fidai said, are not “dead institutions” and have the capacity to modernize and evolve. He added that religious groups

were also part of the traditional civil society and in addition to their political and religious roles, they have also played strong social roles for example, in banning the practice of exchanging women as part of blood feud settlements and banning *walwar* (dowry). Political parties represent another civil society partner and Afghanistan now has more than 73 registered political parties. He said a “new” civil society emerged in Afghanistan after 9/11. Mr. Fidai said contrary to the popular perceptions about large donor funding for NGOs only 9.6 percent of direct donor funding went to NGO between January 2002 and September 2004. Including contract funding, he said NGOs are estimated to have received approximately 13 percent of the overall development budget in the country. He concluded it was time for civil society groups and the media to work jointly to ensure that everyone’s voice was heard and incorporated in the Afghan effort towards change and progress.

Case study: India’s civil society

Vinod Raina, People’s Science Movement of India

Mr. Raina began by explaining the lack of one definition to group all the constituents of civil society – non-governmental organizations, charities, community organizations, village associations or councils, people’s organizations – and concluded saying that anything that is not government is civil society. He said that a civil society can act as a unifier that enables “people with little in common to find something that they have in common so that they can talk to one another.” He added that it is impossible to separate the idea of civil society from the idea of progress towards a better world. His advise was, instead of arguing about what is and is not included in civil society, society should be arguing about what is and is not included in the notion of “common public good.” Citing the case of war-torn Jammu and Kashmir, from where he hails, Mr. Raina suggested that working at the grass-roots with – widows, children, and victims of violence on all sides – can result in a “general public good amongst a traumatized people.”

“The transformation of civil society after 2001”

Najibullah Manalai, Cultural Advisor to the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs

Mr. Malalai spoke about the role of civil society in Afghanistan from the time when it was not even a nation and until the 1960s, during its experiment with democracy. After democracy was established the civil society actors formed and joined parties and civil society was weakened because there were not enough active individuals and intellectuals to go around. During the fight for independence against the Soviet Union, political parties made a strong impact on society, he said. However, after the collapse of Dr. Najibullah’s government, civil society took the role of government. He argued that the international community needed two foundations for democracy in post-Taliban Afghanistan – an independent media and independent civil society, and therefore they invested heavily to build up the two sectors. This was the new civil society they created. Mr. Malalai said many traditional civil society groups and those created through donor support have been forced to close down after funding was stopped. He advocated support for groups working for increasing participation in democracy saying that they have been most successful, especially the organizations of the youth and women. But was critical of the way women’s rights were projected – from a Western perspective – and argued for finding local answers through local research for resolving the issue. He also argued the need for confronting the free market through cooperatives. Mr. Manalai concluded saying a voiceless civil society is as good as dead and said those groups that want to play an active role in the transformation (including politics) of Afghanistan must have voice and for that they must cooperate with the media.

“Media and civil society: Collaborators or competitors?”

Dr. Mohammad Akbar, Director, Media Support Partnership Afghanistan

Dr. Akbar spoke about examples of how media can be used by civil society to communicate messages on a range of issues like health and education. He said civil society needs a language and the media is the tool by which to reach out to the public. He said his organisation uses radio for

long-distance education programs of teachers, helping create a cadre of educators in the provinces. Community dialogue and conflict-resolution exist at local levels, which he said must be broadcast widely to raise awareness about the issues faced by others and how they resolved them. Dr Akbar said the media is a platform and can play a central role in educating the public on new concepts and values and advocated the use of the media for education and information and not just for entertainment.

Are we “implementing partners” or socio-political constituents and the real stakeholders?

Jailani Popal, Chairman, Afghan Development Association

Mr. Popal said strengthening the role of civil society is vital for nation building to take root, adding that the government did not have capacity to effectively and efficiently deal with root causes of violence and conflicts. He said in situations “when civil society is absent or not active it is a sign of oppressive regime or forces,” adding that civil society organizations are capable of providing basic services in areas where government access is limited, insufficient or absent. Mr. Popal said civil society groups were less bureaucratic and non-partisan and distribute resources faster than the government. This he said was important because the legitimacy of the government does not necessarily come from ballot boxes, but from its ability to provide public services and security. He concluded saying that a partnership between government, international community and civil society is a must for sustained peace and development.

“Challenges and opportunities for civil society participation in the Afghan process”

Mirvais Wardak, Program Director, Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)

Mr. Wardak focused on the factors affecting the growth of civil society despite the role they have played in delivery of basic services and for improving local governance. The NGOs, as modern civil society constituents, began operations in the refugee environment and have been active even in areas where the state has been absent. They provided

emergency assistance and adopted a service delivery role and have created a perception that emergency response and service delivery is the main role of civil society. The preoccupation with service delivery has restricted NGOs from engaging in the more crucial role in social and political mobilization and advocacy for public participation. He said Afghan civil society has capacity to strategically “rethink, redirect and fine-tune” their role. But he said there also was ambiguity, which has been intensified by massive growth in the number of civil society organizations created by donor funds. He added that even though better coordination could reduce many of the confusions, internal weaknesses including organizational politics and competition between civil society leaders has hampered joint efforts preventing formation of a unified civil society position on relevant political and social issues. He suggested the need for civil society to be vigilant about the top-down approach of the state and some donors. He was concerned about the increasing role of civil society as “contractors” for implementing programs designed without their inputs and was also critical of the “excessive influx of external experts with little or no contextual knowledge” which he said was reason for failure of massively funded programs.” Mr. Wardak said new developments – such as top down delivery by state and donors, the militarization of aid and the increase in number of groups promising quick solutions – has constricted the growth of genuine civil society. He was worried of the erosion of public trust which had taken civil society over 30 years to win.

“The challenges of provincial media and reporters”

Zabid Shah Angar, Station Manager, Da Suley Paigham Radio, Khost

Mr. Angar spoke about various safety and security issues facing the provincial media, particularly in the south and east of the country. Journalists are regularly threatened by local government, security forces and armed groups. He said despite international assistance, the capacity of local FM radios remains low and technical equipment provided to the local stations by the USAID-funded Internews is of “basic” quality – even used – which is why local radios face technical problems regularly. He was also critical of the distribution of aid between Internews and its local partners using the example of how donor funds from public service

announcements during the elections were shared. He added that many provincial media did not have access to the Internet and while the large stations have some commercial and market access, little or no advertising opportunities exist in smaller provinces and towns, such as Dai Kundi, Jaghori in Ghazni, Takhar and Helmand.

Interaction with ministers

The afternoon session was devoted to a press conference and interaction between government ministers and on issues raised during the conference. The ministers took questions from the audience and responded to concerns varying from problems faced by individual media and civil society organizations to broader policy issues affecting the growth of the sector. The following ministers took questions from the participants: Rangin Darfar Spanta, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jalil Shams, Minister of Economy, Mohammad Azzam Dadfar, Minister of Higher Education and Mubarez Rashidi, Deputy Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs.

CONCLUSIONS

The final session was devoted to drafting and finalizing the Declaration of the Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum. The declaration was drafted in English and read out for the audience. The English text was translated into Dari and Pashto and feedback from participants was incorporated before finalizing and approving the declaration.

THE DECLARATION OF THE AFGHANISTAN MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

“Media is Development: Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum” provided the first all-Afghan platform for civil society and media representatives to discuss their role in the Afghan process in the presence of and with participation of representatives of government, donor and regional and international organizations;

We the representatives of media and civil society met as Afghanistan faced the possibility of regressing, fully aware that the process could be accentuated in the absence of Afghan-led confidence-building efforts facilitated by the media and civil society, and conscious of the need to build stronger partnerships in the country and beyond national borders. The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss the Mass Media Law being debated in parliament and to provide inputs to the committee debating the amendments;

We discussed the role played by the media and civil society and the challenges they still face in their quest to facilitate a smooth transformation of the war-torn country towards a democracy rooted in the social and cultural specificities of Afghanistan; and

We dedicate this unique Forum to the media and civil society workers who have lost their lives in Afghanistan and around the world in their quest to improve the lives of others.

We affirm that

The conference slogan, “Media *is* Development”, embodies the ultimate truth that there can be no democracy or development unless the voices

of all sectors are reported and disseminated in order to contribute in the decision-making process;

Local ownership, sustained production and dissemination of Afghan content can contribute towards enriching the debate for deepening democracy and development;

Media has been facilitating nationwide, regional and international dialogue needed for informing and building public opinion for facilitating the changes taking place, and will be better able to perform this role as its capacity is enhanced;

The Afghan civil society has played a substantial role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, working in one of the most hostile environments in the world, while much of their social, economic and political contribution and impact remains unrecognized or ignored;

Both the media and civil society need to improve their ability to communicate and support each other in communicating the experiences of civil society organizations by developing appropriate skills and access to tools for improving dialogue among themselves, with their communities and other stakeholders in the Afghan process;

The civil society and media are both constituents and change agents in the Afghan process and also a source of information, knowledge and opinion that comprises the collective voice of the Afghan people;

The media and civil society must cooperate and assist each other in the collection, articulation and dissemination of information, knowledge and opinions of Afghan society for ensuring that the reconstruction underway will lead to a stable society;

The Afghan government, parliament and the international community need to recognize civil society and media as social and political constituents of the Afghan process for ensuring democracy, pluralistic development, good governance and accountability; and

Both media and civil society can perform best only in an enabling environment created through policy and legal frameworks that cherish and support free flow of information and plurality of opinions and ideas;

There can be no restrictions in the constitutional right of the Afghan people to be informed, and inform;

All state, government, international military forces and opposition groups are duty bound at all times to respect the independent nature of journalism and refrain from threatening or restraining their activities.

We conclude that

There is no alternative to free flow of information and ideas in a democracy because this is the basis for informed dialogue for participation and ownership of development;

The Afghan process and development must be based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods for listening to others, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, preparing policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change;

Civil society institutions provide the forum where people can participate in decisions that affect their lives; the media can take this dialogue beyond the immediate locality and involve larger society in the development process;

The civil society needs to better exploit the opportunities to communicate within their constituencies and outside and within the media sector, there is need for enabling media managers and editors to take on greater roles in leading their sectors for improving reportage on Afghanistan.

We commit to

Organize this Forum at least once every year to evaluate progress and discuss ways to address new challenges;

Develop a Code of Conduct for media to self-regulate the production and dissemination of content and to abide by the code;

Work towards the institutionalization of the Afghan Media and Civil Society Forum to follow-up on progress and engage in dialogue with the government and parliament and the international community on issues affecting media and civil society;

Expand and enrich the partnerships developed among Afghan media organizations and their international partners in the past and work towards joint programs for media development and for enhancing Afghan influence in international coverage;

Seek means needed to improve awareness and skills of journalists and media managers and to develop the communication skills of the civil society organizations through a capacity building process that is locally owned and empowering.

And recommend

The creation of a policy and legal environment that guarantees freedom of the press, independent regulation and the creation of a Public Service Broadcaster to support and encourage increased engagement of media and civil society for taking Afghanistan towards peace, democracy and development;

That all sides involved in armed conflict must protect and respect journalists' freedom and facilitate their activities where possible, while at the same time ensure the immediate release of those in captivity; and

The recognition of the media as an involved and important partner in the Afghan process as first step towards the creation of a Special Fund for supporting its development and growth.

Media is Development – Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum
Kabul, Afghanistan
28-29 March 2007.

APPENDIX I: Content analysis of selected media, August 2006

The Killid Group with the support of Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung

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Background

Following the political changes of 2001 and the Bonn Conference, there has been astonishing development of the media sector in Afghanistan. Today it reflects both strength and diversity. There are around 400 newspapers/ periodicals, more than 50 local, national and international radio stations with local language programming, seven news agencies and seven TV networks in the country. Three new TV channels are also readying to begin operations.

Despite the potential for future growth, there is now evidence that the success story of the media growth could be short-lived, owing mainly to the lack of adequate support from the market (advertising) and the discontinuation of funding by international donors.

Another output of past investments on the media is the availability of professional Afghan journalists and trainers. This has opened up new opportunities for cooperation which was unimaginable a few years ago.

The growth has taken place mainly in the independent media sector, whilst the anticipated transformation of the government media has remained slow and shaky, despite official statements favouring change.

The challenges ahead are still immense despite the promise shown by the independent media groups. In this context, The Killid Group (TKG) and the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) joined hands to try to understand what the media was covering and where, their main sources of information and reach.

Content produced by four newspapers/ periodicals, three TV channels, two news agencies and four radios was analysed. Even though the need for a more extensive content analysis remains, this research does provide important conclusions and recommendations to re-orient priorities

and suggest short, medium and long-term policies for enhancing coverage and media growth.

General conclusions

The focus of the study was to find out what the media was reporting, and less on the quality of the content. The findings suggest the following:

- The continuing War attracted the highest coverage (17.36%), Human Rights (10.7%) and Reconstruction (9.50%), though the latter increases to 15.42% if combined with the Economy (5.92%), which was considered as a separate category.
- Reports on people's Needs and Claims followed Reconstruction with 8.20 percent, followed by Politics (7.96%) and Social Behaviour, at 6.96 percent.
- The other thematic areas considered comprised of less than five percent of coverage, even though narcotics accounted for 4.93 percent of the stories covered. Corruption accounted for 4.80 percent, International Aid 4.61 percent, Environment 2.7 percent and Accountability of government institutions, just 0.82 percent of the coverage.
- Three aspects were considered while looking at reports on Human Rights: Human Rights in general 4.33 percent, Women's Rights 4.30 percent and Democratic Rights 2.07 percent.
- The sources of the information were overwhelmingly government; almost 40 percent of the published information was attributed to government sources – Central Government (26.92%) and Local Governments (12.84%). However, the number increases to 52.60 percent if Intergovernmental Organizations (10.65%) and Foreign Governments (2.19%) are added.
- Other sources of information were: Individuals (8.53%), the Civil Society (8.23%), other institutions (7.80%) and Local Actors (5.46%).
- International news agencies accounted for 16.76 percent of the coverage in the Afghan media. This is explained by the use of the copy of the government-run Bakhtar Information Agency's international service by the media. (The BIS relies extensively – 85% –

on translating foreign agency copy.) Excluding BIA, international news agencies accounted for 10.23 percent of coverage.

- The media in the study received content from Afghan news agencies – 24.76 percent of the information printed or broadcast. The information was largely provided by the Pajhwok Afghan News and the BIA, the latter almost exclusively, in the case of the governmental media.

Comments and recommendations

- **Content improvement and reach:** The majority of the Afghan population remains to be reached effectively by the media. The media has been unable sufficiently cover areas that matter to the people at large vis-à-vis the Afghan process: reconstruction, human rights, accountability, corruption, civil society.
- **Deepening capacity building:** The EC call for proposals at the end of 2004 for projects to be implemented in 2005 was a new approach to the development of the media in Afghanistan. It considered only training addressed to Afghan journalists and media managers, aiming to expand print and radio outreach to rural areas, and foster sustainability.
 - The on-the-job specialised training should focus on sensitive issues relevant to the development of Afghanistan, providing trainees with skills to cover education, health, gender, human rights, and development issues in general. Thousands of journalists and would-be-journalists participated in a large number of training workshops in the last four years, but not all of them have joined the profession.
 - The need now is to move to a very selective and specialised re-training of those that may be considered as the best journalists in the country. Journalists with editing responsibilities should be trained on the news production cycles, handling and editing copy and reporters, and setting and complying with editorial policy and style guidelines to ensure content production that is balanced in terms of sources, actors, and territorial coverage, and
 - The perception is that the time has come to work on develop-

ing a team of highly professional Afghan journalists and editors who will contribute to the consolidation of the sector and assist to build an environment where less skilled journalists would grow or move to a different activity.

- **Human rights:** In early 2004 the first issue of Internews' Media Monitor listed nine incidents of intimidation against publications and radio stations. The threats came from different sources including the police, the criminal investigation bureau, armed representatives of the ministry of justice, the Supreme Court of Afghanistan, the mayor of Kabul and the regional governors of Herat and Nangarhar. In March 2006, the Monitor reported six instances of threat – coming from the Public Security Court of Kabul, the President's office, unidentified bombers, several police officers, and even American forces.

In 2005, there were 45 registered cases of intimidation and actions against journalists, and two assassinations – including a woman journalist – according to the Association of Afghan Journalists. However, the reported violations of media rights represent only the tip of the iceberg because many of the threats go unreported. Much of that has to do with lack of awareness on the need to report violations.

Possible interventions to change the situation

- Capacity building of editors, journalists, civil society and government information officers on human rights and their roles in helping the country to move towards being an open, free society. The capacity building should focus on the rule of law, the relationship between media, civil society and the state, and integrate gender and ethnic perspectives.
- Deepening the professional skills and awareness of local journalists to support their colleagues for defending their right to be informed and inform, strengthening the content and reach of local media on these matters, and sharing these Afghan realities with regional and international organisations for defending rights of journalists, and the media.
- Strengthening public awareness on the need for supporting and

protecting individuals and associations that are defending human rights, and

- Strengthening the professionalism and reach of media in general because of the basic and continuing need to ensure that people across Afghanistan have the ability to hear and to be heard through the media.
- **Sources and the civil society:** The fact that the official sources continue to remain as the main providers of news, information and opinion, confirms that the Afghan civil society – made up of thousands of local *shuras*, associations and NGOs – remain ignored. The survey demonstrates that the link between the media and civil society has not been established or, in the best of the cases, is far from being interactive and spontaneous. As result:
 - Little or nothing is known about the role of civil society in the transition and their accomplishments
 - Their voices and opinions have not been adequately disseminated
 - The Afghan civil society has not been provided a platform for playing the role it should and could play in a democracy, and
 - The main reason for this gap is the inability of civil society to use available media to communicate their concerns, and the inability of journalists to build networks and contacts with civil society organisations.
- **National and local reach:** A solid and powerful national information network with the objectives of reaching and providing information, education and entertainment to all the people of Afghanistan is still missing.

Much has been achieved but there still remain gaps and risks that need to be tackled. All individuals interviewed in the context of the survey and otherwise, suggested the need for building direct links between the reconstruction efforts and building and sustaining strong and effective public and independent media. The environment created by free flow of information would help enhance national security and stability.

- **Provincial media:** The situation of both government-run and independent media is worse in the provinces in terms of skills, capacity and technical support.

More attention should be given to improving the media in the provinces, with the aim of ensuring that every province has at least one local radio station and one weekly publication. The development of local media serving local needs and interests should be a key part of the capacity building efforts in order to get public support for the Afghan process.

Donors interested in undertaking such projects should pay attention to issues of ownership and control as well as capacity building and empowerment at community level. Those seeking support should also be requested to submit viable business plans – or be helped to prepare them – in the hope that, after receiving initial support, the media would move towards becoming self-sufficient.

- **The sustainability dilemma:** Self-sufficiency has been very difficult for the print media in Afghanistan. One recent example is the closure of the Kabul Weekly. It does appear that raising resources seems easier for the broadcast media, compared to the print media.

The sustainability question is valid but it has to be assessed together with the economic realities of Afghanistan and the current inability of the market to support all publications and broadcast organisations. Market demand and supply may eventually determine which media survive and which do not in the longer term, but there is need for continued donor support in the short run to allow diverse groups to try out their ideas.

Appendix II: List of speakers and participants at the Forum

A. Speakers

Inaugural session

No.	Name	Designation/organization
1	Shahir Ahmad Zahine	Chairman, The Killid Group
2	Mario Lubetkin	Director General, IPS
3	His Excellency Hamid Karzai	President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
4	Ambassador Francesc Vendrell	Special Representative of the European Union for Afghanistan
5	Ambassador Hansjorg Kretschmer	Head of Delegation, European Commission Delegation to Afghanistan
6	Ambassador Ettore Francesco Sequi	Ambassador of Italy (he read the message from the Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Patrizia Sentinelli Ambassador of Italy).

SESSION A: State of the Afghan Media

No.	Name	Designation/organization
7	Shirazuddin Siddiqi (Chair)	Director, BBC Afghan Education Project
8	Imtiaz Alam	Secretary General, SAFMA
9	Kanak Mani Dixit	Editor, Himal South Asian
10	Fazel Sancharaki	President, Afghanistan National Journalist Union
11	Rahimullah Samandar	Director, Centre for International Journalism
12	Shahir Ahmad Zahine	Chairman, The Killid Group
13	Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq	Member of Parliament, Chairman Culture, Media and Religious Affairs Committee of Parliament
14	Abdul Hamid Mubariz	Former deputy minister of information and culture (journalist/writer)
15	Ricardo Grassi	Inter Press Service
16	Emmanuel de Denichen	Director of Marketing, Altai Consulting
17	Antoine Heudre	Director, Sayara Media and Communications

SESSION B: Government, donors and the media

No.	Name	Designation/organization
18	Aziz Hakimi/Kanak Mani Dixit (Co-chairs)	Executive Director, The Killid Group/Editor, Himal South Asian
19	Ricardo Grassi	Inter Press Service
20	Mubarez Rashidi	Deputy Minister, Culture & Youth Affairs
21	Elisabeth Rousset	European Commission

22	Shigeru Aoyagi	Director, UNESCO Afghanistan
23	Tsuneo Sugishita	JICA - Japan
24	Massoumeh Torfeh	Research Associate, SOAS/LSE
25	Aunohita Mojumdar	Freelance journalist, India
26	Sakhi Munir	Editor, Anis Daily
27	Ann Ninan	IPS - India

SESSION C: The Civil Society: Public service providers or conscious but excluded socio-political mediators?

No.	Name	Designation/organization
28	Abdul Salam Rahimi - Chairman	Founder Saba Media Organization, Chairman CHA Network
29	Mohammad Halim Fidai	Media and Communication Coordinator, Counterpart International
30	Vinod Raina	People's Science Movement of India
31	Najibullah Manalai	Advisor, Ministry of Culture and Youth
32	Dr. Mohammad Akbar	Director, Media Support Solutions
33	Jailani Popal	Chairman, Afghan Development Association
34	Mirwais Wardak	Program Director, Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CAPAU)
35	Mohammad Hashim Esmatullahi	Acting Chair of the independent commission for Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA)
36	Zahid Shah Angar	Da Wulas Ghagh Radio, Khost and Mediotheke, Khost

B. Government

No.	Name	Designation/organization
37	Jalil Shams	Minister of Economy
38	Dadfar Rangin Spanta	Minister of Foreign Affairs
39	Abdul Karim Khuram	Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs
40	Azzam Dadfar	Minister of Higher Education
41	Mohammad Hanif Atmar	Minister of Education
42	Sayed Amin Fatimi	Minister of Health
43	Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady	Minister of Finance
44	Mohammad Ehsan Zia	Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
45	Zarar Ahmad Moqbil	Minister of Interior
46	Abdal Jabar Sabit	Attorney General
47	Chief Justice Salam Azzimi	Supreme Court
48	Mohammad Qasim Halimi	Supreme Court
49	Daud Muradian	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
50	Omara Khan Massoudi	Director, Kabul Museum
51	Aziz Ahmad	Office of Father of the Nation
52	Sharifa Sharif	Advisor, Office of President
53	Karim Rahimi	Presidential Spokesperson

C. Donors/Embassies (Invitees)

No.	Name	Designation/organization
54	Ambassador Ronald Neumann	United States of America
55	Richard Norland	Deputy Chief of Mission
56	Yvonne Stassen	Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of The Netherlands
57	Yuichi Iizuka	First Secretary, Embassy of Japan
58	Lyle Crawford	Embassy of Australia
59	Mariam J. Sherman	The World Bank
60	Brian Faucet	Asian Development Bank
61	Bruce Etling	US Agency for International Development
62	Diana Youdell	CIDA
63	Anita Nirody	United Nations Development Program
64	Semyon Grigoriev	Embassy of the Russian Federation
65	Sara Rezoagli	First Secretary, Embassy of Italy
66	Sofia Orrebrink	Embassy of Sweden
67	Marianne Olesen	Embassy of Denmark
68	Timo Oula	Embassy of Finland
69	V.V. Rao	Embassy of India
70	Asif Durrani	Embassy of Pakistan
71	Jon Summers	The Asia Foundation
72	George Varughese	The Asia Foundation
73	Meloney Lindberg	The Asia Foundation
74	Fazel Rabbi Wardak	The Asia Foundation
75	Victor Madeira Dos Santos	European Commission
76	Ville Varjola	European Commission
77	Mario Raggazi	European Commission
78	Ursula Koch-Laugwitz	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
79	Michael Troester	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
80	Alex Hill	Embassy of the United Kingdom
81	Matt Freear	Embassy of the United Kingdom
82	Aly Mawji	AKDN
83	Paul Van de Logt	Embassy of the Netherlands
84	Linda Cheatham	PAO, Embassy of the U.S.A
85	Joseph Mellott	Embassy of the U.S.A
86	Sebastien Duhaut	Embassy of France
87	Gabriel Buti	French Cultural Centre, Kabul
88	Nathan Naidoo	Embassy of Canada
89	Javier Parrondo	Embassy of Spain
90	Speck Henning	Embassy of Germany
91	Tomoko Otsuka	Embassy of Japan
92	Tetsuya Iwasaka	Embassy of Japan
93	Mindaugas Simonaitis	Special Mission of Lithuania

D. International participants

No.	Name	Designation/organization
94	Kanak Mani Dixit	Editor, Himal South Asian, Nepal
95	Rajendra Dahal	Press Council Nepal
96	Binod Bhattarai	Centre for Investigative Journalism, Nepal
97	Imtiaz Alam	Secretary General, SAFMA, Pakistan
98	Ayesha Durrani	Program Officer, UNESCO Pakistan
99	Vinod Raina	People's Science Movement of India
100	Ann Ninan	IPS, India
101	Asagiri Katsuhiko	IPS, Japan
102	Aunohita Mojumdar	Freelance journalist, India

E. Media participants (Kabul-based)

No.	Name	Designation/organization
103	Zubair Shafiqi	Wesa newspaper
104	Murtazawi	Raraqı & Bahar newspaper
105	Barry Salaam	Chief Executive GMA/AwaNama
106	Fahim Dashti	Editor, Kabul Weekly
107	Mujib Khilwatgar	Director, Nai Supporting Free Media
108	Ali Rizawani	Eqtedar Mili newspaper
109	Amin Modaqiq	Radio Azadi
110	Habibullah Rafi	Editor-in-Chief, The Killid Group
111	Ghani Modaqiq	Radio Television Afghanistan
112	Abdul Wahid Nazari	Shamshad TV
113	Siddiq Khan	Tolo TV
114	Massood Qiam	Tolo TV
115	Emal Pasarly	BBC Pashto Service
116	Ghaus Zalmai	National Journalist Union of Afghanistan
117	Daad Noorani	Producer/editor, The Killid Group
118	Mir Haidar Mutahar	Arman Mili
119	Dr. Mohammad Zaher Ayubi	Radio Nawa
120	Danish Karokhel	Pajhwak Afghan News
121	Shafi Rahil	Bakhtar Afghan News
122	Aryanzai	Ariana Radio Television
123	Jamila Mujahid	Radio Saday-e-Zan
124	Katrin Weda	Cheragh daily
125	Turyalai Zazi	Hewad daily
126	Sargardan	Zambil-e-Gham
127	Fazel Rahman Orya	Freelance journalist
128	Siddiq Khan	Tolo TV
129	Dr. Yasa	Outlook/Afghanistan

F. Media participants (provincial)

No.	Name	Designation/organization
130	Qayum Babak	Jahan-e-Naw radio – Mazar-i-Sharif
131	Atta Obaidi	Radio Takharistan - Takhar
132	Younes Bohran	Lawang magazine – Khost
133	Zhaid Shah Angar	Da Wulas Ghagh radio – Khost
134	Basir Haqgo	Radio Amo – Badakhshan
135	Mirwais	Sabawoon radio – Helmand
136	Najia	Zohra radio – Kunduz
137	Shafique Shaeq	Sharq Radio TV – Jalalabad
138	Mursal Ahmadzai	Saday-e-Afghan radio – Kandahar
139	Ali Erfani	Bamyan radio – Bamyan

G. Civil Society participants

No.	Name	Designation/organization
140	Asila Wardak	UNDP
141	Partaw Naderi	ASCF
142	Aziz Raffie	ASCF
143	Naim Nazari	ASCHRN
144	Wasay Najmi	AKTC
145	Jolyon Leslie	AKTC
146	Fawad Muslim	Independent Technology Consultant
147	Ehsan Hemat	AFGA
148	Sajya Behgam	Medica Mundial
149	Paul Fishtein	AREU
150	Sima Samar	AIHRC
151	Kefayatullah Eblagh	ATC
152	Najia Hanifi	AWEC
153	Eng. Sayed Hassan	ADA
154	Paul Barker	Care International
155	Kanishka Nawabi	CPAU
156	Sulaiman Kakar	CPAU
157	Dr. Saljooqi	CHA
158	Eng. Waheed Hamidi	Saba Media Organization
159	Fazil Karim Fazel	OMAR
160	Raz Mohammad Dalili	SDF
161	Ana Roza Rodriguez	Kabul University
162	Dr. Farid	AHDS
163	Ehsan Zahine	Tribal Liaison Office
164	Eng. Jawed	HAFO
165	Eng. Naeem Salimi	CoAR
166	Hussaini	CCA

167	Fazlullah Wahidi	ANCB
168	Shafiqullah Wardak	DHSA
169	Ismail Hail	Nye Express

H. International media - coverage (Invitees)

No.	Name	Designation/organization
170	Mathew Pennington	AP
171	Tom Coghlan	Economist/Independent
172	Rachel Morarjee	Financial Times
173	Griff Witte	Washington Post
174	Carlotta Gall	New York Times
175	James Bays/Qais Azimi	AlJazeera
176	Abdul Saboor /Terry Friel	Reuters
177	Mark Dummet	BBC World Service
178	Declan Walsh	The Guardian
179	Eberhard Sucker	DW
180	Hiromi Yasui	Kyodo News
181	Tim Allbone	The Times (UK)

I. Local media - coverage

No.	Designation/organization
182	Tolo TV
183	Ariana Radio Television
184	Radio Television Afghanistan
185	Shamshad TV
186	Afghan TV
187	Aina TV
188	Good Morning Afghanistan/RTA
190	BBC Pashto/Dari Service
191	Radio Azadi
192	Voice of America
193	Radio Killid