

# The Potential for Community Radio in Afghanistan

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Is community radio a viable option for Afghanistan? What would it sound like? How would it fit into a national public-service radio system? What type of governance structures will ensure stations are both responsive to their communities and independent? Is it necessary to wait until the legal and regulatory framework is in place?

This study, sponsored by the Communication Assistance Foundation, examines the potential for community-based radio in Afghanistan and identifies examples of how community radio can support initiatives for community development. The report and its recommendations are primarily intended as a resource for agencies and organisations considering supporting radio, media or communication activities in the country, whether with funds or expertise.

Afghanistan has a 70 per cent illiteracy rate (85 percent among women), devastated infrastructure and a largely rural population ? according to some estimates, 85 percent of the population lives in 37,000 villages. Barely four percent of households have electricity and even in major cities the telecommunications infrastructure is virtually non-existent. Only Herat has a modern functioning landline telephone network, complete with public call booths.

Kabul's GSM network offers irregular service and its capacity is insufficient for its 12,000 customers. The Internet, banned by the Taliban, is still unavailable, except to UN agencies, NGOs and a few ministries. The demand for education far exceeds the capacity to supply it.

However, most Afghans do have access to radio receivers and are accustomed to using radio as a source of news, information, education and entertainment. Community radio, understood as radio which is community-based, independent and participatory, offers a low-cost and effective way of contributing to medium and long-term efforts for reconstruction, development, democracy and nation-building.

Jo van der Spek and Bruce Girard undertook a study, the report of which concludes that community radio is not only a viable option for Afghanistan, it is also a low-cost and effective way of contributing to medium and long-term efforts for reconstruction, development, democracy and nation-building. Community radio can be the missing link in a three-tiered public-service radio system made up of national, regional and local radio stations. Recommendations deal with awareness of community radio, legal issues, governance, technology, and coordination of activities.

The full report can be downloaded from <http://comunica.org/afghanistan/>