



**ARD/ALGAP
LOCAL GOVERNANCE AWARENESS
MOBILE THEATRE CAMPAIGN
DECEMBER 2006**

**Final Report
JANUARY 2007**

The Local Governance Awareness Mobile Theatre Campaign took place in December 2006. The seven troupes performed in 21 provinces of Afghanistan. Overall, the drama was performed more than 240 times for a total audience of 129,000 direct spectators. This does not include the indirect audience reached through TV and Radio broadcasts. The play was aired entirely 5 times by provincial RTA TV stations and 3 times by provincial RTA radio stations.

During the campaign, 112,500 leaflets (fitted with PC members contact list inserts) were distributed and 3,000 posters were displayed. The messages highlighted in the leaflet focused on the following points: awareness about local governance, its processes and its actors, in particular the Provincial Council, importance of people's participation, importance of cooperation between the different actors in the province. In addition to the booklets distributed directly by the teams, 22,000 copies of the booklets were handed over to ARD/ALGAP for distribution through their PBFs in the regions or provinces not covered by the mobile theatre.

The campaign was first planned to be implemented in September 2006. However, writing the script took longer than expected and the final script was finally validated in November. The rehearsals took place for two weeks at the end of November and by early December, the teams were ready to start their campaigns. Most teams started performing on December 2nd. All teams completed their road maps on December 28th.

1.1. The campaign in figures:

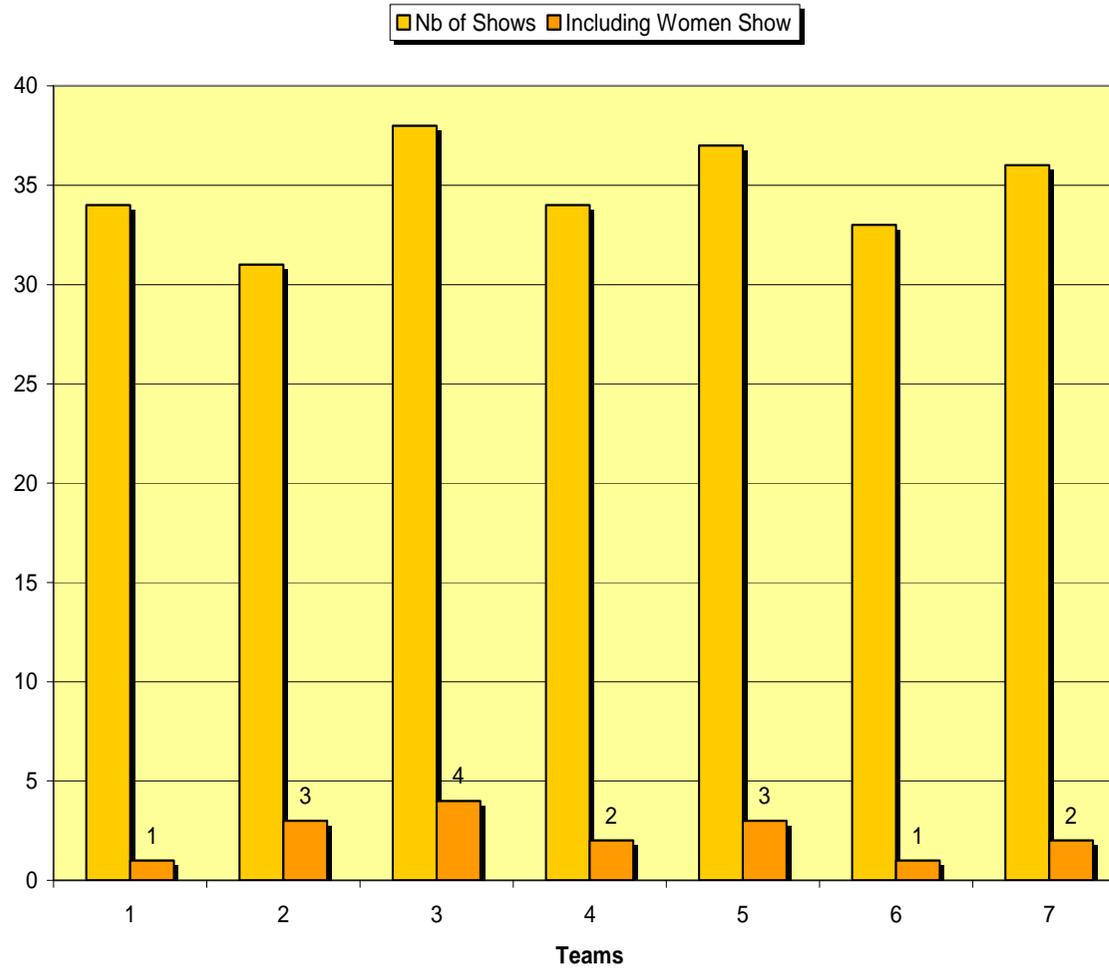
Overall, the play was performed more than 240 times. All troupes respected their contract, i.e to perform at least 30 times in one month. This is no small achievement because the conditions were adverse (short days restricting possibilities in terms of schedule, cold weather, difficulty for the coordinator to travel independently from one location to another one for coordination).

Team 3 (Takhar, Kunduz and Samangan) tops the list with 38 performances in total, team 2 "only" performed 32 times but that team lost some shows because of the weather conditions in Bamiyan and Parwan (and a car breakdown on their way to Bamiyan). The number of women shows, 16, represents a modest and somehow disappointing 6.5% if the total number of performances. However, only shows were the audience is exclusively female or has a significant majority of women spectators attending are counted as such (typically, these shows will happen in the Women Affairs Directorate in the provincial centres. There are also women attending shows not labelled as "women shows". Overall, the percentage of women in the total audience nears 9%.

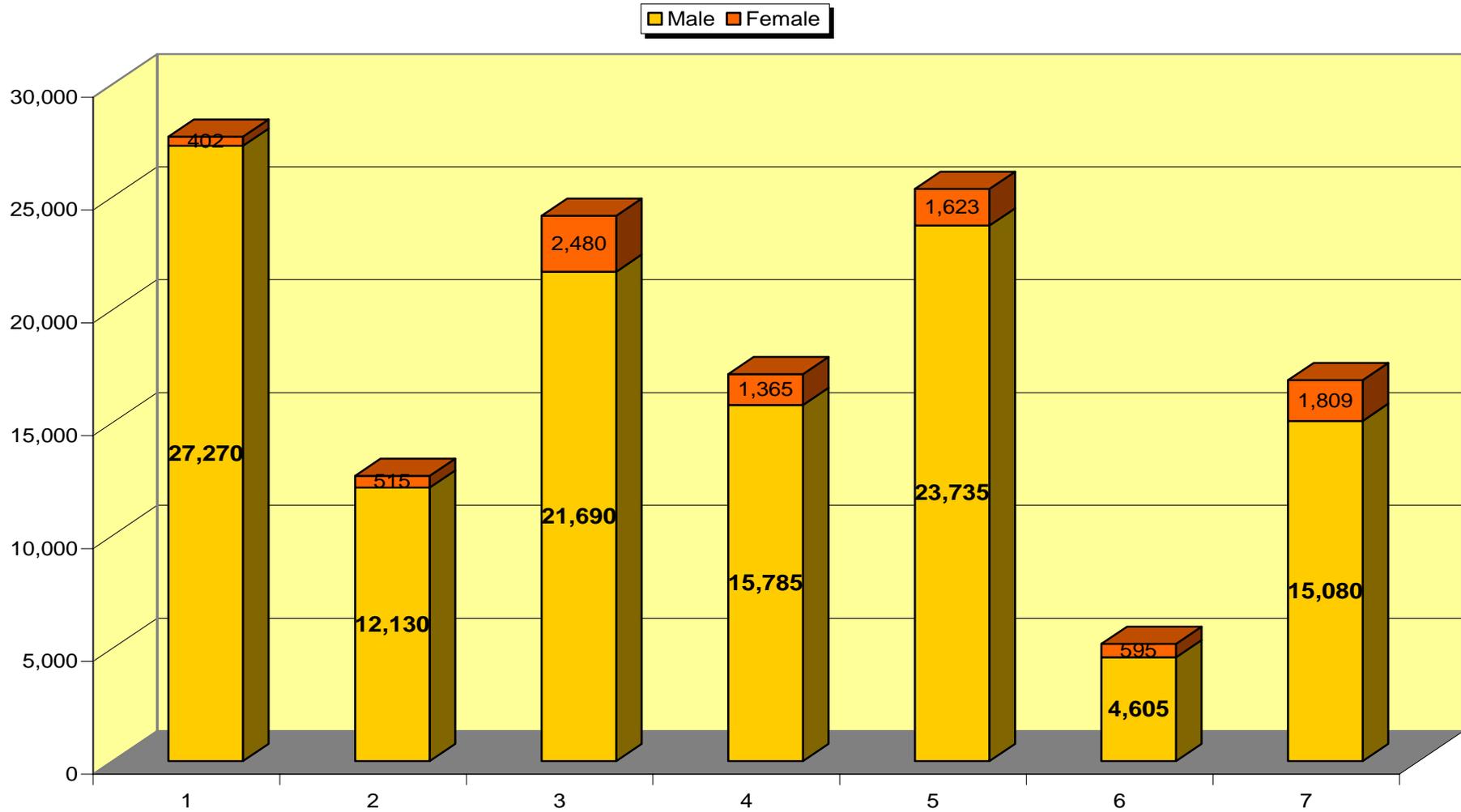
The total number of spectators reported by the coordinators is 129,000. The various teams' audience records vary significantly: from Team 3 and its 25,000 spectators reported (indeed the pictures from this team show large crowds) to Team 6 (which covered the South-Eastern provinces of Khost, Paktya and Logar), with 6,000 spectators. Teams 2 and 5 with around 25,000 spectators reported are above the overall average, while teams 2, 4 and 7 are reported audience in the range of 12,000 to 17,000.

Following are breakdowns of the number of shows and of the audience, first per team and then per province.

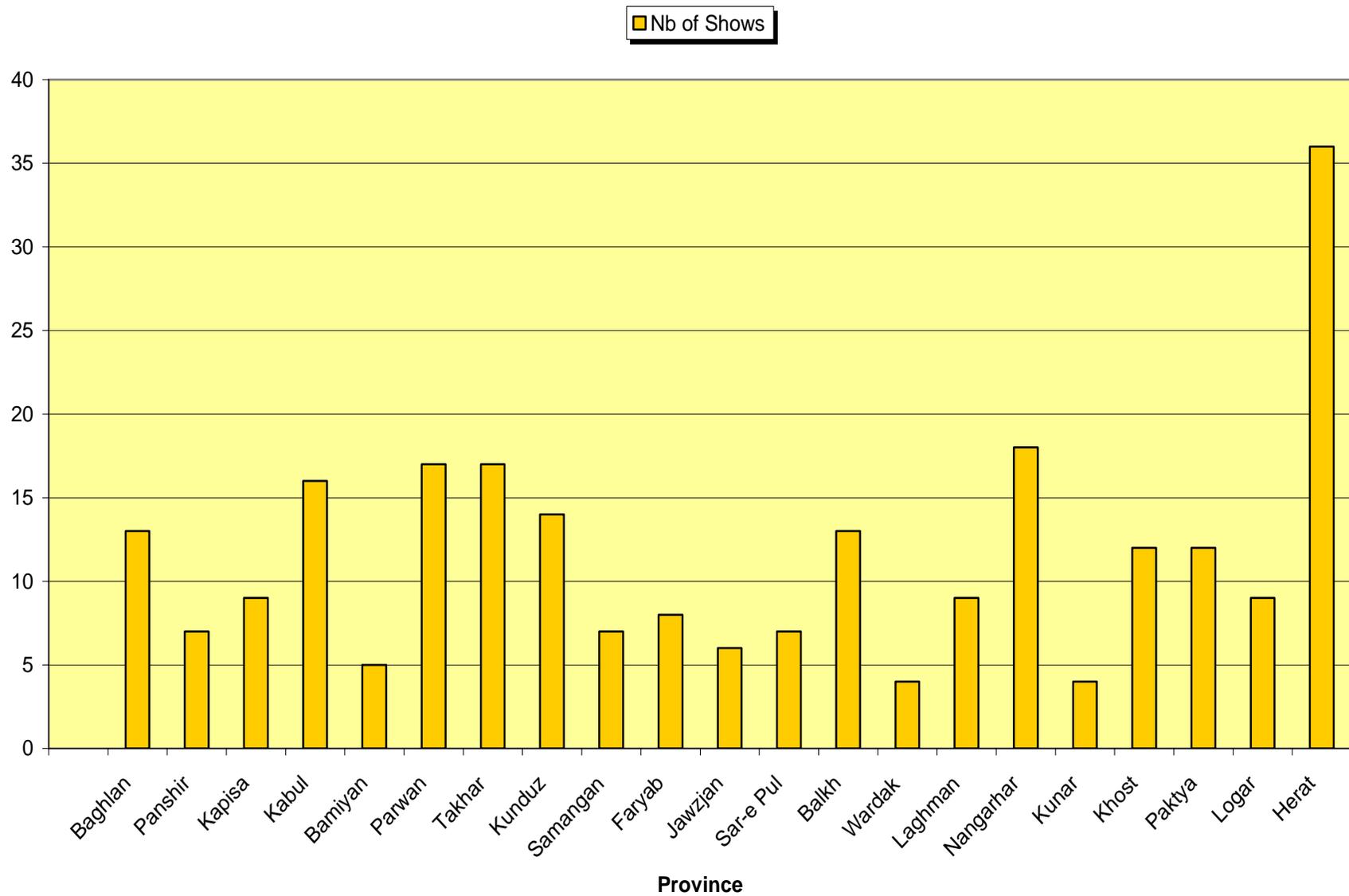
Nb of Shows per Team



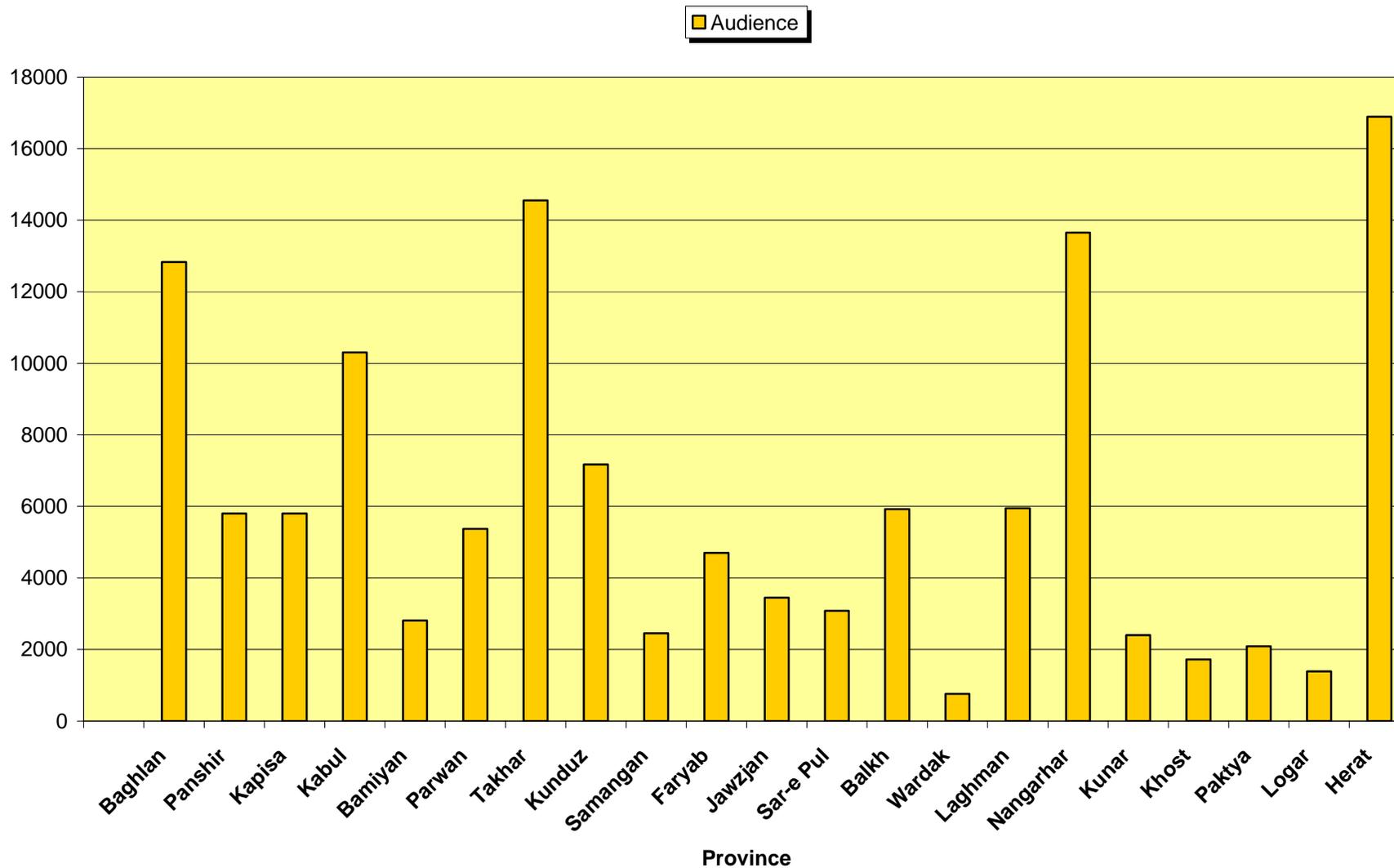
Audience per Team



Nb of Shows per Province



Audience per Province



1.2. Overview of Official Shows Province per Province

Rather than having each team staging a, inauguration event at the beginning of the campaign, it as agreed that in each province, the ALGAP PBF and Sayara's coordinator would join forces to organise a "official show" in the provincial centre where the province's officials would be invited.

Here is a brief overview of these shows in all the provinces. Only in Khost province did the event not take place, reportedly because none of the officials invited turned up for the show.

Most of the times, the officials (Governor, PC) seem to have welcome the program and expressed appreciation for its objective to provide information to citizens so that they see an interest in participating and supporting the local governance process. In one occasion, however, in Balkh province, the Head of the PC was critical of the program and he regretted that "the money used for the theatre campaign had not been given directly to the PC"¹

■ = speaker

Team 1:

Baghlan

Date: 05 December 2006

Venue: Ghori Electricity Factory

More then 80 officials attended, including the directors of the line ministries, members of the provincial administration, PC members and the TV reporter. There was no introductory speech. At the end of the show, the PC members were happy and appreciated the program. The TV recorded some parts of the drama for the news.

Panishir

Date: 14 December 2006

Venue: Provincial Hall

250 local and official people attended, including the security commander of the province, the deputy security commander (■), security staff, the directors of the departments and PC members.

The deputy security commander welcomed the team and the guests and said that it was the first time that an public information campaign was coming to his province to raise people's awareness, and he hoped this program be nice and interesting for the people of Panjshir. At the end, the security commander expressed his appreciation for the program and wished the duration of the campaign was longer.

Kapisa

Date: 19 December 2006

¹ This is an oral record of the declaration which has then been repeated over the phone and then translated so it might not be word for word what was said but I expect the PBF to have picked up the remark as well.

Venue: Mustufyat Hall

More than 250 people attended, including the head of PC and all the PC members, the directors of the departments, members of the provincial administration, and local radio reporter.

Nobody spoke before the play, but at the end, the head of the PC expressed his appreciation for the program. He said the play contained a lot of useful information and messages that could help solve some problems. The radio recorded some parts of the drama for the news.

Team 2

Kabul

Date: 2nd December 2006

Venue: French Cultural Centre

Around 100 people attended, including the deputy governor of Kabul province (■), deputy head of Kabul PC (■), Wardak PC members.

Bamyan

Date: 5 December 2006

Venue: Communication Department Hall

100 people, mostly officials, attended, including the deputy security commander of Bamyan province, the directors of communication, public health and information & culture departments, members of the provincial administration, PC members (■) and radio Bamyan.

PC member Ehsanullah Ehsani (■) said that it is very important and useful program specially the messages that make the communication good and efficient between the organizations, he add that before your program our communication with the governor was not so good, but now this program solved many problems among us,

Parwan

Date: 20 December 2006

Venue: Information & Culture Department Hall

60 officials attended, including the deputy governor of Parwan (■), deputy security commander, director of information & culture department, members of the provincial administration, head of PC's secretary (■), PC members and RTA Parwan reporter and cameraman.

The deputy governor said it was the first time that he was watching a very important, useful and efficient program; he expresses his appreciation for the program. The secretary of the head of PC said that he hoped that the duration of this program be long in order to cover all the districts of the province, because there are a lot of efficient messages that in your program which are important and necessary, It was very good and the reaction of people was positive.

Team 3

Takhar

Date 05 December 2006

Venue: Municipality Hall.

400 people attended, including the governor of the province (■), the deputy security commander, the Head of PC, the directors of the departments, members of the provincial administration, PC members and RTA Takhar.

The governor first welcomed the team and the guests. After the show, he said: "It was very important and useful program specially the messages that make the communication good and efficient between the organizations, he add that before your program we had some problems with the PC, but now this program solved those problems for us, It was very good and the reaction of people was positive and also Takhar TV recorded the drama and broadcasted the same night, at the end of the program the governor invited the theatre team for lunch.

Kunduz

Date: 14 December 2006

Venue: Security Department Hall.

220 people attended included the deputy governor of Kunduz (■), the deputy security commander, the director of the information and culture and education department (■), members of the provincial administration, PC members(■), RTA Kunduz.

The deputy governor said the program was important, useful and efficient, he expressed his appreciation for the program. The education department director said it was really an educative program, necessary and important for everyone. He added that theatre was a useful and important tool in Afghanistan to teach the people. Mr. Eimaq, PC member said he hoped Sayara and ARD could continue this good and useful program that presents a lot of efficient messages. RTA Kunduz recorded the drama and aired the full drama twice.

Samagan

Date: 25 December 2006

Venue: Ajani Malika Girls School Hall.

200 people attended including the head of the finance department (■), head of the PC (■), the director of information & culture department, PC members and RTA Samangan.

The head of PC expressed his appreciation for the program. At the end of the program, he said that the play was very useful, important & efficient, because the information provided would help answer some questions and solve some problems of the people, RTA Samangan recorded the drama.

Team 4

Faryab

Date: 03 December 2006

Venue: Information and Culture Department Hall.

100 official people attended included the governor of the province (■), the ANA commander, the Head of PC (■), the ISAF staff, the directors of women affair, information & culture departments, members of the provincial administration, PC members and Radio Faryab.

The governor welcomed the theater team for their important program. He said it was the first time he was watching an educative theatre performance and hoped it would solve some misunderstandings between the provincial administration and the PC. The PC head expressed his appreciation for the program. Radio Faryab recorded the drama and aired it once. At the end of the program, the governor and head of PC distributed certificates to the theatre team.

Jawzjan

Date: 10 December 2006

Venue Municipality Hall.

150 people attended including the deputy governor (■), the security commander, the directors of information & culture (■), woman affairs, orphanage departments, members of the provincial administration, PC members and RTA Jawzjan.

The deputy governor welcomed the program and expressed his appreciation. The director of the information & culture department said “it is three years that Sayara presents educative theatre campaigns so I am sure it is very useful and important for all of us”. He added “I hope this campaign also brings some change in our life activities”. The secretary of the PC said “I hope your efficient messages can have an effect on the people”.

Radio Jawzjan recorded some parts of the drama for the news.

Sar-e-Pul

Date: 16 December 2006

Venue: Woman Affair department hall

60 people attended, including the directors of information and culture, woman affairs, and education departments, members of provincial administration and Head of PC (■) and PC members, and RTA Sar-e-pul.

The head of the PC welcomed and expressed the appreciation for the program and hoped the messages of this campaign could bring some changes in the day-to-day activities of the PC.

Sar-e-Pul TV recorded the drama during the program and broadcast it once the next day..

Balkh

Date: 20 December 2006

Venue: Provincial Hall

50 officials attended, including the mayor of Mazar, the deputy directors of education and information & culture departments, Head of PC (■) and PC members, the Head and reporter of Balkh TV reporter.

There were no speakers prior to the show. At the end of the show, the head of Balkh PC, Mr. Farhad Azimi, asked why ARD had used this budget on a theatre program, when it would have been better to give the equivalent funds directly to the PC in order to solve some of its problems.

Team 5:

Wardak

Date: 05 December 2006

Venue: Municipality Hall

More than 100 officials attended, including the governor of the province Mr. Abdul Jabar Naeimi (■), the security commander of the province, the deputy head of the PC (■), the directors of the departments, members of provincial administration, PC members and RTA Wardak.

The Governor announced he would express his feelings after watching the play. At the end, he declared: "It looks like the script was specifically written for Maidan Wardak province, because all the problems and the situations that are in the drama are really the problems and situations that we face in our province. It was very important and useful program specially the messages that make the communication good and efficient between the organizations, especially with Wardak PC (difficult relations)". The drama was recorded by the TV camera man and at the end of the program; the Governor invited the theatre team for lunch.

Laghman

Date: 09 December 2006

Venue: Agriculture Department Hall

More than 150 officials attended, including the governor of the province (■), the deputy governor, and the deputy security commander, the head of the PC (■), the directors of the departments, members of the provincial administration, PC members and radio reporters.

The Governor welcomed the team and the program. He said that it was the first time he was attending a very important theatre campaign, given the issues of this campaign. The head of PC was also happy. He declared " I think this is the first awareness campaign about PC and local governance in Afghanistan and I hope this campaign can bring some important changes in the local governance system in our country". At the end of the program, the Governor said that the number of shows was not enough for Laghman province, and that the team had to stay for at least 10 or 15 days to cover the entire province. The radio reporter recorded some parts of the drama for the news.

Nangarhar

Date 18 December 2006

Venue: Qabahel Hall

More than 500 officials and school students and teachers attended, including the head of the PC (■), the directors of the departments (including director of education (■)), members of the provincial administration, PC members, PRT commander (■) and TV and Radio reporters.

The day after the planned date for the official show, an official event organized by the PRT was taking place in the same hall. The director of information & culture suggested that the two events be combined. The PRT staff was very happy to watch the show. RTA Nangarhar recorded a few scenes of the drama.

Kunar

Date: 28 December 2006

Vanue: Qabahel Hall

More than 500 people attended, including the head of the PC, the deputy head of PC (■), the directors of the departments, administration section of the province & members of the PC and TV reporters.

The deputy head of PC welcomed the team; He said he hoped the campaign could bring some important and necessary changes in the local governance system of Kunar province. RTA recorded the full drama and broadcast it once.

Team 6:

Khost

Officially, Sayara and ARD PBF had distributed the invitations two days in advance to many officials and offices. However, nobody turned up and the official show was cancelled.

Paktia

Date: 13 December 2006

Venue: Municipality Hall

More than 70 officials attended, including the governor of the province (■), the directors of the departments, administration section of the province, deputy head of PC (■), PC members, elders of the districts and TV and Radio reporters.

The Governor welcomed to the guests. He said the topic of the campaign looked useful and important and hoped the program could have a good effect on the people of Paktia. The deputy head of the PC said: "I am sure this drama has a lot of important information that will be useful for all of us". At the end of the program, two elders expressed their appreciation for the team's acting and for the program; They said that they were not aware of the responsibilities of the PC before, whereas now, thanks to ARD and Sayara, and a nice and efficient program, it was clear for them. Radio & TV reporters recorded some parts of the drama for the news.

Logar

Date: 23 December 2006

Venue: Municipality Hall

More than 100 officials attended, including the deputy governor (■), the head of PC (■) and the directors of the departments, members of the provincial administration, PC members and TV & Radio reporters.

The deputy governor welcomed to the team and guests. He said: "I am happy to participate to see this program and I hope that it has good and efficient messages for the people of Logar. The director of the agriculture department said that the program should be for the local people only, as the people present were aware and we do not need an awareness program. At the end he said "this was indeed an educative, useful and important for all of us". Then the head of the PC said, I hope your efficient messages can have an effect on residents in Logar. At the end, the Pajhwok reporter and Radio Azadi realized an interview with the coordinator, the theatre director and two actors.

Team 7:

Herat

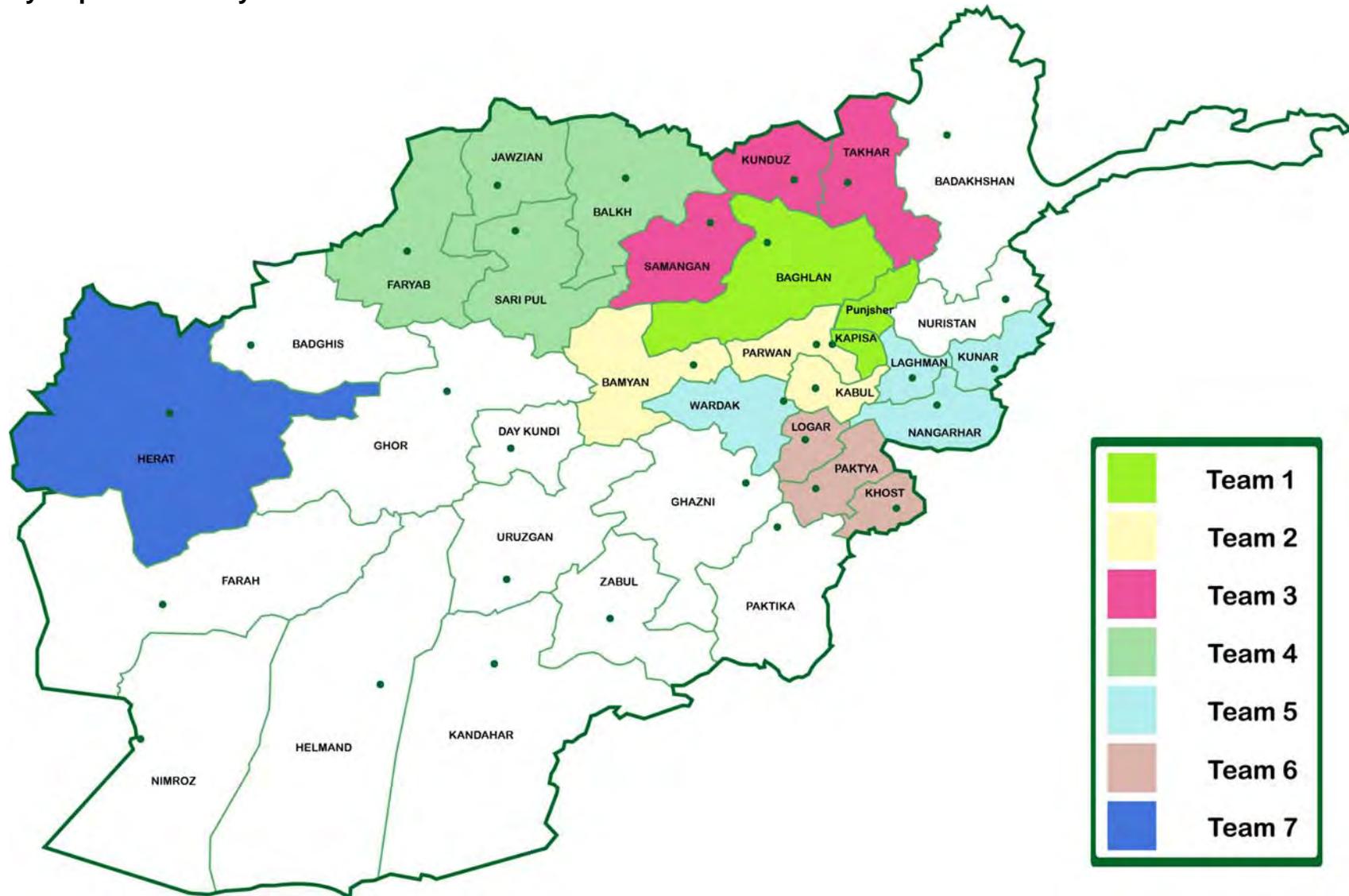
Date: 02 December 2006

Venue: Theatre Department Hall

More than 70 official people attended, including the deputy head of the PC (■), the directors of departments (including information and culture department (■)), PC members, ISAF commander, Bakhter press, newspaper journalists, Afghan film section staff and TV & Radio reporters.

The deputy head of PC said: "I am wondering how it is possible to make a theatre program about the PC and local governance. I cannot say anything now, because I do not know how the program will be, but I am sure it will be very important". The director of the information & culture department said: "We need awareness programs and we have see every awareness program in order to know it is good and useful or not". After the show, the deputy head of PC expressed his appreciation for the team work and the play and said he hoped the program could be recorded in Heart TV and broadcast for all the people of Heart province.

1.3. Activity Reports Team by Team



Following, are the complete activity reports team by team.

1.4. Evaluation

As part of an evaluation exercise conducted after the performances, the spectators were asked to answer a questionnaire to give their feeling about the theatre play and explore some opinions and behaviours with regard to some of the themes addressed by the play.

As part of the exercise, a total of 234 persons were interviewed, including 213 men (91%) and 21 women (9%), representing different age groups. The number of women interviewed is very low, but does correspond roughly to the proportion of female spectators in the overall audience.

A full record of the answers collected can be provided to ARD/ALGAP on demand.

1.4.1. Reception of the play

More than **95%** of the spectators said they liked the play, and less than **1%** said expressly that they disliked the play.

More than **94%** found the play was appropriate culturally. Interestingly, the only formulated negative answer was to stress the absence of a female character.

Asked what they would change in the play if they could, **74%** said that the play was very good and that they would not change anything, while **10%** would make the play “funnier” and **5 %** would create a female character.

Regarding the conditions (viewing, hearing), **95%** declared to have been able to hear and see well. Only one person interviewed complained that she could not hear well because there were many people.

1.4.2. Reception of the messages

To start with, **57%** of the interviewed said they did not know about the PC before seeing the drama. **38%** had heard about the PC before.

25% said they had already gone to their PC or meet a PC member, but **75%** had not.

85% said the play encouraged them to go and meet their PC, **3%** said it did not.

More than **93%** of the spectators found some new information in the drama, including **51%** who mention “the responsibilities and activities of the PC”.

The question “Which of your views or opinions has this play made you think you might change?” seems to have lost most of its substance in the translation, as **87%** answered that “they had learnt to solve their problems with their PCs.” **9%** said the play left their opinions unchanged as “changing people’s minds takes time”.

95% are convinced it is important for every citizen to be involved in the local governance process, including **21%** because “one should be aware of everything” and **28%** because “if people do not support their PC and local governance, there will not be any improvement”. Among the negative answers, a handful stressed that “participation of illiterate people in the decision making process will increase problem”.

Asked the question “Please tell me why it is or is not realistic, practical or possible for you to become involved in the decision making processes in your province?”, overall **83%** answered positively, including **47%** who said “because we want to be aware of what is going on in the country” and **13%** “because we must be involved in the decision making process in our province”.

However close to **17%** expressed pessimism, **6.5%** because they feel “nobody listen to them” and **3.5%** because they “are not given a chance to become involved”.

Asked to describe the main functions of the PC, **50%** said “to guide people and government”, **21%** “bringing people’s voice to the government and fostering cooperation between people and government, **4%** “building schools, hospitals, roads”, **4%** “making work plan and controlling the budget” (other answers, **20%**).

The results are encouraging. As dry and abstract as the topic of local governance may be, it seems possible to propose something that is both entertaining and informative. Without doubt, people who watch the play at the very last become aware of the existence of the Provincial Council (57% declared they did not know about the PC before seeing the play and of its main functions and role in the local governance structure) and exposed to the idea of citizen’s participation. **95%** of the interviewed said they would talk to family and friends about ideas contained in the play or in the booklet.

And **85%** said they felt encouraged to “talk with their PC” which is a very positive. Obviously, the questionnaires are made right after the shows, and it can only be a very short term assessment. If it was possible, it would be interesting to measure how many people actually go to their PC on account of what they have seen and heard during the drama.

Regarding the evaluation, these are just suggestions that ARD/ALGAP might have already thought about and/or done:

- ❖ write to the PC members of the provinces to collect feedback from them,
- ❖ ask the PC to document (at least report) if and when someone comes to speak to them after seeing the play.

On our side, we have given to all the theatre teams a post-campaign questionnaire to fill. It is more for us to get information about the technical and practical organisation of the shows, to have the teams’ opinion on their working conditions, etc... However, if it yields any information that might be relevant or interesting for ARD/ALGAP, we will of course share it.

So in conclusion, the results of the evaluation questionnaire are overall positive and encouraging. The exercise has its known limitations: it is done by the coordinators or troupes’ directors who can lack neutrality or skills or simply time to get the most out of the questionnaires, and are restricted to immediate post-evaluation exercises. This underlines the potential benefit of including a separate evaluation officer in the project (this can be done with a very reasonable budget) in order to improve the quality and therefore the usefulness of the evaluation process.

1.5. Media Coverage:

The media coverage was very good. The “official” shows organised in each province provided the opportunity for the performance to be recorded either for Tv or for the radio and fully broadcast on several regional RTA stations.

The drama was broadcast 5 times on TV (once in Parwan, Samangan, Herat, Kunduz and Takhar). The performance was reportedly recorded in Nangarhar but RTA confirmed they have not broadcast.

We made repeated attempts to get tapes from the TV channels in particular but it proves very difficult. Most stations do not keep archives, or the person who could help is out of town, etc We still hope to get a copy of the broadcast in Parwan and Kunar provinces.

Although the number of persons who could watch the drama on TV can hardly be precisely estimated, it certainly represents several tens of thousands of people. Plus financially-speaking, given the price/minute for broadcast on TV channels (prices range according to channels and time of broadcast from 70 to 200\$), several free broadcast of a 45 minutes drama is a very good operation.

The drama was aired 3 times on radio (radio Qarabagh, in Kabul province and Radio Imam Sahib in Kunduz).

In addition, the program was introduced and extracts of the play broadcast in the news on TV (Baghlan, Balkh, Paktya, Logar, Herat TV, Ghoryan TV) and radio (Mahmood Raqi, Kapisa, Bamiyan, Jawzjan, Maidan Shar, Laghman, Paktya, Logar).



Media Coverage

Date	Province	District	TV recording	Radio recording	Broadcast
Team 1					
03.12	Baghlan	Pul-e-Khumri	5 min for News by Baghlan TV		03.12 at 8.15 pm
19.12	Kapisa	Mahmood Raqi		10 min for News by Radio	
Team 2					
06.12	Bamyan	Centre		10 min for the News by Radio	06.12 at 6.30 pm
20.12	Parwan	Charikar	Full drama recording by Parwan TV		20.12 at 8.30 pm
25.12	Kabul	Qarabagh		Full drama recording by Radio	
Team 3					
06.12	Takhar	Taleqan	Full drama recording by Takhar TV		07.12 at 8.30 pm
14.12	Kunduz	Centre	Full drama recording by Kunduz TV		14.12 at 8.30 pm
18.12	Kunduz	Emam Sahib		Full drama recording by Radio	19.12 at 7.30 pm
25.12	Samangan	Aybak	Full drama recording by Samangan TV		26.12 at 8.30 pm
Team 4					
02.12	Faryab	Maimana			
09.12	Jawzjan	Sheberghan		10 min for Radio Sheberghan	09.12 at 8.00 pm
17.12	Sar-e-Pul	Centre	Recording was reported.		
19.12	Balkh	Mazar-e-Sharif	5 min for the BalkhNews TV		19.12 at 8.00 pm
Team 5					
05.12		Maidan Shar		5 min for Radio News	05.12 at 7.00 pm
09.12	Laghman	Mehterlam		5 min for Radio News	09.12 at 6.30 pm
18.12	Nangarhar	Jalalabad	Full drama recording by Jalalabad TV		
28.12	Kunar	Asadabad	Full drama recording by Kunar TV		?
Team 6					
13.12	Paktia	Gardeez	5 min for the News by Paktia TV	5 min for the News by Raido Paktia	13.12 at 8.00 pm
16.12	Paktia	Ahmad abah		5 min for the News by Raido Paktia	16 12 at 8.15 am
23.12	Logar	Pul-e-Alam	5 min for the TV News	10 min for the radio News	
Team 7					
02.12	Herat	Centre	5 min for the Heart TV News		02.12 at 8.12 pm
28.12	Herat	Ghoryan	For the Ghoryan local TV New		28.12 at 7.45 pm

1.6. Challenges

Not having a separate car severely restricted the coordinators' capacity to operate independently (ahead of the show for coordination, preparation and advertisement, or after the show, to follow-up if the drama was broadcast on radio and TV and obtain a tape of the airing).

The weather conditions were very difficult. Some teams were restricted in their coverage, especially team 2 in Bamiyan who could not cover other district then the central one, and in Wardak. Obviously, it is not the ideal season in Afghanistan for what is mostly an outdoor activity as people tend to want to go back to their homes as soon as they are free from whatever other activity they were doing outside.

However, it should be said that the teams have overall been up to the task they were given and some faced somehow harsh living and travelling conditions during the one month of campaign. Yet all the troupes are asking for more!

Some of the lessons learnt on our side include the fact that the time allocated for script writing and approval can never be too long so we need to take that into account when we plan the schedule of a mobile theatre campaign. Another lesson for us is that some expenses in a mobile theatre budget should be "protected" from the effects of budgetary negotiations (and a good example of such an expense is the separate coordinator's vehicle"). Also, the "official" shows, where provincial VIPs are invited, seems to be an excellent opportunities to attract the media and even get free broadcasts on TV and radio.

“The Voice of The People”

SCRIPT

Characters:

- 1- Hassan (a villager)
- 2- Sher Agha (a villager)
- 3- The head of the Provincial Council
- 4- The Deputy Governor
- 5- A Doctor
- 6- Village elder
- 7- Members of the Provincial Council

Author: Ahmad Shah Faqeer

Time: 40 – 45 minutes

Scene 1

Hassan, Sher Agha, and an observer

Hassan is playing a flute and singing. He is sitting on a rock in the middle of the stage.

Sher Agha enters the stage with a scale and he seems to be trying to level both sides. He is pacing back and forth until Hassan notices him and stares at him intrigued. He stops playing the flute and stands up.

Hassan: My brother, what are you weighing?

Sher Agha: Brother, I ask you, why are *you* playing flute?

Hassan: Well, you see me that I am playing the flute, but I don't know what you are doing?

Sher agha: I am weighing.

Hassan: What are you weighing?²

Sher Agha: I am weighing people's expectations against the government's current capacities. These small wood logs that you see are the people's expectations and these stones are the government's current capacity. I'm trying hard to reduce the imbalance between the two but I cannot. As you can

² While difficult to translate into English, this dialogue holds relevance in Dari and Pashtu.

see the people's expectations far outweigh the government's current capacities. That is why it is so difficult for the government to meet people's expectations. Thinking about people's problems makes me crazy. Now tell me, why are *you* playing flute?

Hassan: I am playing flute because of your sadness, my sadness and other people's sadness that our burdens are so large. Which is the reason why Hassan is my name.

Sher Agha: Be careful man! Hassan is MY name.³

Hassan: My name is Hassan and if you don't believe it, I can show you my Identity Card.

Sher Agha: Don't use the name of Hassan, otherwise you will regret it!

(A man bursts onto the stage)

The man: Which one of you is Hassan?

Sher Agha (*rushing to answer*): I am Hassan? What's happening?

The man: So you are Hassan?!

(The man slaps Sher Agha and leaves. Sher Agha rubs his face and stares at the man in amazement).

Hassan (*laughing*): Why did you let him slap you? You should have slapped him as well.

Sher Agha: In a way, I also fooled him.

Hassan: What do you mean?

Sher Agha: Because actually, I am not Hassan at all.

Hassan: Well, it's good that you finally recognized that you are not Hassan. So tell me why you call yourself Hassan?**Sher Agha:** Because everybody I know has some kind of problem and no one knows where to go and whom to refer to. Now I have a lot of questions and yet did not find anyone to answer them in a clear manner.

Hassan: Tell me. Your Hassan will answer your questions.

³ The following dialogue concerning the name and meaning of "Hassan" is a running joke in Dari and Pashtu. A true translation is difficult.

Sher Agha: See, we know that you live in Deh-Bala⁴ and that I live in Deh-Meyana⁵, and we also know that we are residents of Surkh-Dara district and that we belong to this province. But I do not know what the responsibility of the provincial governor's office is, what the responsibility of the district governor is, who is linked to whom, what the duties of the different governance bodies are. Questions assail me.

Hassan: You are really Hassan. Why do you need to know these things?

Sher Agha: Why wouldn't I need to know them? If I was, I would go and tell the residents of my village how to gain time and be more efficient in looking for the right people to talk to. I realize that many people who face problems do not know where to go, whom to talk to and to which department their problems are related. If the picture is not clear, people are lost and do not have the motivation to try and seek assistance or advice from the local governance bodies. They will just leave it to God.⁶

Hassan: I think I understand what you want to know, now listen to me carefully. Let's start from village level. The villages, in which we both live, like every village, have a Qarya-Dar⁷, which is in some cases called Malek³ and some call him Arbab³. Qarya-Dar is responsible for his village. It means he is responsible for addressing local problems and to foster the development of the village. It means that he should be aware of the conditions which the people of that village live in. The Qarya-Dar should refer the problems of the village to the district governor and ask for assistance. Now we have reached the level of the district.

Sher Agha: Go ahead!

Hassan: The district includes a certain number of villages and the district governor assists in finding a solution for the problems and with the development of those villages. He should be aware of the situation and living conditions of the people of his villages and refer the relevant problems to the provincial governor. There are some departments working in each district governor's office, and if I give you all the information about each department, it will be dark before I can finish. Now we get to the provincial governor's office.

Shir Agha – Ok, I am listening.

Hassan – Like the district which is made up of several villages, the province is made up of several districts and is headed by a provincial Governor. All the district governors are supposed to report to provincial governor about the situation and condition of their districts. Under the direction of the Governor, the provincial administration (including the departments and agencies representing the ministries from the central government) manage the affairs of the province. **(After a pause)**. Now, there is a new local governance body which I did not mention yet. If you can tell me which, I will give you a gift!

⁴ The upper village

⁵ The middle village

⁶ A local common expression is used here

⁷ Village leader

Shir Agha –I don't know.

Hassan – It is the provincial council that we elected last year. Do you remember?

Shir Agha –Yes! I remember. It was September last year. By the way, what are they all about!?

Hassan – They are new, so all the duties and roles are still being clarified, but I know that they are to advise the local government and that the council is also like a delegation of the people because its members come from all over the province and must carry the people's voice up to the government's ears, and the government's voice down to the people's ears.

Shir Agha – Ok I understand these things. Now tell me where do WE fit into all of this?!

Hassan – Is Laili a man or woman⁸?! YOU are in the centre of it! The Provincial Council is elected by us, isn't it? So our participation and our involvement is absolutely necessary to support local development and make this new structure of local governance work. If we just vote for the PC and then sit back and wait, then we cannot complain. Let's go and see from close up what more else is doing the provincial council.

Shir Agha – Now? You want my wife to throw me out from the house. Let's go tomorrow instead. Wait a minute, I have an idea. Why don't we take this opportunity to tell them about the issue of the broken bridge between our village and the bazaar.

Hassan – That is ok my brother. We shall go tomorrow.

(Hassan plays the flute and leaves the stage)

Scene 2

In the Office of the Provincial Council.

The head of the Provincial Council (HoPC), a doctor, an elder, Hassan and Shir Agha

They are carrying chairs and settle outside the office of the HoPC.

Head of PC: Let's sit in this free area and talk. Can you believe that we didn't have enough supplies such as even desks or chairs yet? Ah! The PC members have gone home for the day, otherwise they would have been so happy that they have desk and chairs now. Anyway, everything will be ok, we should not be out of patience, right?

⁸ From the story of Laili and Majnoun. This expression is used when, after providing a lengthy explanation to someone, one discovers he has not been understood.

Hassan and Shir Agha enter the stage, they settle on one side, away from the HoPC and his visitors and they observe their conversation.

HoPC: Welcome here. This is your Provincial Council and I am at your service.

The Elder : The Doctor and I, we are residents of the village of Shakar Khel and we came here to talk about two issues. But first we want to have information about the Provincial Council and its activities.

HoPC: You know that the Provincial Council is an advisory body, and its duty is to consult the people, to try and solve certain problems, to advise other local governance bodies and to channel people's voice to the related authorities, including the government, and use its influence to make sure that these authorities are doing something to resolve the problems. We are here to help them address provincial issues. For example, since the establishment of the PCs, we were faced with many family and tribal disputes, such as over land or child marriages. We held meetings and discussions with the parties and were able either to solve the disputes or to refer them to the relevant judicial authorities. We are also very concerned about security. Some PC members are undertaking some field visits, to assess the lack of security or freedom in certain areas and to see what or how the public can further assist the government in achieving greater security. Based on these visits or the meetings we have with people, we write reports and work with other governance bodies.

Elder: This means you are like a bridge Rais Sahi?

HoPC: Actually, yes, we are like a communication bridge between you and the government, we have good relations with provincial officials and other organizations, and we follow up the matters until some kind of solution is found. Now tell me why you came to your provincial council.

The elder: Sir, we came to discuss two issues. Our first problem is the clinic in our area. The building is falling apart since it was damaged during the war.

The doctor: The other thing is that there is only one doctor and the other staff is too few and insufficiently trained to provide appropriate services for the 5,000 residents of the area who depends on the clinic. Finally, we urgently need a midwife.

HoPc: I see, please continue.

The elder: We came here to discuss this with you and seek a solution. If the clinic can be repaired, we, the residents of the village, are ready to give a house for the clinic until the end of the construction.

The doctor (showing two letters): This is a letter from all members of the staff requesting an additional doctor and a midwife to be assigned to the clinic. This other letter is from the village leaders who write that all the residents are ready to help as much as they can.

HoPC: About the problem of the clinic and doctor, this is related to the provincial Health Department. We will meet with the head of the Health Dept., and request them to look into the matter. We will ask them to give us an answer as soon as possible. Inshallah, a solution will be found. Every time that you have a problem, you should understand to which authorities your problems are related.

The elder: How could we know that?

HoPC: For example, if you have problems with a school, it concerns the Education Dept. If you have problem with weapons, it concerns the DIAG offices. In addition to you going to those bodies yourselves, we are able to take your voice to the related authorities. When you expect something from the PC, we ask you to follow-up, bring us some updates, and generally stay in contact. This will make it more successful.

I am very happy that you came to the PC and told us these concerns. I will present your requests at the next meeting of the PC and after which I will check it with provincial government. We will follow up the matters and see how we can work with the relevant agencies to get the needed attention and funds. .

Hasan- (To himself) Way to go!⁹

Head of PC – And don't sit without doing anything. You should try to solve some small problems through the collaboration of the members of your community. You know that your government has serious economical difficulties. Therefore the funding that the different governance bodies (including the Provincial Council) receive from the Government is limited for the moment.

(To the elder): What you told me about the proposition of the villagers to provide a house for the temporary clinic is wonderful. I am thrilled by the generosity of the villagers in trying to make some efforts in order to find a solution. These efforts deserve our support.

The doctor and the elder stand up

The elder: Right. Off we go. We don't want to take more of your time Sir. I believe we understand what you explained to us. Maybe we will go to the Public Health Department and the Governor as well to emphasize the need.

HoPC: *Inch'Allah*, as you say, let's see what happens. We will also follow up.

The doctor: Good bye.

(The elder and the doctor leave. Hassan excitedly summons Shir Agha toward the HoPC)

Hassan: Hello Sir.

HoPC: What are you doing here?

Hassan: We also came to visit you and the Provincial Council and when we saw that you were busy, we stood here. We just came to see how it all works.

⁹ In the Dari version the Afghan proverb "Buzak Buzak namoor ke jaw Laghman mirasa" is used, referring to a long term promise being made, with little certainty about its actual future fulfillment.

HoPC: I see. Please, tell me if there is anything specific on your mind.

Shir Agha: There is actually....and it is a problem that concerns our village and the bazaar.

HoPC: I see.

Shir Agha: Sir, before we used to have a bridge which connected our village with the bazaar and we could buy and sell easily. Now we have to travel hours up the road to get to the bridge many miles from our village to cross over and then travel hours back down the other side. Buying a broom is a full day's event and we cannot sell our vegetables because by the time they get to the bazaar they are in an awful shape. I just want your advice. How can we find a solution to this problem? Who should we go and see?

Head of PC: Yes I know that the bridge between upper village and middle village is destroyed. I imagine that it must be a great cause of problems. But before I advise you, let me explain you something. First of all, you should go back and discuss the issue of the bridge with the people of your village and the bazaar and reach a consensus among everybody. Also make sure no other plan has been initiated regarding the bridge. I ask you to bring a letter on behalf of the community, and then we will take some action. I have taken note the bridge is necessary and I will wait for the letter.

Shir Agha: Thank you Sir. You are absolutely right. Let's go back Hassan.

Head of PC (To Hassan)- And you Mr. Hassan, you don't have any specific problem?

Hassan - (Ironic) Sir, my problem is that I talk too much and I am afraid no council has yet been created to solve this problem.

Head of PC – (Laughing) You joke too much! Khoda Hafiz. I intend to raise the issue tomorrow in the council's meeting after that I think I will talk to the Governor and the provincial development council. But don't forget to bring the letter.

Sher Agha: Ok sir, Khoda Hafiz.

Scene 3

In the Office of the Provincial Council

The Head of the Provincial Council, the Secretary, 3 PC members.

The members of the Provincial Council enter the stage and take their seats. The Head of the Provincial Council follows, holding a few documents. He sits down

The Head of PC: In the name of Allah! Dear brothers, I propose to start our meeting. Today, our agenda is as follows:

1. First, let us review the issues discussed at our last meeting; I would like the PC members in charge to give us an account on the initiatives taken and the outcomes recorded, if any.
2. Second, I would like to update you about the latest visits I received and the issues that were brought to my attention.
3. Third, we can briefly discuss about the forthcoming visit of the Meshrano Jirga's delegation to our province.

MPC 1 Sir, I went to the village of Gurgabad and discuss with the local residents and with the Kuchis over land use. Both sides claim that they have the rights to the land and both sides were unyielding, so I asked the elders of the Kuchies and the village to hold a Jirga so as to let everybody talk and listen to each other. At the end I had a separate meeting with the elders from each side and with the help and cooperation of the district office, the Agriculture department and the Chief of Police department a solution was found. The Department of Agriculture suggested certain portions of land that should be set aside for the Kuchies to use each year and in return the Kuchies would abstain from using undesignated land. In the end both sides needed to compromise to come to a solution and we stressed to them why it was important to reach these kinds of solution through dialogue and with appreciation of the importance of both communities. The result was that both sides feel a just solution has been reached and they support the decision. The report about this resolution is ready to be sent to the Governor's office.

HoPC: That is good news, thank you. Who is reporting on the issue of rising insecurity in Yahia village which was reported two weeks ago by the elders of the village?

MPC 2: I am.. I went with two representatives who were selected by the Governor and yourself and discussed this issue with the district governor. Later we had another meeting with the district chief of police and then with the elders of the village who had contacted us. We tried to assess the possible causes for the degradation of security. After the consultations, we concluded that many of the youth are jobless in this district and some of them have kept illegal weapons. They disturb the people, and some of them have become thieves. The Chief of police said that he didn't have enough men to cover all security posts in the district. He also mentioned that they are not mobilized with advanced equipments to react immediately in case of incidents. One of the people in the district had a good suggestion.

HoPC: - What did he say?

MPC 3:- He said "these robbers and destructive elements are our sons and they are all residents of the district. It is our duties through our families to find the solution by trying to get these youth back onto the right track. And it seems most of the local residents agreed with him. They decided that they were the best ones to come up with solutions to tackle the issue. We supported them and told them that we would cooperate in any way we could with them. This is the letter that all the elders of the village wrote and signed, in which they say that they intend to solve the problem by themselves. One copy was given to me and I am now handing it out to you (**he gives the letter to the HoPC**). However, if I may recommend, I do think we should talk to the provincial Governor and to the Police Department because the understaffing of the police posts remains a critical problem.

HofPC:- I appreciate the decision of the district's residents to try and tackle the insecurity issue but I also agree with you regarding insufficient police forces. (**To the secretary**) Please draft a document for the Provincial Governor and the Police Department to inform them about our field mission and about the situation and the decision of the local people. Mention that the Provincial Council feels it is necessary to put the issue of insufficient police forces in this district on the table. We will send this document along with the local residents' letter.

Now let us move to the second item on our agenda. I would first like to tell you about a visit I received three days ago. An elder and a doctor from the village of Shakar Khel came to report about the critical condition of the local clinic's building and the fact that a midwife was urgently needed. Is anybody from the area?

MPC 3:- Yes, I am and I know the extent of the problem. The clinic serves a very spread out community and the road is very long for some people. One doctor is not enough to take care of all the patients who come to the clinic. And they definitely need a midwife to be based there because I have seen villagers carry their pregnant women on donkeys to another clinic.

HoPC: - The head of one village said that the people of the village were ready to give a house for free to temporarily house the clinic. Now they need a good midwife. (**To MPC 3**). Please contact the Head of the Public Health Department to see if he has time for a meeting with us to discuss this. And also you should go to that village and check how suitable the location of the house is for the clinic. On Saturday we have a meeting with the provincial governor about a work plan and it is good if I can have the report ready by then. If the house is suitable, it should give us a strong argument to convince the Provincial Governor and Ministries' Departments to take action to repair the clinic.

MPC 3:- I will do just that Sir. And make sure that I have consulted the Public Health Department and visited the village before your meeting.

HoPC:- On the same day, I also approached by two residents from the village of Deh-Meyana. The bridge that connects their village and the bazaar has been destroyed for years and it is greatly affecting the locals' daily life. Is anybody familiar with this village?

Two members of PC: Yes we are from the area and are aware of this situation.

HoPC:- Do you know if any ministry is planning to do something?

MPC 1:- As far as we know, no. Nothing has been planned to fix this bridge. This village is far from the district centre and so far the bridge has not been prioritized.

HoPC- (To MPC 1) I requested the villagers to get a letter from their community. Once we get this letter, I suggest we have a meeting with the different provincial ministries, to assess the possibility to repair the bridge. And in two weeks, during my visit in Kabul, I will try to talk about this to the MRRD. Please coordinate the meeting with the departments (**To the Secretary**) Request for me an appointment at the MRRD.

HoPC:- (To the Secretary) Anything else?

Secretary:- Yes we received a letter from the municipality which is facing difficulties regarding the enlargement of the main road.

Head of PC:- Please, read it.

Secretary:- To the Head of the Provincial Council. As you know, the Municipality intends to enlarge the main street in the city because traffic is very bad and local businesses are complaining of the difficult access. However, we do have problems with some shopkeepers and residents, who are angry

because we will need, in a few cases, to destroy part of their shops and houses. We would like to discuss the matter with representatives of the Provincial Council and ask the PC to try and convince the people that the street's enlargement is for the good of the community as a whole. We are thankful for your assistance. Regards, The Head of the Municipality.

Head of PC: Right! Please make an appointment for me with the Head of Municipality Department as soon as possible. (*To MPC 1*) In the meantime, please go to the area and assess how many shops and houses would be affected by the road expansion. I suggest you include in your delegation Gul Mohammad and Shakila Ahmad who are from this part of the city and can use their influence with the residents.

I think that is all for today. Before we wrap up our meeting, did we get a confirmation about the visit of the Meshrano Jirga's visit to our province?

The Secretary: Yes, we did. The delegation will arrive in one month and stay for four days.

HoPC: Excellent. I want all of you to prepare your suggestions for the agenda of their visit. I have my own ideas and we shall discuss this at our next meeting and also inform our colleague in the Meshrano Jirga to see what he thinks.

Scene 4

In the village – One month later.

Villagers, Hassan, Shir Agha, the Head of the Provincial Council, the Deputy Governor

Men cross the stage, carrying tools and construction materials. Hassan enters and look at the men, intrigued.

Hassan – What happened? Where are you going? What are you doing? Why are you not talking? Did someone die? Are you busy digging a grave?

(Hassan talks to two of the men, but they seem busy and they do not reply. He stops when he sees the Head of the Provincial Council and the Deputy Provincial Governor coming his way)

Hassan – (*To himself*) Oh! Oh! The Deputy Governor with the Head of the PC! What are they doing in our village?

(Sher Agha approaches with the deputy Governor and the Head of PC)

Hassan: Greetings, Sir.

The DG: Walaikum.

Hassan: Rais Sahib, what is going on here? Where are these people going? Has somebody died or what?

Head of PC – (Amused) So you are not aware Hassan? You see, the work to fix the bridge linking your village and the bazaar have started. Thanks to the collaboration between the Provincial Council and the Governor.

Hassan – My God, I thought that you were joking. So you really managed to move things forward? I did not know, having been in the city for a few days.

Sher Agha – Sir, as promised, the village is providing 25 workers who have volunteered to participate in the reconstruction of the bridge. They are getting busy now with the tools and materials provided by the province. The District Governor, the elders of the village and representatives from the provincial administration have come to attend the event.

The DG– (To Hassan) When people offer their cooperation, it is easier to find a solution, at least for your basic problems. **(To the Head of PC)** Rais Sahib, your initiative and the work realized by the members of your council has been essential. If you had not heard the request of these residents and then brought it to our attention, this would probably not have happened. Your advocacy has been successful and the outcome is a concrete improvement for these people's life.

The HoPC – Thank you so much Mawen (Deputy) Sahib. Despite your busy schedule, you came here to witness the launching of this project, so important to our villages. We are happy and hope that the works will be completed soon.

In fact funds are limited to support our initiatives. I only wish there was more funding to spend on this village and on this district. But the reality is different. That's why it was so instrumental that the local residents voluntarily provide free labor for the construction of this bridge.

The DG – You know that the lack of funding is not just the problem of this province or district. This is in fact the problem in the whole country. The Governor said he was assessing whether he could earmark some funds on the rehabilitation of the bridge. These funds, even if limited, were enough to provide the raw materials and tools.

Head of PC – You see Mawen Sahib! The Provincial Council is also like a kind of bridge linking the government and the people. Today, the bridge is open and ready to be used so that the people and the government can be closer to one another.

The DG - It is very good. I know that the Provincial Council performs its duties and responsibilities very well. I do have to leave now because I am meeting a delegation from the Public Health Ministry to discuss the rehabilitation works in a clinic of that village, which was also advised by you.

HoPC – Please Sir.

The DG – Goodbye for now (towards Hassan) goodbye!

Hassan – Mawen Sahib, this is the first time you are coming in this village. You cannot leave without eating something.

The DG – I appreciate but I can't. I will come back and eat another day. What is your name?

Hassan – My name is Hassan but the people call me Saifo.

The DG – (*Joking*) You mean, Saifo the singer?

Hassan – Don't say this Mawen Sahib, he has died long ago. I am Hassan in fact.

HoPC – Are you that Hassan?

Hassan –No, no I was just joking, there a lot of Hassans, see we have made Rayis Sahib also a Hassan.

The DG – Goodbye!

The HoPC – God bless you.

(Deputy Governor leaves)

Head of PC – (*To Hassan*) I see that you are not helping in the reconstruction efforts.

Hassan – What can I do Rais Sahib? I can't help but to guide people. (***He pauses***). All right, if you say it I will help, as you have helped the people of these villages.

HoPC – Well said! Let me go and see the delegates and the workers.

Hassan – Sir, please go with Sher Agha, I will join shortly but I have first something to tell these people.

(*The HoPC and Sher Agha leave.*)

Hassan – (*To the audience*) You see, the Provincial Council was actually able to channel the voice of the people up to the ears of the governance bodies and authorities so that the different departments agree to work together for to improve people's living conditions. I am going because Rais Sahib is waiting for me.

Scene 5

In the village – Six months later.

An village elder, the head of the PC, Hassan, Shir Agha.

Sher Agha, carrying his scale, and Hassan enter.

Hassan – Look the bridge is almost finished. Sher Agha, I told you we would be the first people to cross over the bridge. (*Hassan seems ready to rush on to the bridge*).

Shir Agha: Wait you fool! Don't you know that the Governor is coming to open the bridge with the HoPC?

Hassan – (*Upbeat*) Talking about the head of the PC, he was right, the Provincial Council is really like a bridge for the people.

Shir Agha – Yes indeed, and like a physical bridge, it is important to keep it in good working order. The bridge should be opened to everybody: men and women, young people and white beards, of all ethnic origins.

Hassan – I wonder if this bridge is big enough for the whole population of the province....

Shir Agha – It is certainly not and if too many people try to stand on the bridge at the same time, it will collapse. That is why, as the HoPC told us, it is important that communities organize themselves and try to send representatives for different issues.

Hassan: Ok. Meanwhile, tell me about your scale. How is it doing?

Sher Agha – It looks a little bit more even now. I wonder why.... (**Shir Agha and Hassan look in front of them pensively**). Hassan, I think I understand. See, if I take a few small expectations off from this side of the scale, and instead I add a few small stones, representing people's support to the current capacities of the government, then the scale becomes more even. Do you follow me?

Hassan – Yes where are we going?

Shir Agha – I meant: do you understand me?

Hassan – Hmmm

Shir Agha – It is more even because we are "helping out". You see, the small stones I added on this side, they represent the community's participation, such as the work of the village's 25 volunteers for the rehabilitation of the bridge.

Hassan - And the matches you took off from this side?

The HoPC who has been listening from behind, approaches:

Sher Agha – These represent the little problems, the modest expectations from the people. In other words, the things that we can do by ourselves.

Hassan – Like?

Shir Agha – Well. Say, the ditches in your street are full of dirt, you should not wait and expect the government to come and clean the ditches. The people living on the street should join their efforts and clean the ditches together. Let the government take care of building roads, bridges, water canals.

HoPC – (*Emphatically*) Bravo! Excellent! (**Talking to the others, while pointing at Shir Agha**). See, I like this man's perception of things. It is true that if people fulfill their small expectations by themselves with the help of each other, government will for sure be able to respond to your big expectations.

Remember our conversation outside my office? I told you that you are the driving force for the development in your community. Without the cooperation of your community, we would have not been able to open this bridge today. And as for this other bridge we are talking so much about, remember it is the people's duty to use it. I also have to ask you something very important. You have to spread the word and inform as many people around you about the bridge, and about their duty to use it in order to be part of the governance process in the province and to influence the government.

Hassan – Well, as for me, no problem. I will spread the word, you can count on me. You know, I can't help but to guide the people. Now Rais, Sahib, you should go, because I see the Governor and the other authorities arriving and the people are waiting for you.

(To the public) - What can I do? I am Hassan, and, you saw, I managed to move people and the outcome is the reconstruction of this bridge. Now I am going because I promised that I will be the first person to cross this bridge so I want to give it a go now. See you on the other side!

Sher Agha goes running after him with the scale.....