

New Home, New Life

**Final project report for ARD/Afghanistan (ALGAP)
Contract no. S004**

15 March 2007 – 14 June 2007

Title: **New Home, New Life**

Implementing Agency: **BBC World Service Trust Afghan Education
Projects (BBC AEP)**

Institutional Background – BBC World Service Trust Afghan Education Projects

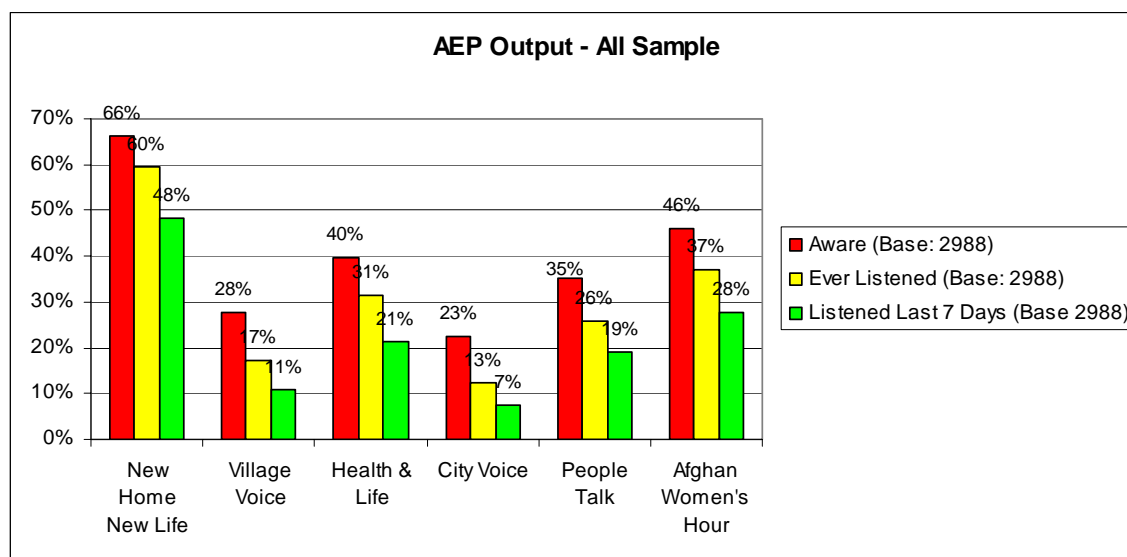
The BBC has long-standing broadcasting to Afghanistan in Dari and Pashto and has built up a reputation with the people of Afghanistan as an accurate reporter of news. The BBC was the only external broadcaster to maintain a correspondent in Kabul throughout the Afghan civil war and the Taliban regime, and reaches Afghan listeners around the world. There continues to be much prominent endorsement of the role of the BBC World Service in general, and of the BBC AEP in particular, in providing information and education to the people of Afghanistan.

The BBC AEP is now the largest single media-for-development project for Afghans run by Afghans and produces three episodes of the soap opera *New Home, New Life* in Dari and Pashto every week, which is broadcast on the BBC World Service. Recent surveys indicate that 13 years since its start, *New Home, New Life* is still the most popular cultural programme on radio in Afghanistan and it has proved to be an ideal medium for putting across educational messages on themes such as the importance of education, human rights, child development and health. Major subjects covered in *New Home, New Life* have included mine/UXO awareness, repatriation, poppy cultivation, nutrition and malnutrition, drinking water, livestock management, basic hygiene, health and agricultural issues. Weekly radio educational feature programmes provide back up information on the health and livelihood issues arising from the drama. These feature programmes include *City Voice*, *Village Voice* and *Health and Life*. Since 2005, the Radio Educational Features team has also produced the *People Talk* series, to help people understand the complex political concepts which Afghanistan is currently facing during reconstruction and nation-building and hence facilitate people's participation. Another way of putting the messages across is a *cartoon magazine*, based on *New Home, New Life*, which was started in 1994. Storylines from the soap opera are illustrated and summarised into simple captions in Pashto and Dari. This helps to provide entertaining reading material for teaching basic literacy skills to both adults and children. Programmes are also made for children (REACH – Radio Education for Afghan Children), including the *Our World Our Future* series, broadcast since 2001 addressing out of school children's learning needs. A publications unit produces picture books for children and adults to assist with basic literacy.

BBC AEP staff currently consists of some 300 Afghan producers, reporters, writers, actors and technical staff, and its main strength is its closeness to its audience. Through sophisticated techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) it has been able to build up a picture of the commonly experienced problems of daily life and how ordinary people respond to them. Needs analysis also reveals the kinds of misinformation that can be countered by educational messages with the help of technical experts. Focus group discussions are conducted inside Afghanistan in three-monthly cycles to assess audience need. The BBC AEP team also draws from the experience of the BBC World Service Trust team in London and Kabul in producing *Afghan Woman's Hour*, which has provided insights into exactly which messages work with female target groups in Afghanistan's complex gender context.

Impact of BBC Programming in Afghanistan

New external audience data available in January 2007 revealed the following listening figures for BBC AEP Programming (and the BBC WST Afghan Woman's Hour):



Co-operation between ARD and BBC AEP

The overall project objective is **to raise awareness of the role of Provincial Councils and encourage more active citizen engagement in local government structures across Afghanistan**

The themes to be addressed throughout BBC AEP programming in this project are:

- Provincial Councils – their role and responsibilities in representation, communication, improving service provision to the public, including in key areas such as health and education, and ensuring human rights
- How Provincial Councils function
- Where Provincial Councils are based and how they can be contacted
- How the public can get involved in the work of the Provincial Councils – e.g. through voting, through attending meetings, through seeking information and through joining advocacy groups
- Why the public should get involved in the work of the Provincial Councils
- The importance of good local governance for: a) poverty reduction; b) conflict management and resolution; and c) government accountability and transparency

This specific project focuses on:

- Production and broadcast in Pashto and Dari of *New Home, New Life*, including 34 episodes (17 Dari and 17 Pashto) on issues of local governance
- Production and broadcast in Pashto and Dari of 24 BBC AEP educational programmes (12 in each language).
- Design and printing of the *New Home, New Life* monthly cartoon magazine.
- Organisation of focus group discussions within Afghanistan on local governance issues.

Project Activities

The following section provides an update on the main strategies pursued to deliver the project objectives.

Production and broadcast of *New Home, New Life*:

Production and broadcast of *New Home, New Life* involves the following stages:

- Needs assessment on the topics to be covered
- Development of messages, based on needs assessment
- Script development, based on messages derived from needs assessment
- Consultation with key partners, on the proposed storylines
- Synopsis writing of episodes
- Script writing of episodes
- Recording of programmes in the BBC AEP studio in Kabul
- Transmission from BBC Persian and Pashto Service, London

Storylines dealing with ARD-related and other themes of *New Home, New Life* are contained in the script development notes, which have been sent to ARD. The episodes of *New Home, New Life* of relevance for this project have been:

- Episodes 2041 - 2043, broadcast on 14 - 16 April 2007 – setting up the storyline of the role of the Provincial Council in addressing people’s problems
- Episode 2046, broadcast on 23 April 2007 – with the villagers deciding to approach their Provincial Council representative for her help in addressing their problem (school infrastructure)
- Episode 2048, broadcast on 29 April 2007 – featuring the meeting with the Provincial Council representative.
- Episodes 2050 – 2055, broadcast on 5 – 14 May 2007 – outlining how the Provincial Council resolved the issue, by asking the Education Ministry to build new classrooms for the school. Through these programmes, the role of Provincial Council representatives is explored and how the Council informs government of people’s needs and also informs people of the government’s policies and requirements.
- Episodes 2060 – 2069, broadcast on 27 May – 17 June 2007 – continued storyline, showing how the materials to build the classrooms arrive to the schools and how the village works together and volunteers their time to complete the project. In episode 2064, there is also the decision to later approach the Provincial Council about the lack of roads leading up the village where the school is located.
- Episodes 2070 and 2071, to be broadcast on 18 and 23 June 2007 specifically link the provision of the classrooms back to the efforts of the Provincial Council and highlight the importance of electing Provincial Council representatives who are active and responsible and will help local people to solve their problems.
- Episodes 2075 and 2076, to be broadcast on 1 and 2 July 2007, concluding the storyline and highlighting other areas where Provincial Councils can help, such as on provision of roads, electricity and health clinics.

The total number of episodes of relevance to the theme of Provincial Council is 48, 24 in Dari and 24 in Pashto. Throughout the storyline about the provision of school classrooms, BBC AEP has aimed to ensure listeners understand the role and responsibilities of Provincial Councils, how it differs from government and the benefits of good local governance.

Cartoon magazine

Printing is underway for one edition of the cartoon magazine. 4,000 copies are being published exclusively for ARD, 2,000 in Dari and 2,000 in Pashto. A further two copies are currently in the final stages of development. As discussed with ARD, the cartoon magazine is always slightly behind the drama in production. The steps towards this result were:

- extracting storylines from the drama
- summarising the scenes for illustration
- drawing illustrations
- scripting (writing captions) for the illustrations

- reviewing and finalising the text and illustrations
- printing.

Radio Educational Feature Programmes

Production and broadcast of feature programmes for children and adults involves the following stages:

- Planning of programmes including learning objectives
- Field work in Afghanistan to collect and record interviews and other illustrative material
- Scripting of programmes
- Recording of programmes in BBC AEP studio in Kabul
- Broadcast by the BBC Pashto and Persian Service from London.

The following radio educational feature programmes of direct relevance to ARD themes were produced and broadcast during this project period:

- *People Talk*, 20 April – the structure and role of Provincial Councils
- *People Talk*, 27 April – the duties and authorities of Provincial Councils
- *Village Voice*, 27 April - the role and importance of Provincial Councils in the rural areas
- *City Voice*, 28 April – the role and importance of Provincial Councils in the cities
- *City Voice*, 2 May – the role of Provincial Councils in fighting corruption in government offices
- *Village Voice*, 8 May - the role of Provincial Councils in prevention of narcotics
- *City Voice*, 9 May - the role of Provincial Councils in environmental issues
- *Village Voice*, 15 May - the role of Provincial Councils in conflict resolution
- *Village Voice*, 22 May - the role of Provincial Councils in preserving heritage and historical monuments
- *People Talk*, 1 June - the role of Provincial Councils in local budgeting and finance at the provincial level
- *People Talk*, 8 June – how Provincial Councils function
- *People Talk*, 15 June - the role of Provincial Councils in developing provincial development plans

As such, the project has fulfilled its objective of producing and broadcasting 12 programmes in Pashto and 12 in Dari on the issue of Provincial Councils.

Monitoring

BBC AEP needs assessment, based on focus group discussions, provides the raw material from which the storylines of *New Home*, *New Life* are formulated. Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques are used to collect qualitative information. *New Home*, *New Life* needs assessment is conducted in quarterly cycles, to fit in with quarterly script development cycles of *New Home*, *New Life*. The points brought up in the needs assessment appraisal are then discussed in the related consultative committee meeting.

A needs assessment was conducted from 13 – 23 March 2007 in Balkh, Kunduz, Parwan and Maidan Wardak Provinces. A total of 13 focus groups were held and discussed the following topics:

- National Solidarity Programme – which received very good feedback
- Road-building – positive feedback was received on reconstruction efforts, people reported improved access to homes and facilities such as clinics and that transporting land produce has become easier. They added that the government or NGOs should help villagers repair damaged/broken roads.
- Farming cooperatives – in most villages, people did not know what a cooperative was, or its potential benefits. However, some did report forming cooperatives and outlined a number of benefits in terms of getting improved seeds, access to tractors at reduced prices, access to veterinary services and access to loans.
- Costs of weddings and funerals – the groups discussed the high costs of such family events and the resulting problems, particularly around dowry.

- Job opportunities and creating small businesses – groups shared experiences in income generating activities.

Furthermore, as part of this needs assessment and specifically for this project, a list of survey questions was developed and asked to assess knowledge levels at project start around the issue of Provincial Councils and thus inform development of programming for this project. The following questions were asked:

1- What is done in your area by the government?

- Do you have any examples of approaching the government with your problems? What was their response?
- Is there a system of inclusion in decision-making in your area?
- Is there any work done through cooperation between the public and government?

2- How do you address your problems to the government?

- Do villagers gather together and go to the government?
- Do you select representatives among yourselves, who then represent your concerns to the government?
- Can it be done through Provincial Council representatives?

3- What do you know about the Provincial Council?

- Where do the Provincial Council representatives come from?
- Are they government civil servants?
- Are they elected by the people?

4- Do you know your own district Provincial Council representatives?

- Do you go to them with your problems or do they contact you?

5- What are Provincial Councils? What do you know about the work and responsibility of Provincial Council representatives/members?

- Is it an independent office?
- Is it more like an adviser among other governance bodies in the province?
- What roles does the Provincial Council have in society?
- Where is the location of the Provincial Council office in your province?
- If you were a Provincial Council representative, what would you do?

6- What is Provincial Governance?

- What is the benefit of good governance?
- How does the system of Provincial Governance work?
- Is there any difference between provincial government and provincial councils?

These survey questions revealed a considerable lack of knowledge about the role of the Provincial Councils. The public expressed concern that the candidates had visited them prior to the elections to make promises about services they would provide if elected, but they have had little if any contact since the elections. Most did not know which office to go to find their representative and some did not even know who their representative on the Provincial Council was. Many participants said they solve their minor issues with their elders, and major issues are referred to the government, or the related government organization, police, or court. They said they had never referred anything to the Provincial Council office. The Council is a relatively new structure in Afghanistan and thus people are lacking information and knowledge about its role. As part of the focus groups, the BBC AEP team also consulted with three Provincial Council representatives.

Full details of these focus group discussions have been supplied to ARD.

In broader terms, other regular field visits have collected specific information on economic, social and environmental challenges being faced across Afghanistan. Producers and writers of the different programming strands conduct field trips every week and this dialogue with the listeners and the Afghan public is vital to ensure that programming remains locally relevant and responds to priority needs.

Consultation with ARD

ARD has an open invitation to attend BBC AEP consultative committee meetings, which are held to discuss upcoming episodes of *New Home, New Life*. A consultative committee meeting was held on 18 April, and discussed:

- Provincial Councils – participants felt that it was essential that all members of the Afghan public know: a) what the Council is and what its roles are; b) the benefits of good governance; c) the difference between government and Provincial Council; d) with whom problems can be discussed.
- Promoting the role of the community in road reconstruction and ensuring that roads are maintained.
- The importance of government support for farming cooperatives.
- Request for programming on the high costs of weddings and funerals, to address existing prejudices.
- Request for programming giving advice on money management, loan and micro-finance procedures, business opportunities which need less upfront investment, and encouraging sharing of work and finances.

Full minutes of the meeting were sent to ARD.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The major issue which continues to impact on implementation of activities and field research is the security situation. However, the project strategy remains as outlined in the project proposal.

In terms of lessons learned, the BBC World Service Trust and BBC AEP conducted a detailed staff planning and evaluation workshop in Kabul in February 2007 to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges and start the design of an agreed internal country strategy for Afghanistan. Discussions in Kabul and London are ongoing to finalise this strategy, which will include an analysis of activities conducted to date and recommendations for the future.

Conclusion

We are extremely pleased with the progress that has been made in this three month period in raising issues of local governance and the role of the Provincial Councils in Afghanistan. Cooperation and consultation between BBC AEP and ARD has helped to provide well-focused storylines addressing priority themes across all areas of BBC AEP programming. We hope to have the opportunity to work with ARD again in the future.