Afghan Information Ecosystems
A Design Research Approach
ABOUT SAYARA RESEARCH

Sayara Research is committed to enhancing the quality of information that shapes development work throughout the Middle East and Afghanistan. We provide our clients with the research and evaluation services to inform more effective and relevant decision-making based on rigorous social science. We specialize in complex survey implementation, participatory monitoring and evaluation, and integrated, mixed-methods approaches to exploratory research. Because social inclusion and capacity building are central to our mission, Sayara also provides outreach services and specialized skills trainings to local stakeholders. Sayara Research has offices in Beirut, Lebanon, and Washington, DC, and is headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan.

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GLOSSARY

MALIK: local leader who represents the community to government agencies and vice versa

SHURA: known in Pashtun areas as jirgas, village council that decides on local and family disputes and builds community consensus about needed collective action

MULLAH: religious leader who, in addition to providing religious instruction, interprets Islamic rules that guide behavior and dispute resolution

MADRASSA: an Islamic religious school

MASJID: an Arabic (and Dari) word for mosque
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Image: Traditional influencers discuss access to information in Rodat district, Nangarhar
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The dynamics of information ecologies play a critical role in shaping civil society, governance, and individual well-being. Throughout decades of conflict and repeated upheaval, Afghanistan’s information ecosystems have undergone constant evolution and disruption. Conflict, unpredictability and persisting illiteracy mean that access to reliable information is inconsistent. Reliable information reaches the Afghan population unevenly, navigating through complex dynamics of social norms, hierarchies, and infrastructural deficiencies.

As most media and news outlets were banned during the Taliban years, and then severely disrupted during the subsequent decades of civil conflict, Afghanistan’s information ecosystem remains understudied and poorly understood. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, news outlets – private TV in particular – have grown exponentially throughout the country. Today, the Afghan media and information landscape is saturated with 400 print outlets,1 more than 250 radio stations, and over 100 TV stations, both state and privately owned.2 Similarly, Internet use, and social media in particular, is quickly emerging as an alternative media and information outlet for Afghans, especially the youth. While Afghanistan has made great strides in establishing media and communication outlets, little is known about the ways in which Afghans actually engage in information exchange. Thus, there exists an overwhelming need to explore Afghanistan’s information ecosystem, and to identify how Afghans currently seek, access, consume, share, create, and evaluate information.

The Internews Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP) speaks directly to this need. The USAID-funded ACEP program is implemented in partnership between Internews, Counterpart International, The Aga Khan Foundation, and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). The program seeks to promote civil society and media engagement to enable Afghan citizens to influence policy, monitor government accountability, and serve as advocates for political reform. Internews, a key implementing partner for the ACEP program, is an international nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard. To achieve these goals, Internews works with local partners to implement activities designed to improve access to independent news and public affairs information.

Founded in 2011, Internews Center for Innovation & Learning strives to balance local expertise and global learning in support of the vision that healthy information ecosystems are a root solution to furthering human progress. Seeking to better understand the media environment in Afghanistan and recognizing the potential of design research to reveal the causes, relationships, and human dimensions of complex contexts—and to translate this knowledge into innovative, context-appropriate programmatic designs looking to the future, Internews commissioned Sayara Research to map and characterize the information ecosystems in Rodat district of Nangarhar, the Macroyan neighborhood of Kabul and the Jade Kaj neighborhood of Herat using a human-centered, design research approach. The aim of the project was to provide useful insights that could be used to inform Internews’ ACEP program. The project sought to provide a careful qualitative examination of information flows and the practices of media consumption as preparation for discovering and creating solutions. The resulting analysis, which synthesizes pre-existing quantitative survey data, yields richly textured case studies of three locations that

address the key issues within each region, cross-cutting themes, and divergences. Individuals, especially those active on social media, have been given close ethnographic attention to present a granular sense of new information technologies, changing needs and the daily practices of people in the context of their lived experiences.

**Key Findings**

» Traditional Influencers

News and information is filtered through established social patterns and institutions, including longstanding practices of oral information sharing and complex dynamics of trust and information verification. Ethnographic studies show that individuals from respected families who hold positions of power at the local level—mullahs, Maliks, and elders—are important sources of information and highly influential in the formation of opinions within tribes and villages. This was particularly evident in the rural district of Rodat, Nangarhar, where traditional influencers continue to shape information consumption, especially as ordinary citizens grapple with the process of verifying information heard from multiple sources, many of which are not fully trusted.

In urban Macroyan and Jade Kaj, widespread access to new communication technologies means that the flow of information has substantially decentralized. Current nodes of information exchange range from television, radio, billboards, elders, and educated individuals to social media, the Internet at large, as well as internet-enabled communication apps, such as Skype, Viber, Tango, and WhatsApp. However, traditional leaders in both Macroyan and Jade Kaj continue to play important roles in disseminating religious information, as well as information about local development projects (in Jade Kaj) or employment opportunities.

» Information Triangulation and Flow

The process of socialization adds value to information. Public spaces are thus particularly important nodes in local information ecosystems because they provide venues for debate and collective information consumption. Some of the most important places identified through this research include bazaars, taxis, buses, mosques, and barbershops. Importantly, many of the most important places for valuable exchange are characterized by mobility (e.g. bazaars, buses, and taxis), and therefore facilitate information exchange across different regions. Places of public information exchange are limited and different for women (discussed below.)

Information consumers in Rodat, Macroyan, and Jade Kaj are highly attuned to the history and politics of media and technology. Questions of origin, history, and funding play important roles in shaping the contours of trust in radio and TV and play out in the way that people triangulate information. Similarly, while social media adds a potentially important, live, and participatory component to information access, people tend not to take media statements as fact until they have discussed those statements with trusted family, friends and respected community elders.

» Evolution of Trust and Influence

The increase in educational opportunities for youth in both rural and urban areas may be changing the dynamics of traditional information patterns. Secondary schooling was interrupted during the Taliban’s reign for a large portion of the population. These individuals, now in their 30s, have teenage children who are growing up literate and in a world with far greater access to information via mobile phones and the Internet. A number of our respondents reported highly trusting the news they heard from their literate children, who receive it via Facebook and other social media
sites. Youth’s exposure to new technology and formal education brings them closer to the center of information ecosystems, as they play an important role in bringing new technologies to their families and communities.

» Lack of Local News Coverage
Security concerns, lack of infrastructure, and turnover in local staff limits the capacity for media outlets to make it out to certain villages, such as Rodat. The practical outcome of this situation is that, in Rodat, local events receive less coverage than national or international events. Traditional structures of information circulation provide the main channel for local information to flow between NGOs, local government offices, and maliks to general consumers. In contrast, Jade Kaj and Macroyan, in particular, are hubs for media and information production. Events that take place in these neighborhoods are more likely to be covered both by local or national news outlets and on social media by the growing number of residents with access to it. However, greater local news coverage does not necessarily mean that residents of these neighborhoods perceive that their needs or opinions are heard. In Macroyan, where media exposure is arguably the greatest and most consistent, residents were more likely to report a lack of government responsiveness and accountability.

» Social Media Constraints and Adaptations
Despite increasing access and popularity, social media has not become a robust tool for inclusive information dissemination, even in urban Macroyan and Jade Kaj. Access is fragmented geographically and economically and patterns of use demonstrate local adaptations to both cultural and educational constraints. For example, while illiteracy is indeed a barrier to robust internet and social media use, illiterate people nonetheless engage with social media, though in a specialized way, largely limited to posting and viewing photos or videos. Additionally, Facebook users frequently use quotes in the place of original content to express opinion or sentiment within the online community. This practice might be understood as a way of preserving neutrality or maintaining distance between personal ownership social media content.

» Social Media and Online Security
Online security, particularly for women, appears to severely limit free and open online communication, and thus the capacity for social media to become a robust platform for social engagement. Greater online security is needed in order to facilitate trustworthy and productive communication. One of the issues with providing that security is that administrators of social media platforms, namely Facebook, have a poor understanding of both the cultural norms and the risks involved for women engaging in online activity in conservative places.

Note: this research finds that when participants talk about social media in the Afghan context, they are almost always talking about Facebook. While some participants also used apps such as Twitter or Imo, we found that a lot of people equate “social media” with “Facebook,” and that a lot of people actually discuss “Facebook” and the “Internet” interchangeably.

» Gender
When asked how women access information, both men and women frequently report that women rely mainly on men, despite their widespread access to radios or TVs. Likewise, they site the lack of access to public spaces as women’s main barriers to information flows. While women might not have direct access to information as it circulates throughout the public sphere, they have
adapted in numerous ways, including observing and listening to the way men discuss information in their presence, even if men are not addressing them directly. Women also take advantage of the public places that are open to them, including workplaces, schools, ceremonies, and beauty parlors in order to consume and exchange information. This study found that spaces that are exclusively female (for example, beauty parlors) are particularly important because they provide venues for women to discuss issues or complaints they have about their husbands and family life.

» Migration
As one of the most pressing issues for Afghans today, this study sought to understand how people get information about migration opportunities and risks. Youth get information about migration from all types of news sources, including international coverage. However, the most salient migration information has to do with the experiences of their friends, families, or community members. For this, they rely on word of mouth and internet apps, including Skype, Viber, and WhatsApp. Growth of access to these new information technologies is shaping how Afghan youth make decisions and represents an important area for future research and programmatic exploration.

» Persistence of Radio
While the biggest story in Afghanistan’s new media landscape is the rise in popularity and availability of television, findings from this study highlight the enduring importance of radio as a source of trusted information. Outside of cities, radio is still the top source of news and information, particularly in areas with limited or inconsistent electricity. It is also in important medium for ensuring that access to information is inclusive of diverse socioeconomic groups and geographic locations. Radio’s persistence is thus an important and overlooked feature of Afghanistan’s contemporary information ecosystems.

Opportunities

Social Media and Online Security: Practitioners and policy makers should view online security as central to the success and inclusivity of the Internet, and of social media in particular. At a policy level, and at a global scale, internet administrators need to be trained to recognize harassment and fraud in contexts similar to Afghanistan’s. This means a greater level of sensitivity toward conservative values, as well as a more nuanced understanding of how different segments of the population (especially men and women) use social media.

Inclusion and Social Media: As internet access continues to expand, future research should explore the dynamics of adaptive, non-verbal social media use to promote the inclusion of illiterate individuals in the online community. Both the visual and social aspects of media use among illiterate people need to be better understood in order to develop relevant and innovative methods for online engagement and to ensure that online security measures are accessible to all users.\(^3\) Additionally, apps that enable communication through pictures or tactile patterns, such as swiping or clicking, could be developed to increase online inclusivity and could be tailored to specific information needs, such as health or vocational skills.

Gender: Practitioners and policy makers should bolster support for spaces of public information exchange, particularly for women. Some of these spaces already exist (e.g. classrooms or mosques

where women are allowed); others examples might include internet cafes only for women, or that offer specific times when only women are allowed. Such places would provide a safe space for women and to socialize more generally—skills and experiences that are central to the process of informed information consumption. Given the value that socialization adds to pieces of information, spaces that are exclusively female, such as beauty parlors, offer potentially important venues for communicating sensitive information. While the value of places such as beauty parlors as “safe havens” for women is widely acknowledged, their use as designated spaces for political, social, or personal debate merits further research in the context of Afghanistan’s information ecosystems.

Information, Objectivity, and the Diaspora: There is room for capacity building among journalists and other media professionals when it comes to covering migration and Afghan refugees. Programmers might take a focused look at the different ways Afghan media outlets are discussing migration to identify current models of innovative, balanced, and inclusive coverage, while also using migration as a platform for further training in objective reporting.

Media Independence: While some analysts fear that the proliferation of television channels could fuel the polarization of Afghan society in the future, the plethora of outlets might also contribute to greater freedom and political independence. Media and information professionals should embrace the opportunity to bolster media independence and public debate while closely assessing the need for an increasing number of media outlets to understand and follow accepted standards for journalistic objectivity.

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METHODOLOGY

Image: Interview with general information consumer, Rodat district, Nangarhar
The Design Research Approach

Successful development intervention requires that practitioners are able to “step into someone else’s shoes”—to understand the constraints and obstacles that target populations face in truly benefiting from an intervention. Practitioners also need to understand where there are new opportunities for positive action within an ever-changing social and political landscape. If information intervention is really for and about the end-user, the process of designing such programs must necessarily be user-centric. As Andres et al. (2015) note, international agencies have made stunning progress in addressing technical problems around the world, for example, immunizing children or expanding schools. However, where expanding known technology is insufficient for solving problems, the global community has fallen short.  

Too often, development interventions are designed to “look a certain way”—rather than do a certain thing—and are thus limited by the methods, expectations and assumptions of the past. Those programs struggle to innovate, and they cannot fully meet end-user needs because they cannot comprehensively identify them. To really step into someone else’s shoes requires empathy, insight, and an unprejudiced approach. Likewise, designing programs with a clear purpose, for a specific context, and with the end-user in mind, means going beyond the mechanical application of proven methods and learning to listen without the filters of expectation. This is where design research comes in.

Design research is an approach that combines ethnographic and systems-thinking approaches to reveal the causes, relationships and human dimensions of complex contexts. As empathy is a key principle of design research, ethnographic participant interaction and field immersion are central components, which yield rich narratives of human needs and user experience. Photographs, observations, hundreds of interviews and traditional desk work then combine in an iterative process of data analysis and synthesis. Data points are continuously evaluated, characterized, prioritized and refined to inform fieldwork practices and insights for later design. Mapping relationships between stakeholders, users, and sources of information gives dimensionality to findings, which are then distilled into insights and translated into actionable formats and opportunities.

Here, we synthesize the design research approach with several, pre-existing quantitative studies, such as the widely used Survey of the Afghan People, along with other media-focused assessments, to add context, empathy, and depth to their findings. By doing so, this research emphasizes the value of flexibility and inclusion. It enables practitioners to more thoughtfully walk in the shoes of others and thus to design more effective and impactful activities, tools, and interventions. Of course, as this approach sought to identify the nuances of information consumption and circulation through highly contextualized case studies, the findings presented are certainly not universal and will have varying levels of relevance for other communities.

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Information Ecosystems

This study uses the information ecosystem framework to understand the complexities and nuances of information flow and consumption in its three study sites. An information ecosystem is a dynamic configuration of multiple processes and actors that each affect the flow, production, consumption, sharing and sourcing of information in a given space or community. An ecosystem is a dynamic set of activities; not a static object. Thus, the approach sees information of value as always being in motion. Information is also a relationship of exchange between people, and the acts of receiving and generating information require creativity and imagination. This is true whether information is heard by radio or through word of mouth, whether it is read in print or on a smartphone screen, whether it is witnessed in person or seen on a television. Because information is inherently social and has meaning only in social context, an information ecosystems approach allows us to better conceptualize how information flows adapt and regenerate according to the specific context of a given situation and community.

Information Ecosystems: A Working Definition

Information ecosystems are complex adaptive systems that include information infrastructure, tools, media, producers, consumers, curators, and sharers. They are complex organizations of dynamic social relationships through which information moves and transforms in flows. Through information ecosystems, information appears as a master resource, like energy, the lack of which makes everything more difficult.

Any examination of an information ecosystem goes beyond traditional audience research on media access and consumption; it adds considerations of information needs, information creation, and information distribution as dynamic systems that adapt and regenerate according to the broader developmental challenges and needs of a given community. Information must move or it has no reason to exist. Because it flows, it transforms as context and actors shift. Information is a defining aspect of human relationships; thus an analysis of trust and influence are critical to the study of information ecosystems. The framework is meant to be practical, and thus an examination of the use and impact of information is also essential. The diagram below represents the key elements of an information ecosystem as used to define this research and analysis.

11 Ibid.
Borrowing an analogy from the study of ecology, the interconnected parts of an information ecosystem—the consumers, influencers, processes of sharing, human relationships, flows, etc.—affect a community’s ability to adapt to changes to the wider external environment. This means that the information ecosystem is an essential component of a community’s resilience to external threats, shocks and changes.

Speaking concretely about the case of Afghanistan, the information ecosystem consists of the producers and consumers of various types of media (TV, radio, internet, etc.), as well as the social and community structures through which received information is filtered, interpreted, influenced, trusted and shared. The information ecosystem in Afghanistan is vital to how Afghans make decisions about everything from personal security to health, migration opportunities, livelihoods, etc. Using a systems approach to analyzing information within and across communities is a powerful way to uncover deficiencies and to identify new policies and practices for improving existing measures.

The Research Process

This study was completed over the course of 20 weeks. An intensive five-day training introduced the field team to key concepts of information ecosystems and ethnographic research methods. Because design research is a relatively new approach, and because ethnographic methods are underutilized in development research, training was essential to project success. The training included a general introduction to the work of Internews, the concept of an information ecosystem, and in-depth instruction on the research methods detailed below, including interview skills, observation, and photography. As a capstone to the training, the research team piloted each of these methods in Kabul city.
Sayara’s research was based on five key research themes and related sets of research questions, developed in collaboration with Internews:

1. **Information Flows:** From what sources does a person get his or her information? Once they get a piece of information, how do they choose whom to share it with?

2. **Trust:** How do people determine whether a particular piece of news or information is – or the source of that information – is reliable or trustworthy?

3. **Influence:** How do people determine whether a particular piece of news or information – or a source of information – is reliable or trustworthy? What is the influence and reach of different types of information sources?

4. **Displacement:** How does the experience of migration and displacement – both conflict-related and work-related – impact how populations access, evaluate, and share information?

5. **New Media & Technology:** How do people use technology to access, share, create, and evaluate information? How might technology change these habits in the next two to five years?

» **Survey & Interviews**

Sayara conducted a total of 61 interviews with key informants (KIs) during its initial round of fieldwork. Most interviews sought out the experiences and perspectives of general information consumers and key local influencers as they related to key research themes. Local influencer groups were comprised of elders, religious leaders, teachers, and government officials. For important contextual information, the research team also interviewed a total of 14 policy, culture and media experts in Kabul.

Key informant interview (KII) guides were developed collaboratively with input from both Internews and Sayara’s local research teams. Guides were semi-structured and aimed to allow both the interviewer and interviewee substantial flexibility to discover new topics and themes while also revealing information directly related to key research themes. Initial KII guides can be found in Annexes 2 and 3 of this report.

» **Respondent Index Form (demographic and quantitative survey)**

Appended to interview guides were short questionnaires with indicators focused on demographics, capabilities, availability and technology usage. These quantitative surveys were conducted at the end of each key informant interview. Though this research project is, at heart, qualitative, surveys provide key contextual information that can help to triangulate participants’ experiences, perspectives and attitudes. The Respondent Index Form can be found in Annex 6.

» **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are a reliable tool for gathering in-depth information from a cross-section of individuals representing specific groups of people, key community members divided by age groups and gender. The FGD moderator first builds rapport and trust with the group and then uses the discussion guide to facilitate conversation. A key advantage of the focus group method is its flexibility for in-depth exploration of group behavior and perceptions towards information access and flows, trust and influence.
For this research, focus groups sought to understand how people exchange ideas. Most focus groups were pre-arranged using approved lists of potential participants. However, researchers were also encouraged to take advantage of opportunities for spontaneous group conversations. Spontaneous focus groups offered the advantage of engaging groups that already knew and trusted one another, yielding a uniquely comfortable environment and openness. FGD guides can be found in Annex 2.

» Mini Ethnographies

Research teams selected an active and locally recognized social media producer/blogger or active consumer/disseminator for an extended ethnographic study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation and shadowing were employed to examine their social media history, practices and aspirations. This included a brief life story with an emphasis on the process of becoming active on social media. An example of a mini ethnography from this research project can be found in Annex 1.

» Observation and Artifact Collection

Researchers conducted ethnographic observations in environments where information was being consumed, produced or exchanged, noting how people behaved and communicated in these situations. Researchers compiled brief summaries of the people, their surroundings, mood, and types of information in exchange. They also noted and photographed communications materials, such as magazines, phones or websites that were present during observations. An example of an observation summary and related artifacts can be found in Annex 5.

» Collaborative Synthesis Sessions

Collaborative synthesis sessions were intended to provide an ongoing, weekly platform for reflecting on fieldwork and adapting research questions and methods to evolving understandings of local information ecosystems. Throughout the process of fieldwork, Sayara realized that one week of training was not sufficient to train field staff on this process, which requires that field staff not only engage in relatively nuanced qualitative analysis but also have the confidence to convey their reflections as authoritative research findings. The more effective synthesis sessions were between Sayara’s Lead Analyst, Ethnographic Expert, and local Research Associates in the Kabul office, which took place throughout the first round of fieldwork, in the planning phase for the second round, and then weekly during final the analysis phase.

» Field-team Reflections

The final iteration of fieldwork involved interviews with field researchers themselves. Because researchers were all local to their areas of study, and because they had unique access to research sites, this final component was especially revealing. Researcher interviews included open ended questions that prompted researchers to reflect on their own experiences with the project. By identifying what surprised or interested them the most, researchers provided additional insight into the most locally relevant findings.
The Study Region

Design research is about understanding complexity through nuance. A design research project cannot, nor should it attempt, to capture a sample size like one needed for quantitative dataset. Rather, the goal is enough representativeness to draw meaningful insights on patterns of behavior and context.\(^{12}\)

The sites selected for this research represent the dynamism and variety of demographic and cultural experiences that characterize the Afghan information landscape. They were chosen based on a combination of broad cultural and geographic criteria, including urban vs. rural and open vs. closed (conservative). Due to ever-shifting security concerns, and to the complexity of the design research process, research sites were also places where Sayara has extensive experience, knowledge, and strong local research teams. This process led to the selection of Rodat district, Nangarhar, Jade Kaj in Herat, and the Macroyan neighborhood in Kabul.

**Rodat district, Nangarhar**

Rodat is a Pashtun area where Pashtunwali culture is predominant. Despite the growth of television nationally, radio is still very popular in this district and traditional voices remain influential. Conflicts among people or between tribes are typically resolved by district elders, who also serve as important conduits between the local population and their district governments. However, as discussed below, Rodat’s seemingly “traditional” landscape of trust and influence has been and

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\(^{12}\) Design Research for Media Development
continues to evolve in response to international intervention, technological advancement and ongoing security concerns.

Notably, Rodat is an unstable and conservative district. At the time of fieldwork, the district was largely secure during the daytime, but split during the night between ISIS and Taliban control. For security reasons, researchers did not have access to Chaparhar (mostly controlled by Taliban), Bati Kot (ISIS presence), and Behsoud (GI RoA).

Macroyan, Kabul
Located in the eastern part of Kabul City, Macroyan is a dense urban area that contains a relatively high concentration of educated and employed individuals, including women. Government institutions and NGOs are among the most prominent employers in the neighborhood. In addition to its role as a commercial center, the neighborhood is home to mostly middle and upper-middle class residents, who are exposed to a wide diversity of media, including social media, TV, and Radio, and who tend to be early adopters of new technologies. Macroyan is home to a mix of ethnicities, including Tajik and Pashtun, though in comparison with Kabul City, overall, few Hazaras reside in Macroyan. The security situation is generally stable in Macroyan and had no detectable effect on researchers’ access to participants or information.

Jade Kaj, Herat
Jade Kaj is a conservative neighborhood in Herat city, located between Bagh-e-Mellat and Bagh-e-Azadi. It is mainly a residential area with little commercial activity. Its residents are a mix of government and NGO employees, farmers, and unemployed individuals. Jade Kaj is multi-ethnic, though mainly Tajik (around 80 percent.) The neighborhood thus represents both the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity that can be found throughout Herat City. The security situation is generally stable in Jade Kaj and had no detectable effect on researchers’ access to participants or information.

Challenges and Biases
Security concerns and general mistrust are an unavoidable challenge for field research in Afghanistan. These concerns were less prevalent in Macroyan, Kabul, but influenced the research in Rodat. In Rodat, acute instability limited access to certain areas and people, whose experience and perspectives are not included in this analysis. Insecurity combined with a general wariness toward strangers and outsiders also limited the number and types of residents available to participate in the study. On average, respondents in Rodat are likely more educated, wealthier, and more exposed to various media types than the average resident.

The combination of new ethnographic research techniques and a dispersed field team meant that Sayara did not have a direct presence during fieldwork. While Sayara staff were available in the Kabul office and daily via the phone, closer supervision and collaboration between Sayara’s lead analysts and the field team could have added more value to the process of weekly synthesis, iteration, and refinement. As a result, the approved field instruments were not always optimally relevant as research themes and understandings evolved. Final analysis required additional research and outreach to the field staff to answer questions not formally included in the instruments themselves. A more iterative research process, as envisioned by the design research approach, requires more frequent, face-to-face contact between different members of the research team than could be achieved in this study due to the limitations posed by distance, physical access, security and budget.
The Respondents

**HERAT**

- **Interviews**
  - Male: 6 Consumers, 1 Key Influencers, 2 Follow-up KIs, 4 "deep hanging out"
  - Female: 6 Consumers, 3 Key Influencers, 3 Follow-up KIs, 4 "deep hanging out"

- **Ethnographic Observations**
  - Male: 3
  - Female: 3

- **FGDs**
  - Male: 1
  - Female: 2

- **Mini Ethnographies**
  - Male: 1
  - Female: 1

**KABUL**

- **Interviews**
  - Male: 4 Consumers, 3 Key Influencers, 0 Policy Experts, 4 "deep hanging out"
  - Female: 4 Consumers, 3 Key Influencers, 1 Policy Experts, 4 "deep hanging out"

- **Ethnographic Observations**
  - Male: 8
  - Female: 2

- **FGDs**
  - Male: 2
  - Female: 2

- **Mini Ethnographies**
  - Male: 1
  - Female: 0

**NANGARHAR**

- **Interviews**
  - Male: 6 Consumers, 3 Key Influencers, 3 Follow-up KIs, 1 "deep hanging out"
  - Female: 6 Consumers, 3 Key Influencers, 3 Follow-up KIs, 1 "deep hanging out"

- **Ethnographic Observations**
  - Male: 7
  - Female: 3

- **FGDs**
  - Male: 2
  - Female: 2

- **Mini Ethnographies**
  - Male: 1
  - Female: 0

**TOTAL RESPONDENTS**

- **Location**
  - Rural: 23
  - Urban: 52

- **Education**
  - Primary: 12
  - High School: 12
  - University: 40
  - Vocational: 4
  - Religious: 1
  - Graduate School: 5

- **Age**
  - Under 20: 2
  - 20-25: 21
  - 26-35: 30
  - 36-45: 13
  - 56-65: 5

- **Socioeconomic**
  - Poor: 25
  - Middle Class: 45
  - Wealthy: 15

- **Employment**
  - Education/Science/Medical: 19
  - Student: 15
  - Service Industry: 8
  - Unemployed: 8
  - Unknown: 8
  - Housewife: 5
  - Agriculture: 5
  - Manufacturing/Sales: 3
  - Government: 2
  - Tribal Leader: 1
  - Self-employed: 1
AFGHANISTAN’S ECOSYSTEM IN CONTEXT

Image: An interview with general information consumers leads Sayara’s field team to a marketplace in Rodat district. Marketplaces provide important, public spaces for information consumption and socialization.
AFGHANISTAN’S ECOSYSTEM IN CONTEXT

» Growth of the Media Sector

Afghanistan’s media ecosystem has undergone dramatic changes in the last 15 years. If, at the end of the Taliban’s reign in 2001, the only source of indigenous media was the state-owned Radio Afghanistan (RTA, previously Radio Shari’at) and television had been banned entirely by the Taliban, today there are more than 250 independent radio stations and 100 TV channels across the country. Independent print media has also grown significantly and is trusted more than other forms of news even if it is consumed significantly less, but radio is still the most important source of news for the majority of the population. The widespread popularity of radio should come as no surprise in a country where 80 percent of the population is rural, mobile phone penetration has been historically low (although in the last decade it has grown quickly), illiteracy rates are high, and electricity supply limited and irregular. In urban areas television has been gaining ground vis-à-vis radio in the last five years, such that by 2015 television was by far the most important source of news and information for urban dwellers.

The quickly growing mobile phone market is revolutionizing the way that people communicate with family abroad, and social media is adding new layers to news consumption patterns. A 30-year old male shopkeeper in Herat describes this revolution in pre- and post-Taliban communications: “If we compare now with the Taliban term there were lots of difficulties in contacting with friends and families outside the country. You would have to go to the telecommunications office, then take a number and wait in line. When your number arrived they would call you, and there were lots of problems with connections too. But now it is a good facility where every single person can contact his friends and families inside and outside the country very easily.”

Between 2002 and 2010, Afghanistan experienced an almost “ceaseless creation of new media outlets, at an incredibly rapid pace.” The pattern of growth in broadcast television, once banned by the Taliban, is illustrative: six new television stations entered the market each year between 2006 and 2009 and three more a year between 2010 and 2014. The growth in media (TV and radio) has been driven by revenue from two primary sources: 1) commercial advertising (driven by increasing competition in private mobile phone and telecommunications companies); and 2) foreign donors and public service announcements (e.g. campaigns for the 2004 presidential elections, 2005 parliamentary elections, early voting and counter-narcotics campaigns, etc.). The latter assists in several ways, including paid-programming (e.g. donors who pay a TV station to broadcast a serial or public service announcement). In 2013, many media stations reported that 20-40 percent of their revenue came from donor’s paid programming. In addition, donors have provided substantial support to the initial establishment and ongoing operational costs of major media organizations, including TOLO TV and the Moby Group, among many other smaller media outlets. Overall, the sector is still far from being independently sustainable. By some accounts the media field is now over-saturated, and the rates of growth have slowed since 2010. With less external financing in recent years, many hope that greater competition will encourage the sector to become both slimmer and more professionalized.

14 Herat Consumer 7
Trust in Media Information

The explosive growth of media is a much-lauded success story for the international community, but the relationship between the new media landscape and peace, security and democratic nation building is ambiguous and uncertain. The proliferation of media companies is in part due to the liberal television and radio licensing framework adopted in the early post-Taliban era. But the flip side of this wide open landscape for broadcast media is that it has enabled a variety of powerful people to own major broadcast stations and reach mass audiences. Some of these media play upon the ethno-linguistic and tribal politics of the country, a more sobering aspect of the media’s rapid expansion. Some analysts fear that the proliferation of television channels might set the stage for greater ethnic division of society in the future. On the plus side, the plethora of outlets may contribute towards greater freedom and political independence through increased diversity of information sources.

Our respondents, from a Kabul-based media expert to a small shopkeeper in Herat, drew attention to the political biases within the media sector, tracing them to the industry’s profitability. A reporter in Kabul described the media bias: “In traditional media like radio and TV, there is a big problem that they are not so independent or free. It is because they are related to a party or an ethnic group, so they never can share or report opposite of their parties’ platforms.” These views are not limited to media professionals. A shopkeeper in Herat similarly observed, “Government officials don’t give authentic information to the media and some of the media are afraid of their future; others censor the news and broadcast wrong information. [Another limitation] is economic problems. When a media [outlet] doesn’t have a good sponsor it cannot hire reporters to collect reports from the provinces.”

The biases and limitations of media are well known among mass media audiences. Afghans are suspicious of most media that they hear, know the reputations of the channels and stations they use, and tend to consume news from many different sources in order to verify information. This process of triangulating news is reflected in the diversity of media sources that many respondents named during our interviews. A 25-year old housewife and teacher in Herat, explains her approach: “When we hear information from radio, TV or newspapers, then I compare this information with others. If I find out that it is true, I accept it.”

Security and Information

Afghans are hungry for accurate, reliable and immediate sources of local and regional news. This is especially salient today—2015 was the bloodiest year on record as Taliban and Afghan security forces clashed across the country. 2014 was the most dangerous year on record for journalists, but 2015 was not much better. In the face of this growing insecurity, the timing and accuracy

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17 Reporter, Radio Salam Watandar.
18 Herat Consumer 7.
21 Herat Consumer 10.

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of news reports have immediate consequences for citizen’s own security, health and livelihoods. Our respondents in rural areas of Rodat district were keenly aware of the security situation’s impact on news and information of local relevance. A malik and shura member in Rodat, observed that very few journalists make it out to his village, and therefore important local events go un- or under-covered in the media. Another respondent, a Kabul-based reporter, summed up the situation in this way: “In short, I can say that lack of security is the biggest threat to free independent media in Afghanistan, because a journalist cannot go to a remote area to collect important information about an issue, and if they go they will face insurgents. Even the people of the area will not accept him or will not give any details because they are also feeling threatened, so security is the only and the biggest problem for independence of media in Afghanistan.”

As a university student from Rodat put it, “In our district, insurgency is a greater threat for access to information. The newly emerged group IS has warned MTN [a telecom provider] to block its signals here especially during the night time. Not only does this reduce or limit access to information among the people, but also there are a lot of other reasons and one of them is the non-professional journalists especially in local media. These non-professional journalists are not talented enough to provide information needed by the people.” One potential outcome of this situation is that in Rodat, news about local events is not as trustworthy as news about national or international events, an issue discussed further below.

Consumer demand for reliable news, as well as high-quality and relevant entertainment, is a powerful force in its own right, as evidenced by a case study of the popular BBC radio show New Home, New Life, which has been broadcast from Pakistan to Afghanistan since 1994. As one scholar notes, “When the Taliban came to power in 1995, they reportedly debated whether or not to ban radio listening at the same time as banning TV viewing. However, moderate voices prevailed, realizing the enormous resentment such an edict was to cause a people so devoted to their radios for news and—thanks to New Home New Life—entertainment and education.” In other words, the popularity of foreign radio programs had the power to alter the Taliban’s political tactics.

While the new media landscape and infrastructure is dramatically changed, it is not a wholesale replacement of older systems of communication and information sharing. News and information is filtered through established social patterns and institutions, including longstanding practices of oral information sharing and complex dynamics of trust and information verification. Ethnographic studies show that individuals from respected families who hold positions of power at the local level—mullahs, Maliks, and elders—are highly influential in the formation of opinions within tribes and villages. These individuals have at once the prestige accorded them by a hierarchical society and the access to outside sources of information that reinforce their status as community guardians. Ultimately, research shows, these opinion makers can be more influential than external media.

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24 Rodat Influencer 3.
25 Reporter, Radio Salam Watandar.
Education, Media, and Influence

The increase in educational opportunities for youth in both rural and urban areas may be changing the dynamics of traditional information patterns. Secondary schooling was interrupted during the Taliban’s reign for a large portion of the population. These individuals, now in their 30s, have teenage children who are growing up literate and in a world with far greater access to information via mobile phones and the Internet. A number of our respondents reported highly trusting the news they heard from their literate children, who receive it via Facebook and other social media sites.

But it would be wrong to assume that traditional patterns are simply being overturned by new media. When media are prolific but also widely known to reflect political agendas, as they have been for decades, the importance of trusted community leaders in interpreting reported news is likely to be heightened, or at least sustained. In Afghanistan, the mosque and the bazaar have played a particularly important role in information dissemination in the past. After Friday service the clergy use the opportunity to make news announcements and local government representatives pass on information about their activities. A 2002 study of modern mass media and traditional communication in Afghanistan notes that the kind of news that was reported after Friday prayers was “breaking”—radio stations rebroadcast such announcements only after they were made at the mosque. Nearly 15 years later, increasing information access via mobile phones, TV and radio continue to mediate between oral traditions and information consumption.

Conclusion

Afghanistan’s information ecosystem is complex and continuously evolving in response to both external and internal change and technological developments. The following sections attempt to characterize this landscape, highlighting current practices, attitudes, and changes in regard to information and media consumption, and identifying opportunities for enhancing inclusivity and effectiveness.

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FINDINGS

Image: Director of Public Services Council, Macroyan, explains the role of media in her personal and professional life.
FINDINGS

Information Access and Need

» Overview

The biggest story in Afghanistan’s new media landscape is the rise in popularity and availability of television. In urban areas, television consumption is outpacing radio consumption. There is a clear relationship between television access and access to electricity. But parallel to the growth in TV, the number of radio stations has also increased. Outside of cities, radio is still the top source of news and information. Therefore, we might say that an equally important, if frequently overlooked, story is the persistence of radio as the top information source for Afghans.

Of course, there are still very big differences between media access and needs in urban versus rural areas. A dizzyingly wide variety of media sources are available in Kabul; in rural areas internet access has increased somewhat, although the vast majority of the rural population still has no internet access. The lack of electricity also plays a large role in media access for rural populations—TV, radio and mobile phone sets must be charged—but the insurgency poses its own set of challenges, especially in terms of journalists’ ability to cover local news. Thus in rural areas, news of local significance still tends to be passed along through village elders and during Friday mosque services. Finally, it is important to highlight that men and women are equally intensive media consumers.

In addition to the four mainstream media types (radio, television, mobile phone and Internet), the social dimensions of access are considered below. Personal connections, trust in community elders, Islamic institutions and gender roles are also important components of how people filter and interpret the news and information they hear, and what their patterns of access and information needs are.

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Radio Access and Use

While radio is being outpaced by television in urban areas, the sector is still rapidly growing and remains the top source of news for remote and rural districts. An average of 19 new radio outlets were created since 2010 and today there are 250 stations nationally, although many of these are smaller stations with limited reach. Radio is a much more fragmented sector than television in Afghanistan, and with the continued growth mentioned above; the trend is towards even more fragmentation over time. In 2010 the top five radio stations—RTA (Radio Afghanistan), Azadi, Arman, the BBC and Ashna—made up just 50% of the audience share. The growth in local radio stations has been credited to the role that external donors play in supporting the sector for development purposes, especially the role of Internews. Large, nationally-broadcast FM stations enjoyed a period of steady commercial revenue associated with the growth in the mobile phone industry. However, managers of large radio stations report that the financial environment has become very difficult today compared with several years ago.

Urban

In urban areas, where radio use is decreasing, many radio listeners are men who listen in their place of work. For example, seven of our 29 respondents in Kabul said they listened to the radio every hour or several times a day, perhaps because they are captive audiences working in tailor shops, barber shops, or taxis. But an even higher share of respondents also said that they rarely listen to radio (9 of 29), hinting at the decline in radio’s popularity in the capital. Rates of radio ownership are high in Kabul, but our data from Macroyan suggest that women may listen to the radio more on their phone, while men listen on a radio set. This may reflect the nature of men and women’s daily routines, with men in public and semi-public spaces where radio is heard more often, compared with women who do not hang out outside the home as much. Because our sample was small, this might be a topic for future research.

In Herat, radio is experiencing a dramatic decline. Only 18 percent of those surveyed in 2010 owned radios, compared to 83 percent who owned televisions. Our data from Jade Kaj supports this observation. Half of households we spoke with owned a radio, but the other half listened to radio on their phones. Women listen to radio rarely in Herat.

31 Altai 2010.
34 Ibid.
Rural

While not all households own a radio, many people in Rodat report that they listen to radio via their mobile phones or when in the car. Nationally, nearly 30 percent of people report listening to radio on their mobile phones at least once a week, and 17 percent say they listened in their cars.  

Most villagers do not have a constant source of electricity to power radio or television sets, but because mobile phones can be charged and work without an electrical connection, they provide radio access whenever desired. People who work as drivers or spend time traveling in cars also have access to radio regularly. But women reported listening to radio just as much as men in Rodat, approximately 1-3 times a day, and a majority of the people in Nangarhar listened to radio on their phone. In Rodat especially, people cited more than a dozen different radio stations, highlighting the market saturation. These included BBC and Voice of America, as well as many local stations such as Azadi, Nargis, Sharq, and Ashna. BBC was frequently mentioned as highly trusted, but it was also listed among many other stations. We take this as further evidence of the pervasive practice of triangulating information.

At the time of our interviews in Rodat district, ISIL was broadcasting an hour-long radio program each evening. Some residents worried about the impact of the station on youth. In early February the station was destroyed in an airstrike by the Afghan forces, though at the time of publication, radio communications have reportedly been reestablished, hinting at the important of radio for the dissemination of ISIS information or propaganda. In addition, at the time of the interviews mobile phone signals were cut off at night. A male university student in Rodat explained, “The most significant event for me which occurred in recent years is that ISIL has installed a local radio station from which they launch their propaganda. I have heard this radio and in this way, I got informed about this. Similarly, everyone is concerned about this radio and people discuss it in their gatherings. People do not trust in their propaganda because everyone has witnessed the cruelties of this group.”

One dynamic we do not have sufficient information about is the amount of radio time that is spent on music and entertainment, versus news, talk shows and educational information. Furthermore, there are differences in the passive and active consumption of radio that deserve further study.

Television Access and Use

Television ownership has more than doubled in the last eight years. In 2015, 62 percent of Afghans owned a television. Fifty-five percent of Afghans actively use their TV sets, and news programs are slightly more popular than non-news series. While some reports have suggested that TV usage rates do not differ by gender, our data suggests a very different pattern. While every household in Macroyan (Kabul) that we spoke to owned a TV set, there was a clear gender divide in consumption patterns. All the respondents who reported watching TV “every hour” were men, and all the respondents who rarely watched TV were women.

Television is also a greater point of controversy than radio. There is a greater number of foreign TV shows compared to foreign radio shows on air and many of these TV shows are perceived as contrary or threatening to Afghan and Muslim culture. The flashpoints are foreign soap operas that portray women in extramarital relationships with men. In comparison, popular crime dramas are not the subject of such intense negative opinion. It is worth noting that while many of our

respondents across all three sites derided the inappropriate content of soap operas, this negative opinion doesn’t seem to have any impact on trust in a station or even in patterns of usage. When asked whether media is a threat to Afghan culture, the same person might complain about the un-Islamic content of a television station and also uphold that station as having the most trustworthy news. Jalaludin, a 24-year-old shopkeeper in Herat, was straightforward about this contradiction: “most of the time I follow Tolo News. But unfortunately most of the time they are crossing Islamic limits in their broadcasting.”

Across all three research sites, respondents highlighted that the visual nature of television was one reason they liked and trusted it more. A housewife, former teacher, and daughter-in-law of the head of the local shura in Rodat, described her access and trust: “I want to watch every news item whenever I am free but we do not have enough electricity due to which we watch TV rarely. There is a lot of difference between heard and watched news.”

» TV Consumption VS. Trust

Current literature suggests that TV is a particularly effective medium for information communication because people actively consume it, meaning that they will watch it with undivided attention; radios, on the other hand, might be on all day, but just in the background, so as to be consumed passively. Indeed, our research found that television is compelling enough that people in Rodat would travel to Jalalabad to watch important cricket matches on the TVs of their urban family and friends. Meanwhile, in Jade Kaj and Macroyan, a growing number of TV owners have begun to use TV cards, digital receivers, such as Oqaab, or internet based streaming services, such as Jadoo, to stream or record programs for on-demand viewing.

These findings support the idea that television is indeed compelling – that people in rural areas will go out of their way to access it and that people in urban areas are interested to invest in television’s evolving and expanding array of related technologies. At the same time, the role of television in information circulation is mediated by the content available, viewers’ perceptions of its trustworthiness, and the contexts in which TV is consumed. Here, we see that what is popular and what is socially acceptable are often at odds. While few people admitted to watching serials, Turkish dramas, or reality TV, such as Afghan Star, and many people referred to them as un-Afghan or un-Islamic, such programs have been shown to substantially increase viewership, suggesting that they are, in fact, quite popular. Despite the popularity of the 8 o’clock news, TV in Afghanistan appears to serve primarily as a medium for entertainment and only secondarily as a source of trusted information.

» Mobile Phone Access and Use

In 2001 less than half of Afghanistan’s population had access to a telephone, and a third of those were satellite phones. The first Afghan mobile company opened its doors in 2001 and charged $250 for a SIM card. Today, a SIM card costs $1 and a basic phone can be found for $10. The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority estimated mobile phone penetration at 72 percent of the population in 2014, although industry experts believe the number is roughly half that amount (many people own multiple SIM cards to take advantage of deals). A 2015 study found that many young men are using their mobile phones to listen to radio, but most of the radio programming is music, rather than news or talk programs.39

People in Kabul are more likely to own a smart phone, as one might expect from income differences

38 Herat consumer 8.
across urban and rural areas. People in Kabul also spend more money on their phones than rural areas. Everyone we spoke to in Rodat owned a mobile phone, both men and women. Half had a feature phone while half had a basic phone; no one owned a smart phone. One interesting development is that since the withdrawal and the New Unity Government, which no longer has a significant security presence in Rodat, mobile phones no longer work at night. The effects of inconsistent mobile service, along with local adaptations to this evolving constraint, merit further research and potential program intervention. Constrained communication options, particularly at night, represent a significant vulnerability in Rodat’s information ecosystem.

Like Kabul and Rodat, mobile phone ownership is high across genders in Herat, although the two respondents who reported rarely using a phone were both women. A number of people have both a smart phone and a basic phone; women tend to use phones for making phone calls only, while men reported using phones for many other activities (this may be due to interviewer bias, though).

It is also worth cautioning about mobile phone ownership: having access to a phone is no guarantee that it is charged with power and credit. Further research might help shed light on how individuals’ daily experiences of financial or infrastructural constraints, combined with available phone and internet packages, are shaping patterns of mobile phone use.

### Internet Access and Use

The last 3-4 years have been a watershed in terms of Internet availability and use of Internet via mobile phone, facilitating far greater and easier connection to the large Afghan diaspora abroad, albeit for a very small percentage of the population. Between 2013 and 2015 the use of Internet for news and information grew from 3.2 percent to 9.6 percent. As might be expected, Internet use is higher in urban areas (22.4 percent) than rural areas (5.4 percent), and higher among men (13.4 percent) than women (6.2 percent). In urban areas, 40 percent of households have at least one member with Internet access; the figure is only 14.7 percent in rural areas.

Our respondents generally reflected these trends. In Macroyan, a relatively affluent neighborhood in Kabul, 18 of 29 people said they used Internet several times a day and only a small number of people rarely used the Internet (once a week or less). However, women in Kabul say they use Internet quite irregularly. Since Internet is accessed either by mobile phone or at Internet cafes, and the latter tend to be locations where mostly young men hang out, this might offer some explanation as to why women have less access. Compared with the other study sites, people in Macroyan spend a lot of money on Internet, up to 3000 Afs (approximately 44 USD) in a single month in internet cafes, mainly just on Facebook, Twitter, Skype. Macroyan is a relatively wealthy part of Kabul.

Internet use among our Rodat participants was surprisingly high for a rural area, where internet penetration is low. More than half of those interviewed said they use Internet 1-3 times a day, and with no difference across genders. This may be due to sampling bias rather than actual patterns. Due to the insecurity in Rodat district, our interviewers reached a greater proportion of more educated people, particularly in the second round of fieldwork. In the first round, none of the teachers, shop keepers or farmers reported accessing the Internet. In Rodat, Facebook was cited as a particularly popular and trusted medium of receiving and sharing news. One of the more frequent purposes of using the Internet was to access health information.

In Herat there were very high rates of regular Internet use that held across gender differences.
However women more frequently reported using Internet for social networks like Facebook, while men said they used it for many different reasons. The method of accessing Internet was split across use on phone and private Internet connections. Respondents in Herat spend 100-500 Afs/week on internet.

The first 3G licenses in Afghanistan were issued in 2012 and since then, mobile internet access has become increasingly common among youth, particularly in Macroyan. As mobile internet grows in popularity, private telecom companies will have an important influence over how individuals access and use the internet. Current bundles cater to different levels of data usage but also to daily patterns of use, such as nightly bundles, and to Facebook use, specifically. Other social media platforms and Internet-based calling applications such as Skype, Viber, and Whatsapp are quickly growing in popularity. The role of private telecom companies in shaping internet access and use should be explored for potential opportunities but also for potential bottlenecks in access, inclusivity, security, and internet literacy.
Like a growing number of young women, a 23 year old university student in Jade Kaj, Herat, uses social media to communicate with friends and family on a daily basis.
INFORMATION MOVEMENT, TRUST, & INFLUENCE

Overview

Broadly speaking, the contours of trust and influence in Afghanistan’s information ecosystems are shaped by tradition, deeply embedded social norms, and by experiences of upheaval, intervention, and reconstruction. As media and information landscapes evolve at a rapid pace, local contours of trust and influence inform the ways in which people engage with both old and new technologies. Indeed, generational, geographic, and socioeconomic patterns still largely govern access to new media. Wealthier, younger, and more urban residents are generally exposed to a broader array of information sources and technologies than their poorer, older, or rural counterparts. Overall, then, urban residents experience a more decentralized landscape of information flow, while more information moves hierarchically through rural communities.

However, despite highly uneven access to new media and technology and distinctive patterns in information flow, participants in all study locations shared a similar wariness toward media-produced information and a propensity to triangulate and cross-check it. This process filters information according to its source characteristics and acceptability among social groups.

The section below presents the flow and influence of information according to an urban and rural typology, created by exploring and comparing the information ecosystems in our urban (Jade Kaj and Macroyan) and rural (Rodat) study sites. Of course, this typology simplifies the complex and varied relationships between individuals, their communities and access to information. Nonetheless, these categories help us make sense of Afghanistan’s complex and evolving information landscape.

Traditional Influencers and Information Flows

Rodat

Traditional systems of trust and influence have retained significant, though geographically variable, importance within Afghanistan’s contemporary information ecosystems. Maliks, mullahs and shura members comprise the top rung of these highly centralized and hierarchical structures and act as information conduits that link communities to one another and to their governments. In the past, these individuals were often the only community members with significant access to outside information because they had access to communication technologies, such as the radio or TV, that the general population did not. While the dimensions of information access are shifting today, particularly in urban contexts, traditional hierarchies of influence remain strong in rural areas, such as in Rodat. In Rodat, research found that traditional influencers continue to serve as the main interlocutors between community members, neighboring communities, local government, and development organizations. They also act as influential sources of information related to almost all facets of life, including government activities, security incidences, religious and health information, as well as employment opportunities.
In Rodat, traditional influencers (namely, maliks) play a central role in connecting general consumers with information about almost all aspects of life, including health, local development, local politics, and religion. Increasingly, technology is coming to play a role in this ecosystem, enabling maliks to disseminate information or organize meetings via SMS, and youth, who are often the early adopters of new technology, to become relevant and potentially influential actors in this system. This system remains hierarchical and, despite the adoption of new technology, continues to rely heavily on face to face communication in homes, schools, Jirga halls, and mosques. The concentrated and hierarchical structure of this system supports resilience and strong communication at the local level.

**Jade Kaj and Macroyan**

By contrast, widespread access to new communication and media technologies in Jade Kaj and Macroyan means that the flow of information in those places has substantially decentralized. Likewise, structures of influence have become less hierarchical. As mentioned above, residents in these cities are exposed to a wide and expanding array of media sources are more likely than their rural counterparts to own televisions and access the internet. Current sources and nodes of information exchange range from television, radio, billboards, elders, and educated individuals to social media, the Internet at large, as well as internet-enabled communication apps, such as Skype, Viber, Tango, and WhatsApp. Amid this expanding media landscape, it comes as no surprise that residents of Macroyan and Jade Kaj cited traditional leaders as important sources of information less frequently than research participants in Rodat.
The above diagram broadly envisions the current information ecosystems in this study’s two urban contexts. Elders and religious leaders continue to maintain important social positions as networkers, but as trusted sources of information their influence is concentrated among older generations. General information consumers and youth pay credence to a wider array of information sources for news, though still reference elders and mullahs as important sources of information on religion (particularly Friday prayer), local development projects (Jade Kaj only), and even employment opportunities. The urban information ecosystem identified in this study appears to be weakly linked with the government. Civic engagement, or involvement in community development activities, along with perceptions of government accountability and responsiveness are notably lower in Macroyan and Jade Kaj, where access to information is decentralized but communication between the local and state levels is weak. In Macroyan, despite geographic proximity to government institutions and representatives in the capital, opinions of government accountability were especially unfavorable. By contrast, in Rodat, where access and influence are more hierarchical and concentrated, civic engagement appears to be stronger.

**Insights**

Two patterns emerge distinguishing the role of traditional influencers in urban and rural contexts. First, while traditional influencers play a less prominent role as sources of general information in Macroyan and Jade Kaj, they are still considered authoritative sources on religion, as respondents in all three sites continue to site Friday prayer an important source of information. Second, outside of their roles as religious authorities, the primary role of traditional influencers in urban contexts seems to shift from source of information to circulator of information. This distinction is nuanced but can be understood as the difference between having an influential opinion, personally, and an influential social connection. For example, respondents in Jade Kaj still refer to traditional leaders as important actors in conveying information about development projects to local community members. (This was not the case in Macroyan.) In Macroyan, participants noted that traditional leaders are often instrumental in linking people with employment opportunities.
These situations, in which traditional influence has endured amid proliferating and diversifying sources of information, highlight the complex ways in which tradition and technology evolve in mutually informative ways and manifest to reflect highly localized social and historical dynamics.

Narrative: Places and Systems of Information Exchange
Male, 63 years old, Rodat resident

The name of our village is Madina. In our particular village, we have a Malik. We all refer our problems to this Malik and he shares our problems with other Maliks in order to find solutions. If they cannot find a solution, then they refer it to governmental officials. If we have any suggestions for the government, the Malik shares them with the relevant directories of the government. He also gives us the response he receives. If there is any program or project that wants to operate in our village, our Malik is well aware of it. Then, the Malik shares it with us through mobile phone or all people gather and they share particular information with us at a gathering. All the villagers gather in Masjids or guesthouses. Our guesthouse is located in the upper part of the Madina where there is also a school and a madrassa. The guesthouse is built by the government and it is used for gatherings. The villagers gather when there is an issue to be shared with all the villagers regarding the youth or development programs in our community. The villagers are informed via announcement or mobile phones to gather in a particular guesthouse or Jirga hall. Recently, we had a gathering about the programs of the Rural Development organization; the program called National Solidarity. The youth and the Maliks make us aware of any new things taking place in our community and village. For example, they tell us that they need laborers, so groups of laborers should be formed in order to make these programs happen. Of these labor groups, one of them is selected to be a team leader. Every member of the group is assigned different tasks to fulfill, then the Rural Development provides them with daily remuneration.

In addition to these good opportunities, our life is not free of problems and dangers; therefore, we the villagers and also the government need to obtain information about these dangers. The only resources to get information are telephones and the Maliks. The maliks are appointed by us because we have voted for them… If there is anything related to our villagers or our village then the government gets in touch with the Maliks and meets with them. After the maliks get the information, they share it with the entire village… Since the government cannot meet with the entire nation; therefore, the villagers choose their representatives and tell them everything regarding the village or community. Our maliks [cell phone] numbers is with the government and the rural development office. If we have any problems or any things to say, we share them with the Maliks.
Evolution of Information Flows: New Media and Technology

Information flow and coverage are shifting with the introduction of new technology and evolving information needs. As noted above, the widespread introduction of new media technology has served to decentralize the flow of information in Macroyan and Jade Kaj. In contrast to Rodat, where insecurity and distance limit media coverage, these urban centers, Macroyan in particular, are hubs of media production, consumption and technological adoption. This means that local events, (for example, protests and demonstrations or security incidents), are frequently covered by national, local, and even international news outlets, and are widely discussed on social media by individuals with access to it. In Rodat, neither social media nor conventional media have a significant local presence. Nonetheless, traditional structures of communication and influence are converging with communication technologies. This process is simultaneously building the resilience of traditional information flows and potentially opening up space for youth to exert more influence.

Social Media and Communication Technology in Jade Kaj and Macroyan

Many organizations have heralded social media as instrumental in facilitating social engagement, empowerment, and inclusivity in Afghanistan. This idea that technological innovation promotes democracy and freedom has given rise to the notion of social media users as “change agents”. In exploring the social, gendered, and economic dynamics of social media use, this study suggests that, despite its growth and appeal, social media has yet to become a robust tool for inclusive information dissemination in the Afghan context. In many ways, the current social media landscape serves as a mirror for some of the persistent economic and cultural fragmentations, as well as adaptations, that characterize Afghanistan’s information ecosystems overall. Understanding how preconceptions of social media use overlap and diverge from actual use is essential for increasing the relevance of social media programming, and for devising strategies to make online participation more secure and available, particularly to women.

» Economic and Educational Barriers to Access

Access and literacy statistics are an informative reminder of the current limitations to social media engagement. As noted above, internet access is expanding but still reaches just over 10 percent of the total Afghan population and a quarter of its urban residents. Meanwhile, literacy rates in Afghanistan hover around 27 percent, and are significantly lower among females. This reality inherently concentrates the direct impact and potential benefits of social media within specific areas and groups of people, namely the urban, the educated and the wealthy. The geographic, generational, and socio-economic patterns in internet use observed in this study largely confirm these findings.

Note: this research finds that when participants talk about social media in the Afghan context, they are almost always talking about Facebook. While some participants also used apps such as Twitter or Imo, we found that a lot of people equate social media with “Facebook,” and that a lot of people actually discuss “Facebook” and the “Internet” interchangeably.

41 (GIZ 2014: 2-5). Internews Eco-Scan.
On the other hand, while illiteracy indeed limits access to social media, it doesn’t prohibit it entirely. Rather, illiteracy shapes the ways in which people use and engage with social media, and adapt it to their own abilities and interests. In Jade Kaj, for example, researchers reflected on their surprise at the number of illiterate people using Facebook. For these users, it appears that Facebook serves only entertainment purposes, enabling them to post and view a plethora of images, but not necessarily facilitating discussion. As internet access continues to expand, future research should explore the dynamics of adaptive, non-verbal social media use to promote the inclusion of illiterate individual in the only community.

» Limits of Trust
Perhaps most discouragingly for those who hoped the internet would be a watershed of inclusivity and open-access, online security appears to severely limit free and open online communication, and thus the capacity for social media to become a robust platform for social engagement. In a generally private society, the potential for public exposure shapes online networks and communication in dramatic ways. For example, profile hacking is a common concern among social media users, though to date, no studies have quantified its prevalence or systematically explored its effects on use. While profile hacking and online harassment appear to affect both men and women, female internet users convey a particularly acute and essentially universal concern for their online security, as online incidents can have real and dangerous consequences.

The content of women’s Facebook profiles is heavily scrutinized, particularly for visual infringements upon traditional cultural values. Photos of women are controversial, and most women avoid posting photos that include their bodies. Because the potential social and physical consequences of online “misbehavior” are so grave, female users report that profile hacking is often used for public shaming. Boys or men hack into Facebook accounts in order to pose as the user and post inappropriate content, including forged photos of the user, her real name, or sexual videos. Facebook users also report that imposters use fake accounts to assume female aliases, establish social networks, and either disseminate inappropriate content, harass users, or attempt to obtain credit card information from people. According to many of the young people we spoke with, this has given Facebook a negative reputation among older family members, who in response, seek to limit youth and women’s exposure to it.

Greater online security is needed in order to facilitate trustworthy and productive communication. One of the issues with providing that security is that internet administrators, namely Facebook, have a poor understanding of both the cultural norms and the risks involved in online activity in conservative places. This means that reporting activity as “inappropriate” from Afghanistan is no guarantee that it will be interpreted and dealt with by administrators. This is perhaps why female participants reported varying levels of success in reporting and mitigating online harassment, and why greater attention to online security might increase the safety and utility of social media for women in Afghanistan.

» Adaptations
Many women who use Facebook despite the risks adapt their behavior to get around issues of privacy and permission. Girls and women also use aliases, for example, in order to shield their online activity from family members. Many then share that identity only with other friends in order to create a more closed and trusted online network. (Boys and men, on the other hand,
are more likely to report using Facebook to meet new people and expand their social networks.) Other people, men included, adapt to online insecurity by maintaining a level of neutrality in their online exchanges or be deferring to quotes either from famous people or anonymous sources to express their opinions in a way that is less confrontational or individualized.

**Communication Technology and Evolving Information Flows in Rodat**

While adoption of new media and technologies in Rodat has been slow and inconsistent, communities such as Rodat are far from “media dark.” This fact is important for understanding the complexity of trust and influence in places that are often perceived to be “traditional” – both technologically and/or socially.

For example, this research found that, in addition to general information consumers, influencers such as elders and mullahs commonly use SMS to streamline their communication. Their use of mobile phone technology, while not necessarily innovative or adaptive, nonetheless serves to strengthen information flows in traditional directions. Specifically, numerous research participants reported that SMS is now used in combination with word of mouth to organize community meetings. This evolution of information exchange, with the incorporation of technology into traditional communication streams, likely reinforces community resilience, particularly in the event of security incidences or other sudden-onset crises where timely and widespread communication is paramount.

Simultaneously, youth play a central role in adopting and bringing new technologies to their friends and family, both in urban contexts and in Rodat. Particularly in the rural context, youths’ exposure to new technology and formal education brings them closer to the center of the rural information ecosystem than ever before, as general information consumers come to value youth’s education and connectedness. Thus, while research suggests that networks of trusts remain fairly traditional and hierarchical, this reconfiguration of flow and, to a degree, influence is opening new, important possibilities for strengthening information networks and encouraging inclusivity among rural communities.

For one thing, as noted above, media and technology penetration is increasing in all regions of Afghanistan. While limited electricity and financial resources mean that few people own TVs or have permanent internet access, almost everyone researchers interviewed had their own cell phones, typically using them for calling family, SMS, and listening to the radio. Even more commonly, Rodat research participants turned to BBC, Azadi and VOA radio as the most trustworthy, daily sources of information. These sources are often understood to provide objective news and informational coverage, broadcast in both Dari and Pashto, and use locally understandable vernacular. Notably, both VOA and BBC pre-date the explosion in media sources that followed the 2001 American invasion, which appears to add to their perceived credibility. Among local influencers, particularly teachers, access to the internet is actually not uncommon, though use is limited to general communication (messaging and email), basic information searches, and social media, such as Facebook. Internet as entertainment does not appear to be one of its limited uses in Rodat.

“The most important source for reliable information is local witnesses of the event. I can trust a witness more than a media network. Whenever something happens in our area then I am trying to visit or call a witness to get the latest information.”

—Teacher, Rodat District
New media technologies indeed offer important insight into world and national affairs, as nearly all research participants contend. At the same time, individual economic constraints, persistent regional insecurity and unpredictability characterize daily life in Rodat. This means that the most salient and important types of information to Rodat residents are often local and related to security conditions— the trustworthiness of that information can literally be a matter of life or death. Thus, though many of Rodat’s information influencers consume international media and value such longstanding sources as the BBC for showing objective, high quality news, by and large, word of mouth and hierarchical social networks remain the most important nodes of information exchange. The patterns in the adoption of new technology reflect those needs.

Discussion: New Media and Technology

In sum, while new media and technology penetration is, indeed, highly uneven across this study’s target areas, it is nonetheless expanding in all three locations, including areas where traditional social norms and hierarchies remain strong, or even rigid. In comparison, though it might appear that Rodat is simply “traditional” Macroyan and Jade Kaj, it would be unwise to expect technological adoption in rural areas to follow the same patterns as observed in more urban areas. As this research highlighted, individuals in all three study areas use and engage with new media technologies in ways that are most relevant to them and their social contexts—not simply the ways in which new media technologies have been used elsewhere. This suggests that three elements will be central to understanding the dynamics of technology adoption and changes in information flow in the years to come: the resilience of traditional systems of influence in the face of decentralizing information access; the potential evolution of youth as influencers and early technology adopters; and, importantly, the types of information that people most need and the context in which they experience those needs. Deeper, targeted research on each of these three factors will ensure that future programming is relevant to local communities and their social, infrastructural, and financial environments and therefore inclusive of people with varying information needs and access.

Gender and Information Flow

Information flows are highly gendered in all three study locations, though are arguably more complex than issues simply of exposure. While women in Macroyan and Jade Kaj report greater exposure to media and information technology than do women in Rodat, and generally occupy more public roles in their community, perceptions of women’s roles in local information ecosystems are remarkably similar throughout all three places. Understanding that the value of information changes depending on the context in which it is presented, that exposure to information by no means equates acceptance, and also that women access information in indirect ways will help to inform more effective, inclusive programming.

The quotes below provide narrative accounts of the ways in which both women and men experience a gendered information landscape. Throughout these quotes, several patterns become clear:

1) Men are consistently cited as important sources of information, and lack of access to public spaces as women’s main barriers to information flows;

2) While women might not have direct access to information as it circulates throughout the public sphere, they have adapted in numerous ways, including observing and
listening to the ways men discuss information in their presence, even if men are not addressing them directly;

3) The few public places that are open to women are centrally important to their ability to access information directly and in a social context that makes information trustworthy and valuable. Such places include workplaces, schools, ceremonies, and beauty parlors.

Notably, in none of the three study communities did researchers identify instances in which women were completely isolated from all media and information technology. As noted above, almost all homes have radios or TVs, and mobile phones increasingly provide access to both the radio and the internet. Thus, even where women’s spaces are generally confined to the home, to refer to them as isolated contradicts their potential exposure to a wide array of radio and TV programming, particularly when their husbands are out of the house. The fact that research participants (both male and female) so frequently refer to women as information-isolated suggests an important and informative difference between the processes of consuming, socializing, and internalizing information.

Information consumed individually, particularly for women in Jade Kaj and Rodat, appears to have less value than information consumed in public places or in overtly social contexts. People even referred to social settings where women are not active participants in information exchange, such as on public transportation or during phone calls between male family members, as important ways that women access information.

Narratives of Gendered Information Flows

The most prominent theme to come out of a gender analysis is the consistency with which the home is referenced as the limiting factor in women’s access to information. This finding is interesting because it points to the differential value respondents place on socialized and individualized information consumption; women indeed have access to information in the home, most commonly via radio and TV, both of which lack opportunities for direct engagement or socialization. As the quotes below demonstrate, neither male nor female respondents identified those technologies as important sources of information for women. Rather, male household members are responsible for bringing outside information into the home, again, suggesting that information that has been collectively consumed or discussed has more value than information consumed individually:

“[Women] get information different ways. Mostly they are getting their information from their husband, brothers, and fathers because most women are not educated and they don’t go out. Therefore, they refer to their men.”
– Female, 26 years old, Macroyan

“Men are mostly working out [of the home] and women are mostly at home, therefore women always need to know about situations from their men.”
– Male, 27 years old, Jade Kaj

“A woman can get her information from her husband and a girl can get her information from her father and brother. It’s because most of the time the men are out, so they know more about daily events.”
– Male, 29 years old, Jade Kaj
“Women get their information from their family, friends, and also colleagues. Women who don’t go out and are not educated get their information from their husbands, fathers and brothers, and they have to trust this information because they don’t have any other source to get it from.”

– Female, 30 years old, Jade Kaj

Indeed, physical spaces (rather than virtual ones) continue to serve as the most important nodes for information exchange. This means that the spaces open to women, such as schools, homes, beauty parlors, and ceremonies, are centrally important to their ability to socialize information amongst themselves. As the quotes below suggest, weddings are one of the most commonly cited spaces for female information exchange. However, this research also suggests that schools and beauty parlors, in particular, represent important and empowering spaces for women to access and circulate information.

“I think the difference between the ways men and women get information are that men have a lot of ways to get information. They can attend public gatherings; they can go to mosques, they can watch TV in market places, they can ask their friends and colleagues in their workplace but women cannot do all these things and that’s why women mostly get information from other housewives whenever they meet in some wedding or other party. Similarly, women also have a challenge getting information. For example, some men do not let their women watch TV or listen to radio channels and this is a great challenge for them. Today almost all male youths have access to Facebook but usually female are not allowed to get access to it etc."

– Male, 30 years old, Macroyan

In addition to physical limitations to information access, findings highlight how cultural norms create unequal information flows for men and women. As the quote below highlights, even when women engage in the public sphere, they are typically the minority, and therefore unable to actively participate in information exchange or circulation because other participants are all men:

“Let me tell you my experience of how women get their information differently from men. Every night my father tells us different stories from different areas, because my father is out from morning to evening and also because people share information about everything more with males than with females. A taxi driver shares his experience of the event he is eyewitness to, but he can’t tell anything to a woman during driving, so these women refer to men to get more information about everything.”

– Female, 22 years old, Macroyan

On the other hand, women are often referred to as keen listeners who, despite limited opportunities for active engagement, continuously glean information from overheard conversations or through direct inquiry. For example, while a taxi driver might not share his experience with a female passenger directly, she might still obtain this information by listening to his conversation with a fellow male passenger. In such an instance, silence or passivity might actually serve to broaden the types of information women can overhear. The following quotes serve to highlight listening as an adaptation to limited information access:

“In our community, all family members have lunch and dinner together, so dining time is when they [women] get their information from the men. While the men are talking, they listen to them and try to get information from them.”

– Male, 29 years old, Rodat

“I think they [women] do not have any special challenges [accessing information] – only in a few areas men do not let their women listen to radio and get some news and information….. When men get some news and information and they return home, women
Media, Displacement, and Information Flows

The United Nations estimates that, over the past 15 years, approximately 1.1 million Afghans have been displaced as a result of conflict, almost 200,000 of whom were displaced in 2015 alone. This, following a powerful earthquake in October and increasing conflict intensity throughout the year – including the temporary fall of Kunduz to Taliban forces. Beyond internal displacement, Afghans continue to make up the world’s second largest refugee group after Syrians, with approximately 2.6 million people in more than 70 countries. While Iran and Pakistan host the vast majority (95 percent) of Afghan refugees, 2015 saw a dramatic and highly publicized exodus of Afghans into Europe, with an estimated 80,000 new asylum applications in the first half of 2015.45

Virtually every individual we spoke with had family or friends living abroad, mainly in Iran (Jade Kaj) and Pakistan (Rodat). However, undocumented migration to Europe was one of the most commonly discussed issues among research participants in all three study locations. General feelings about migration are mixed and include empathy, interest, and concern. Elders, in particular, feel that the process is so dangerous, both to those who leave and for the Afghans who stay in hopes of making a living at home, that they say they want media to actively discourage the process, to tell their youth to stay home and build their country.

To a certain extent, media has indeed attempted to meet this demand:

“As far as our media is concerned, we have developed at least 25 radio talk shows in which political, security and education experts took part and tried to convince youths not to go abroad illegally.”

– Kabul media expert 1

This approach of “telling” rather than “showing” reflects the ways the media sector still needs to develop in order to provide consistent, reliable, and objective information. One media expert described a different approach to migration outreach work, which combines the power of professional media coverage with the first-person appeal of social media and personal networks. This approach presents an interesting and potentially important avenue for programming, particularly if careful attention is paid to balanced coverage:

“Medias’ duty is to make shows and programs regarding this exodus. For instance, we have some media channels which follow a family from Kabul to Europe and inform other countrymen of the difficulties this family faces on the way to Europe. So, this is a good step and can help discourage youths from traveling.”

– Kabul media expert 3

The popularity and effectiveness of such programs is unclear, however, none of the youth who participated in this research mentioned seeing or hearing them. It’s possible that, while

international media have covered this phenomenon widely, those sources do not necessarily provide actionable information that those engaged or invested in migration need. This is where new media and technology come into play. Access to the internet via mobile phones, and apps such as YouTube, Facebook, Viber and Whatsapp allows young Afghans to fill in reporting gaps, to see and circulate the information they need, simultaneously providing critical, timely and relevant information while also strengthening important interpersonal and geographic ties. More importantly, perhaps, continuous in-person communication in places such as market places, universities, barbershops, and guesthouses provide the information, trust, and the influence that general information consumers find most persuasive. Youth are thus more likely to be swayed by the information they gather at the bazaar than from the programming they’re exposed to on a billboard or the radio.

In an attempt to stymy migration, the billboard, erected in Kabul and sponsored by the German embassy provides the hashtag: #RumoursAboutGermany. It asks: “Leaving Afghanistan? Are you sure?”
Narratives of Change: New Media Technology and the Afghan Diaspora

New media and technology connect Afghans to their counterparts abroad with unprecedented speed and consistency. The ability to connect directly with friends has perhaps tightened networks of information exchange and decreased reliance on traveling to pass on information. However, findings suggest that people continue to view mobile individuals and hubs of economic activity as particularly valuable sources of information and places of information socialization and exchange. The following section provides examples of ethnographic observations and field notes that researchers compiled throughout fieldwork. The combination of photos and observations serves to highlight the enduring value of face to face information exchange in an era of increasingly virtual networks and relationships.

**Improved Connectivity**

Information consumers still remember when contacting loved ones abroad meant waiting in line for a phone and a poor connection. Mobile phones, internet cafes, and internet calling apps, mean that communication is no longer a hassle and requires little to no advanced planning. Information can thus flow between Afghanistan and the diaspora spontaneously, or in real-time, which likely increases the breadth of information that people share with one another. In addition to major events, such as weddings, funerals, or security incidents, Afghans are more able to keep up with one another’s daily lives. The impact of this is to enable stronger, more resilient social ties around the globe.

“During the Taliban time you might have to go to a telecommunications office, take a number, wait in line, and connectivity was always an issue... but now we have a good facility where every single person can contact his friends and families inside and outside the country very easily.”

– Male, age unknown, Jade Kaj

**No More Intermediaries**

In the past, communicating with people abroad or in distant places required not only more time but more people. Face to face social networks were essential to passing information from one place to another. New technology means the intermediaries no longer make or break communication between distant places and people. (Importantly though, while intermediaries such as bus or taxi drivers are no longer necessary for individual, person-to-person information exchange, they still play a central role in circulating more general information and news.)

“I remember that once upon a time when mobile communication did not exist, we had a wedding party and my father sent me to Kunar province to inform our relatives about our wedding and you know that Kunar is about 3 hours’ drive from here .... But now, since mobile communication is common, nobody needs to travel to far away cities to inform someone of a wedding, funeral or something else. Just pick up your mobile and talk to anyone you want.”

– Male, 32 years old, Rodat

“I remember that, in the past, my father would go to a bus station and would hand over a letter to a driver who would deliver to another person in another city...But now, we only pick up our mobile phones and can contact people in many ways.”

– Male, 31 years old, Rodat
Smart Phones and Internet Calling

Smart phones, and internet calling apps in particular, are changing the way that people communicate with family and friends abroad. While international calls remain prohibitively expensive for many, apps such as Whatsapp, Viber, and Skype, combined with an evolving telecom market that caters to data users, means that internet calling is becoming a main mode of communication between Afghans at home and the diaspora. As traveling becomes more difficult and security less predictable, internet calling apps represent a potentially important, stabilizing factor in local information ecosystems, increasing the resilience of dispersed social networks.

“The security situation is getting worse day by day, but the smart phones have made it easier to contact our families and ask about their state.”

– Female, 30 years old, Jade Kaj

Case Study: Mobile phones and the age of mass migration

Introduction: The below narrative is from 35-year old farmer in Rodat. He was only able to attend school for six months before his primary education was interrupted by the civil war between the newly-elected communist government and the mujahedeen. The latter burned his school down and rebuilt it only 10 years later. He was able to re-enroll in the 3rd grade where he attended Islamic classes and gained basic literacy before the school was again destroyed, this time by Russian bombing campaigns. Below, he describes in detail the challenges he faces in reaching his relatives who are living outside of the country. Despite the widespread availability of mobile phones and networks, these technologies are still costly to many ordinary Afghans.

“After the decades of wars, many people have moved from one place to another, so it is clear that we are away from most of our relatives and family members. Most of our relatives migrated to neighboring countries. Even we have migrated to other provinces of our country in order to save ourselves from war. Most of our relatives, such as my cousins, are living in Pakistan. It is very difficult to see them because it is very difficult for us to cross the border. Even some of my relatives have been caught, arrested and put in jail when they wanted to cross the border. They were beaten and assaulted when they decided to cross the border and get to Pakistan. In spite of these problems, we go and see them in Pakistan. We also communicate with them via mobile phones. In the past when there were no mobile phones, we sent letters to them in order to give information to them or communicate with them. We give information to them regarding our fields and our family members. In the past, we did not have any problem in crossing the border, so we would always visit them. Now that it is very difficult to go to Pakistan, but we have access to telephone and mobile phones. Now, we use mobile communication for asking about them and also sharing information. We also call them when we need to invite them for any gathering. However, calling them costs a large amount of money but we need to call them and communicate with them [emphasis added]. Traveling to Pakistan is very difficult, so it easy to call and we call despite the fact we spend money. We call them when we want to inform them regarding good or bad news. We also share information about the fields because I cultivate their field. I share information about the crops and as well as how much it costs me to cultivate fields.”

– Male, 35 years old, Rodat
Places of Information Exchange: Ethnographic Observations and Field Notes

Ethnographic Observation
Place: Haji Abdul Qayum Khan Market
Location: Jade Kaj
Discussion: Fewer customers mean that shop keepers at Haji Abdul Qayum Khan Market have more time to sit and discuss the issues they face on a day to day basis. Some have left for Europe and keep in touch with their friends and fellow shop keepers here through internet apps, like Viber and Skype. This process of information exchange and socialization is highly valuable. The information that circulates through Haji Abdul Qayum Khan Market, its shop keepers, and their networks abroad, will have an important impact on how local youth understand and make decisions on issues such as migration. This information will likely be passed on, in some form, to each shopkeeper’s friends and family members.

Most of the shopkeepers in the market are wholesalers, and most of them have a good economic situation. There is also a garage for trucks. People of this market have daily conversations about different issues. Today they are talking about the explosions, that the number of explosions is increasing day by day, and that most of the time they kill innocent civilian people, women and children – they never target foreigners and other high ranking people, but always kill innocent people. One of the shopkeepers says, afterward, that women don’t have to go out and work because it’s against our culture for people to see their bodies...

Two shopkeepers had gone to Europe illegally and contact their friends through Viber and Skype. The reason they went to Europe was the lack of security. Men at the market say they talk daily with their friends in Europe and that their friends complain of their situation there. Their friends have told them that the situation is bad and they don’t have a place for sleeping, they live in a camp and the camp situation is not good as well. They can’t even find anything to eat... They have complained about the trafficker as well.

At the market some young boys said they had wanted to go to Europe, but after hearing about the situation, they felt remorse and now they don’t want to go.

The reliable source for them [the youth] is Facebook. Most of them use Facebook and some of them use WhatsApp and Viber as well. These days, because they have fewer customers, shopkeepers come together more often and talk about different issues.
Ethnographic observation
Place: Barbershop
Location: Jade Kaj
Discussion: Barbershops and beauty parlors are rich spaces for information consumption and exchange. Inside the barbershop pictured below, men and boys discussed issues ranging from migration to social media. This small building provides a place for people, both youth and general consumers, to express personal opinions and experiences in a safe, public place, and to socialize and reflect on those experiences.

Jade Kaj’s proximity to Iran means that experiences of migration and life in Iran are common topics of barbershop conversation. From the hardships of migration to Afghanistan’s political situation and even the unevenness of social media use, the tone of conversations was that of letting off steam or airing frustration. Boy here discussed the gendered dynamics of social media use and the general mistrust of social media information, which permeates online interactions. Consistent with other observations and female interviews, these boys believe that most Facebook IDs are fake, that many use girl’s names to make them more appealing, and that many are used for illicit purposes. Despite these concerns, however, the boys still participate on Facebook, taking a selfie and posting it on the site from a mobile phone. This behavior, one of simultaneous engagement and skepticism characterizes young Afghan’s social media adoption.

One person that was deported from Iran was talking about Afghans’ situation there; he talked about young boys being addicted to drugs (narcotics). The barber’s family was also in Iran. In Iran, Afghans don’t have a good life or a good situation. Their children can’t go to school because they don’t let Afghans attend Iranian school. The people in the barbershop were complaining about Afghan governors as well, and they were talking about President Ashraf Ghani and Doctor Abdullah Abdullah.

The young boys here were talking about Facebook and internet, and one of them took a selfie and uploaded it to Facebook directly. They were talking about their likes and comments, they said that girls’ photos get more likes and comments than boys’ and others. One of them said that the reason was that most of these photos are fake… that most Facebook IDs are also fake, and that people use girls’ names to find more friends and cheat them by getting credit card information from them.
Ethnographic Observation:
Place: Women’s madrassa
Location: Macroyan

Discussion: This observation, at a girls’ madrassa, highlights both the growing use of mobile internet in Macroyan and the ways in which people (girls) use internet apps and social media to engage with the Afghan diaspora. Here, we see that Facebook and Facebook Messenger provide important ways for people to stay in touch with family abroad. These girls reported using the apps not for general social networking purposes, but for staying in touch with, or following, specific individuals. The use of Facebook to connect with small personal networks is not surprising, particularly among girls. Findings from this research suggest that social media in Afghanistan is not currently a trustworthy means for personal expression or connecting with broad, virtual communities. One of the students reported using Facebook Messenger instead of Skype due to the connection quality. As options for internet calling and online communication expand, the criteria consumers use to select apps (quality, price, ease of access, availability, marketing, etc.) should be explored in depth.

Female students of a madrassa (a religious school) were observed during their free time. During the recess time, all students were distributed in different groups. I saw a group in which students were using their mobile phones. I sat with them to observe what they talk about. I found that they were mostly talking about their lessons but besides their lessons, they were also busy using mobile internet. The interesting thing for me was that one of them told another classmate that she teaches the Holy Quran online to her nephews living in Sweden every night and she uses Facebook messenger for it and sometimes Skype but mostly Skype does not work properly, she said. In addition to teaching them, she said that she also communicates often with her sister through this way. I found a chance to ask her about what other purposes she uses internet for. She replied that she searches Islamic pages on Facebook. She quoted a page of Islamic scholar Doctor Zakir Naek and said that she mostly follows the post of this page. She also asked other classmates to do as she does, so that they can serve their religion as much as they can. One of them said that she sometimes sends her photos to her husband through Facebook because her husband lives in Pakistan.
Ethnographic Observation
Place: Beauty Parlor
Location: Macroyan

Discussion: Beauty parlors are among the few public places in Afghanistan that are exclusively for women, and where women’s presence in the public sphere is accepted. Beauty parlors are therefore vitally important to women’s information ecosystems because they represent an opportunity for women to engage directly in information exchange and socialization (rather than indirectly, through male family members or by listening to other male-only conversations.) On this day, women’s conversations revolved around fashion, beauty, and family – their husbands in particular. Indian television and mobile phones also punctuated the salon environment. Women reported using mobile phones for Facebook and for communicating with husbands abroad. The importance of this type of space for women’s access to information and ability to participate in information exchange should not be overlooked. Here, women dictate the content and tone of conversation and reflect on the milieu of daily life.

This observation took place in a beauty parlor where a number of girls were gathered to have their makeup done. I sat on one side of them and listened to them keenly. A large part of their discussion was about makeup and new fashion trends. A cable TV was also placed there, showing different techniques for applying makeup. All were watching that TV channel. The channel was probably Indian. The owner of the beauty parlor said that almost all the ladies in the area come for makeup on a daily basis. Every participant would discuss the choices and likes and dislikes of their husbands with the others. One of the participants of the discussion said that her husband lives in Canada and she talks to him every night on Skype. She said that whenever an Afghan is coming from Canada to Afghanistan, he gives him a lot of cosmetics for her. I also observed that all participants were using their mobile phones. I asked one of them what she uses her mobile phone for. She replied that she not only uses her mobile phone for calling but also she uses Facebook and the internet for searching fashion pages in it. Outside the beauty parlor, I also saw an internet café where a number of people were using public computers.
Ethnographic Observation

Place: Agricultural Field

Location: Rodat

Discussion: This observation highlights how new communication technologies are reshaping the ways that people, even in Afghanistan’s rural districts, are engaging in information exchange. Simultaneously, it provides a glimpse into the every day lives of some of Rodat’s farmers, who were observed drinking tea and conversing during a break from their work. Mobile phones are providing additional as well as alternative means for farmers to access information. They can now listen to radio and watch TV on their phones as well as on conventional devices. In an interesting shift, one farmer actually replaced radio with written news sources, which he can access on his phone. This suggests that in rural areas, where the demand for written news is limited by low literacy rates, mobile technology might provide an important gateway for those who can read to access online media. It might also represent a potential platform for online literacy programs.

Mobile phones and mobile internet allow people to transmit information not only faster but to groups of people at once. Here, group messaging reinforced personal networks and familial communication in the case of a death in the family. Communication networks are facing vulnerabilities, however, and farmers discussed the blockage of mobile signals at night, adaptations to that disruption (another telecom company, Salam, is not blocked), and potential causes for it.

This observation focuses on a few farmers taking a tea break after working for hours in their crop fields. I accompanied them to see what topics they talked about. Since they were farmers, their discussion was mostly centered on agriculture. One said that his crop yield was poor this year. Another said that his crop yield was satisfactory this year. They talked about agriculture for some minutes but no one talked about the media’s role in agriculture. Then their discussion turned to new mobile technology. One farmer said that when his aunt died he could tell all his relatives within 10 minutes due to this new technology. Another one said that he listens to radio and watches TV on his mobile phone and that he can send a message to multiple people at the same time. Another one said that he had activated internet on his mobile and that he now does not listen to radio; instead, he reads news items on the internet. Another one said that now mobiles can do everything a computer can do. Then their topic changed to the blockage of mobile signals by militants during night time, but they said that Salam (a telecom provider) is not blocked during the night time. Some participants said that the towers of Salam Company are mostly installed in government controlled areas so that’s why they do not get blocked. Another participant said that signals of Salam Company are working through satellites and this is the reason Taliban cannot block it. Then they started talking about TV programs and channels. Again opinions were different. The discussion was going on smoothly, then suddenly a huge bomb explosion was heard and this changed the topic.
Ethnographic Observation
Place: Marketplace
Location: Rodat

Discussion: This observation, recorded in a marketplace in Angrizano village, Rodat, presents a rich account of how technological adoption has shaped and been shaped by communication behaviors and needs. As shopkeepers discussed, communication methods have shifted from letters, to letters delivered by cars and drivers, to calling from the phones of early adopters, to personal mobile use and the internet. Today, these information consumers are all on Facebook, though, like many other research participants debate its positive and negative effects on society and on youth in particular. Again, the use of social media for public humiliation arose as a major concern. (This research suggests that account hacking and impersonation presents a real risk for Afghan social media users, especially women.) Information consumers in this market are less familiar with Twitter than with Facebook. The distinctions they draw between Facebook and Twitter are insightful: Facebook, they say, is for “common men” while Twitter is for “high ranking people.” This comparison reflects the greater extent to which Twitter requires the user to curate his own experience, while Facebook arguably requires a lower level of online literacy. One shopkeeper reported using Bluetooth technology to transfer photos and videos between mobile devices. This method of information transfer bypasses the need to purchase data bundles. Despite the seeming practicality of this practice, this observation was the only case in which Bluetooth technology was mentioned during fieldwork.

Generally, when shopkeepers become free in the market, they gather in a shop and start chatting about different issues. A similar gathering was observed in Angrizano village of Rodat district. Their discussion was about new technologies for communication. Participants said that they would send letters to relatives in the past which would reach them after a long time. When transportation systems became a little bit more advanced, people would give a message to the driver of a car and the driver would convey that written message to other party and this approach became less time consuming. They said that following the technology advancements in Afghanistan people started using mobile phones for quick communication but mobile phones were rare 10 years ago. Few people in a village would have a mobile phone and whenever something would happen or if anyone would want to convey a message to someone, all villagers would refer to the few villagers who had phones. But in recent years, access to mobile phones and thus access to information has become common, and quick, as everyone has a mobile phone now. Now people use mobile phones so often that they even use them while driving, which is illegal and dangerous. Another participant said that the interesting thing for him is transferring pictures and videos to another mobile using Bluetooth. Then the discussion turned to Facebook and everyone discussed his usage of Facebook that day. Again the opinions were diverse. Some considered it as good while
others considered it as bad especially for the youth. Among those who considered Facebook to be bad, they argued that humiliation of other people takes place on Facebook. Among the participants, there was a guy who recently arrived from Pakistan who said that if anyone wants to share something on Facebook, it first goes through the filtering process and then it is shared with other people. One participant asked about the difference between Facebook and Twitter. Another participant told him that the difference between them is that Facebook is mostly used by common men while Twitter is mostly used by high profile people. Then the most common topic of security was discussed. People looked as if they were concerned about the deteriorating security situation.

After some time, everyone went back to their shops and the session ended.

**Conclusion**

Fostering an inclusive, user-focused environment for media and information circulation is a complex task for which merely technical solutions are not sufficient. Effective solutions to information challenges are implementation-intensive and require flexibility, adaptation, and continuous reflection. These case studies in Macroyan, Jade Kaj, and Rodat were designed to reveal the nuances and dynamics of information consumption in three localized contexts in order to inform innovative, inclusive program design.

Perhaps most importantly, the case studies highlight the value of the social world in addition to the technological one – meaning that the people and places involved in information exchange exert at least as much influence over the shape and dynamics of local information ecosystems as do the technologies in them. Amid a rapidly expanding virtual world, the relevance of public places, such as barbershops, beauty parlors, marketplaces, taxis, and schools and of traditional influencers has largely persisted. By contrast, despite their popularity and proliferation, virtual spaces, such as Facebook and other social media sites, do not currently facilitate the trust or inclusivity necessary to make them powerful vehicles for information exchange or personal expression. This research thus suggests that practitioners should take steps to increase online security, online literacy, and inclusivity while keeping sight of the enduring value of face to face networks and conventional communication methods.

**Lessons Learned**

In many ways, this project’s use of the design research approach was a success. Research uncovered a number of unexpected and adaptive ways that people in these target communities access information or compensate for a lack of reliable information or exposure. For example, the differences between how women are exposed to information and how they internalize it would have been undiscoverable to quantitative methods, and very difficult to understand with conventional qualitative techniques. Only with ethnographic observations, information synthesis, and iterative design and implementation was Sayara able to understand the significance of the seeming contradiction between women’s media exposure and their actual consumption. With this understanding, Internews can design programming to be more relevant to and inclusive of women. Similarly, this approach highlighted that the adoption of new technology and social media manifests differently among varying populations with distinct information needs. Perhaps

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most importantly, this approach should help to dispel notions that social media and the internet are accessible only to literate individuals. With further research into these adaptations, Internews can develop innovative programming, tailored to the information needs and constraints of Afghanistan’s large illiterate population. Importantly, however, Sayara experienced a number of fieldwork and methodological challenges related to implementing a design research approach in Afghanistan – particularly in the context of information ecosystems research. First and foremost, the complexity of information ecosystems as a concept became very clear in the first weeks of fieldwork. Initial findings were more consistent with a media assessment than information ecosystem mapping. Here, the iterative process was key to eventually identifying the questions and themes that would provide new and relevant information, though Sayara acknowledges that these lessons learned will facilitate more efficient and in-depth research in the future.

The design research approach also continues to be underutilized and requires significant training. Ethnographic research, in particular, is a specialized skill and, despite its value, is unconventional in the realm of development research. It requires that data collectors are simultaneously data analysts and that they understand and value their role as experts in the research process. Perhaps more than anything else, Sayara’s experience implementing this project has identified a significant and pervasive gap between the role that qualitative data collectors play in the research process (particularly in ethnographic research) and general capacity levels. In addition to formal training, which Sayara provides prior to every research project, one of the most important ways to promote data collectors’ skills should be to emphasize their expertise and demonstrate their contributions to final products and program innovations. In the spirit of inclusivity and respectful, effective development, Sayara encourages Internews to incorporate this finding into future design research trainings and guidelines. We will do the same as we continue to refine and reflect on our own work in Afghanistan’s information ecosystems.
ANNEX
Annex 1: Ethnographic Observation Guides

Ethnographic Observation Guide

Events, Locations, Artifacts and Interviews

Ethnographic observation represents a central component of all proposed project activities and occurs during all aspects of the fieldwork.

A central approach to this study shall be close ethnographic scrutiny of events of national significance. The events we propose are - all very suitable to study of social media and text messaging:

1. Kabul demonstrations (Nov 11), “Zabul 7”, in response to the killing of 7 Hazara civilians
2. Earthquake (Oct 26) that struck northern Afghanistan
3. Exodus of Afghan refugees to Europe

All of these events have wide national significance and are likely familiar to most Afghans. In FGDs and KII s we will ask questions including:

- How did you first hear about it?
- What did you hear about it?
- What did you do?
- How did it influence you?
- Do (did) you monitor events related?
- Have you or people you know been affected?
- What information and sources of information about these topics do you trust and distrust? Why?
- What could be done to make information about events like these more available?

Goal: Sustained focus on 3 major events as an ethnographic source for examining the flow and consumption of media from various perspectives and locations.

Understand the Local Context: Ethnographic Observation of a Location

Extended ethnographic observation of an environment where information is flowing, or where people are communicating and/or getting information. Examples include people watching TV together, conversing over tea, or sitting by heater in guard’s shack. Watch how people behave and the dynamics of information exchange.

Write down your observations and reflections in a journal for field notes. Take photos as possible.
How To: Take notes observing

- What is the environment like?
- Who are the people that are in this environment?
- How do people interact or communicate with each other?
- What kind of information are people sharing with each other?
- Are there any interesting patterns in people’s behaviour?
- Is there any about the environment that make it useful for getting information and what the other activities take place?
- What types of communications materials can we see in the environment?
- What appears to motivate the discussion?

Goal: Two observations per researcher per week, an hour each.

Understanding the Local and National Context: Artifact and Document Collection

Collect artifacts and documents that tell us about the culture and concerns of the people that produce or use them. Collect or take pictures of the artifacts.

How To: Collect Artifacts

- Collect posters, brochures, advertisements, informational material and cassette tapes, especially those with inspirational poetry and sermons.
- Collect anything used to access, share, or store information.
- Ask the Research Manager before making purchases, of more than 250 Afghanis.

Goal: About ten artifacts per researcher per week (30 artifacts per researcher over 3 weeks)
Annex 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. How do you get information you need? (Theme 1)

What is your most valued and important sources for reliable, news, and information about
   a. your community, b. national news c. international affairs

Why?
   d. what other sources in your community to for what kinds of issues.

Probe for: Reliance on media sources (e.g. radio, TV, internet, newspapers, etc.) versus people (friends, family members, community leaders, village leaders, teachers, doctors etc.)

2. Did you hear about ... (Theme 1)

   a. ...the march in Kabul about two weeks ago?
   b. ... the earthquake in northern Afghanistan about 2 months ago?
   c. ... the exodus of Afghan refugees to Europe?

How did you hear about it? Once did other people in your community learn of it or turn to learn more about it? Has anyone in your community been directly affected? How? What could be done to make information about events like these more here?

Probe for: Whether they thought the news was believable. How information moves around. Why or why not?

These can be modified during the training based on sensitivities and appropriateness to the research objectives.

3. What is the most important news event in your community in recent months? (Themes 1 and 2) (Or, we have been told the most important event in this community in recent years is... Do you agree? Why or why?) How did you hear about? What was the most trusted source of information about the event? Where and how is information about events in your community most actively exchanged and discussed?

   Community gathering places (e.g. barbershops, mosques, tea houses, hamams, Juma Prayer, etc.)

   Mobile phone, TV, Radio, Internet (Note: Find out how they access it: by computer at home, via a friend, via internet cafe, via mobile, etc.) Email,

   Social Media, (Note: ask detailed questions of those who use social media and what kinds) Web-based News outlets,

   Searches, and kind of search engines are available.

4. What kinds of topics or news items does your community have insufficient information about and you wish there was better quality and more reliable information available? (Themes 1 and 3) Why is it insufficient? How could it be most effectively provided?

5. What sources of media and information people here dislike or distrust and why? (Theme 2) (Note: You may have to specify for what kinds of information.) local, national, regional and national.

6. Over the past 14 years what are the greatest improvements in the media? (Themes 3 and 4) What are the worse elements or the greatest disappointments?
7. Looking for information: If ... (Theme 3)
   a. ...you needed information about a government service (use different specific examples) where would you go? Have you ever done this and what happened?
   b. ...you wanted the government to do something, like to solve a major problem or to build a road, clinic, well or school, what would you do and who would you approach? Would you, why or why not? Have you? What happened?
   c. ...the government were to announce a new policy or program, how would they do it? Are there examples?

8. How do you know if what you hear or see is accurate? (Theme 2) How can you check whether it is trustworthy?

9. When was the last time you got news or information that was important to you or your community but you questioned whether it was true? (Themes 2 and 3) Examples.

10. Group ranking exercise: What is the most important source of information or news? (Note: the purpose of this activity is not to reach consensus but to record the dynamics of debate.) (Theme 3)

11. Who are the best informed people in your community about local affairs? Why are they so well informed? (Theme 2)

12. Do you know what the Internet is? (Theme 4) Explain. Who in your community has access to it?

13. Would you and for what kinds of issues or information would you ask a young person, who is educated with Internet access? (Theme 4)

14. What are mobile phones used for? When was the last time someone urgently needed a mobile phone? What was it use it for? (Theme 4)

15. How can your need for better information be most effectively met? (Theme 3)
Annex 3: Key Informant Interview Guide for General Information Consumers

Introduction: Understanding Life Circumstances

Can you tell us about a typical day?

What do you do for work and during free time? What other obligations influence your day?

Who do you talk with on a daily basis? What are your typical conversations like?

(Probe for: Amount of time spent, conversations had, information exchanged.)

Where do you go on a typical day? What about in a week?

(Probe for: Amount of time spent, conversations had, information exchanged.)

Part 2: Understanding Needs

1. Information about your family:
   - Do you live with your family? Do you have family that live outside this community? How do you get information from them, about their health, weddings or funerals, or just to say hello? How often do you communicate?
   - When was the last time you really needed to get information to or from someone in your family? What was it? What did you do?
   - Who is the best-informed person in your family about affairs in your community? About political or medical issues? Why are they better informed?

2. What is the most significant event to occur in your community in recent years?
   - How or from who did you hear about it?
   - What did you learn about it? What did you do? Who did you speak to?
   - How did it affect you? Who did you speak to confirm or explain the event? (Clearly identify the community you intend.)

3. What are your main ways to find about:
   - Community events (Note: Try using an example)
   - National events (Note: Try using an example)
   - World affairs (Note: Try using an example)
   - Healthcare (Note: Try using an example)
   - Education (Note: Try using an example)
   - Your profession or occupation (e.g. farming tools and techniques, or market prices for different goods, etc.)
   - Elections and political processes

4. What kinds of topics or news items do feel you have insufficient information about and why is that information not available?
5. What topics do you have sufficient information about, and even have too much of?

**Part 3: Understanding Access**

1. **What are your most valued and important sources for reliable, news, and information?**
   - It could be news media and/or people.
   - Which do you rely on more?
   - Probe for: Reliance on media sources (eg. radio, TV, internet, newspapers, etc.) versus people (friends, family members, community leaders, village leaders, teachers, doctors, etc.)

2. **Did you hear about:**
   - the recent protest march in Kabul (“Zabul 7” on Nov 11)?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
     - What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?
   - the earthquake in northern Afghanistan (on Oct 26)?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
     - What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?
   - the exodus of Afghan refugees to Europe?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
     - What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?

3. **What could be done to make information about events like these more available?**
   - Probe for: Whether they thought the news was believable. Why or why not?

4. **What are the main limits to greater access?** Money, electricity, education, availability, insurgency, trust, etc? Explain

**Part 4: Understanding Trust**

1. **How do you know if what you hear or read is accurate?**
   - How do you check to see if it is accurate? Give an example
   - (Probe for what is done to verify information is trustworthy.)

2. **What sources of media and information do you distrust and why?** List specific examples of sources and ask about trust and distrust.

3. **What sources of media and information do you trust and why?** (Probe for why trusted and distrusted.)
4. With your research managers come up with a list of 5 popular media sources in each community, (eg Tolo, local sources, BBC or VOA, etc) and probe for why distrusted and trusted.

Who in your community do you trust for information about important issues?
   • You don’t have to name them but what are their roles or positions?
   • Why do you trust them?

Part 5: Understanding Flow (Emphasis on Governance and Civil Society)

1. What people and sources do you follow or consult to monitor insecurity, corruption, and (un)employment?

2. If you needed information about a government service or action where would you go?
   • Have you ever done this? Give an example.

3. If you wanted the government to do something - build a road, clinic, well or school, apprehend a criminal, stop a corrupt official - what would you do and who would you approach?
   • Have you ever done this? Give an example.

4. Ask about government programs or projects in the area.
   (Identify with research supervisors 1 or 2 in the area to ask about consistently.)
   • What do you know about it?
   • How did you learn?
   • Were you ever consulted about it?
   • Do think you are well informed?
   • Is it or does it appear the program a success or failure?

ARTIFACT: Take photos or pick up common advertisements, brochures, or takes photos of places where information is being passed, or government programs in the area.

5. What kind of educational, health or occupational programming is most needed?
   • Do you have thoughts about how they could be made more effectively available?

Part 6: Understanding New Media and Technologies

(Note - Often the specific questions will emerge from the responses in the quantitative survey. Here you seek more qualitative and wide-ranging background. Appropriate questions will vary substantially from location to location and person to person. Similar questions will be asked of tech-savvy youth and key influencers)

1. What new forms of media and technology have become available to you in recent years?
   • How do you get access to them? How did you learn to use them?
   • What are the main sources that you use? Which do you trust and distrust?
   • What do use them for? What positive, or negative, influences have they had on your life?

2. What media sources do feel you need, but don’t have access to? How might or could you get access to them?
Part 7: Understanding Change

1. What media is deemed “off limits”, problematic or offensive because of cultural or Islamic values?
   • Which ones are shunned?
   • Which ones are widely consumed anyway?
   • Who accesses them and how?
   • Who tries to police their use and how?

2. Do you think more could be done to emphasize achievements and progress? Is it needed? How and what should be done? Explain.

3. Are there examples of a media source or story, or some information that instigated a positive, meaningful change in your life or community? Explain.

4. Are there examples where a form of media or media story instigated a negative, harmful change in your life or community that was based in a lie or manipulation? Explain.

Part 8A: For Key Influencers

(Note – These questions may overlap with those for youth, the tech-savvy and, especially in Kabul, for cultural, political and media experts)

1. Where do you get your information?
   (Probe for: Sources that ordinary citizens may not have access to.)
   • When did you start having access to this information source?
   • What do you use this source for?
   • Who do you share it with?

2. What are the reasons for which people typically come to you for assistance?
   • How do you deal with these requests you get from others?
   • What are the factors that would impact how you treated a particular issue or person?

3. Do you think different forms of locally available media are driven by particular political agendas and powerful actors? (Use examples) If yes, explain. If no, what is there purpose?

4. What do you think the biggest threat to free independent media in Afghanistan is? Is the media you use primarily for entertainment, education, information, political analysis or commercial purposes?

5. What are the main changes and challenges that have occurred to the media since the NUG took office or as a result of the withdrawal of international troops?

6. What useful roles can media play in bridging the gap between rural communities, civil society, and the national or local governments? Explain and give examples if possible.

7. What are examples of clashes between cultural values and types of media/info consumed?

8. Is trust in the media increasing and decreasing? Why?
Part 8B: For Youth and Educated, Urban, Tech-savvy People
(Note – These questions are more likely to be a focus of people in Microyan and, to a lesser extent, Herat.)

1. How have the ways in which you get information changed in recent years? (Probe for: Technology usage and habits.)
   - What are your uses of [the technology they have mentioned in quantitative survey and above]?
   - How does it make your life easier?
   - What are the shortcomings to using [technology]?
   - How have the ways in which you get information changed over time? (Probe for: Technology usage and habits.)

2. How do you communicate with your family? With friends? With classmates? Work colleagues?
   - When was the last time you communicated with each one of these groups?
   - What was the reason for the interaction? Can you describe it for us?

3. Do you know what a mobile phone app is?
   - Which do you use?
   - Can you imagine an app that would be most useful to you, or most useful in Afghanistan today?

4. Do you think that youth can influence their families and communities? How?

5. Do you think that educated tech-savvy can influence others? How? Who?
   This is likely follow up to media channels mentioned earlier on.
   - What kind of radio shows / TV programs / websites do you like? Why?
   - What kind do you dislike? Why?
   - What are the ways in which you access and share information using your radio / TV / website / mobile?
   - When did you start using this tool? Why do you keep using this tool? (Probe for: Use of person-to-person SMS, radio call-in shows, SMS subscription, preferred websites, social networking sites, etc)

6. Are there groups that send out unsolicited advertisements or information?
   - How do they do this?
   - What are your thoughts about these ads or messages that you then receive? (Probe for: Political parties sending out SMS messages or other examples, and respondent’s views on these.)

7. How do you respond when you receive an SMS from someone you don’t know personally?
   - How do you decide whether or not to respond?
   - Can you tell me about the last time this happened?
   - How frequently does this happen?
8. Are there any risks or challenges associated with using technology?
   • Can you describe these to me? How do they impact your access to or usage of radio / TV /
     website / mobile?

9. Has anyone in your community encountered any difficulties or threats as a result of using technology?
   • What happened? How were they using technology, and what were the problems that arose?
   • Who was opposing their usage?
   • How has this impacted other members of the community?
   • Is this a common occurrence?
Annex 4: Key Informant Interview Guide for Influencers

Introduction: Understanding Life Circumstances

Can you tell us about a typical day?

What do you do for work and during free time? What other obligations influence your day?

Who do you talk with on a daily basis? What are your typical conversations like?

(Probe for: Amount of time spent, conversations had, information exchanged.)

Where do you go on a typical day? What about in a week?

(Probe for: Amount of time spent, conversations had, information exchanged.)

There are 7 sections in the questionnaire. You do not have to cover all the sections but do cover at least 4 sections – the most relevant one for the respondent (you can ask him what he prefers to talk about)

Part 1: Understanding Needs

1. Information about your family:
   - Do you live with your family? Do you have family that live outside this community? How do you get information from them, about their health, weddings or funerals, or just to say hello? How often do you communicate?
   - When was the last time you really needed to get information to or from someone in your family? What was it? What did you do?
   - Who is the best-informed person in your family about affairs in your community? About political or medical issues? Why are they better informed?

2. What is the most significant event to occur in your community in recent years?
   - How or from who did you hear about it?
   - What did you learn about it? What did you do? Who did you speak to?
   - How did it affect you? Who did you speak to confirm or explain the event? (Clearly identify the community you intend.)

3. What are your main ways to find about:
   - Community events (Note: Try using an example)
   - National events (Note: Try using an example)
   - World affairs (Note: Try using an example)
   - Healthcare (Note: Try using an example)
   - Education (Note: Try using an example)
   - Your profession or occupation (e.g. farming tools and techniques, or market prices for different goods, etc.)
   - Elections and political processes
4. What kinds of topics or news items do feel you have insufficient information about and why is that information not available?

5. What topics do you have sufficient information about, and even have too much of?

**Part 2: Questions for Key Influencers**

(Note – These questions may overlap with those for youth, the tech-savvy and, especially in Kabul, for cultural, political and media experts)

1. Where do you get your information from?
   (Probe for: Sources that ordinary citizens may not have access to.)
   - When did you start having access to this information source?
   - What do you use this source for?
   - Who do you share it with?

2. What are the reasons for which people typically come to you for assistance?
   - How do you deal with these requests you get from others?
   - What are the factors that would impact how you treated a particular issue or person?

3. Do you think different forms of locally available media are driven by particular political agendas and powerful actors? (Use examples) If yes, explain. If no, what is there purpose?

4. What do you think the biggest threat to free independent media in Afghanistan is? Is the media you use primarily for entertainment, education, information, political analysis or commercial purposes?

5. What are the main changes and challenges that have occurred to the media since the NUG took office or as a result of the withdrawal of international troops?

6. What useful roles can media play in bridging the gap between rural communities, civil society, and the national or local governments? Explain and give examples if possible.

7. What are examples of clashes between cultural values and types of media/info consumed?

8. Is trust in the media increasing and decreasing? Why?

**Part 3: Understanding Access**

1. What are your most valued and important sources for reliable, news, and information?
   - It could be news media and/or people.
   - Which do you rely on more?
   - Probe for: Reliance on media sources (eg. radio, TV, internet, newspapers, etc) versus people (friends, family members, community leaders, village leaders, teachers, doctors, etc.)

2. Did you hear about:
   - the recent protest march in Kabul (“Zabul 7” on Nov 11)?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
• What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?
  o the earthquake in northern Afghanistan (on Oct 26)?
    • How did you first hear about it?
    • What did you hear about it?
    • What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?
  o the exodus of Afghan refugees to Europe?
    • How did you first hear about it?
    • What did you hear about it?
    • What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?

3. What could be done to make information about events like these more available?
   • Probe for: Whether they thought the news was believable. Why or why not?

4. What are the main limits to greater access?
   Money, electricity, education, availability, insurgency, trust, etc? Explain

Part 4: Understanding Trust

1. How do you know if what you hear or read is accurate?
   • How do you check to see if it is accurate? Give an example
   • (Probe for: what is done to verify information is trustworthy.)

2. What sources of media and information do you distrust and why? List specific examples of sources and ask about trust and distrust.

3. What sources of media and information do you trust and why? (Probe for: why trusted and distrusted.)

4. With your research managers come up with a list of 5 popular media sources in each community, (eg Tolo, local sources, BBC or VOA, etc) and probe for why distrusted and trusted.

Who in your community do you trust for information about important issues?
   • You don’t have to name them but what are their roles or positions?
   • Why do you trust them?

Part 5: Understanding Flow (Emphasis on Governance and Civil Society)

1. What people and sources do you follow or consult to monitor insecurity, corruption, and (un)employment?

2. If you needed information about a government service or action where would you go?
   • Have you ever done this? Give an example.

3. If you wanted the government to do something - build a road, clinic, well or school, apprehend a criminal, stop a corrupt official - what would you do and who would you approach?
   • Have you ever done this? Give an example.
4. Ask about government programs or projects in the area. (Identify with research supervisors 1 or 2 in the area to ask about consistently.)
   • What do you know about it?
   • How did you learn?
   • Were you ever consulted about it?
   • Do you think you are well informed?
   • Is it or does it appear the program a success or failure?

**ARTIFACT:** Take photos or pick up common advertisements, brochures, or take photos of places where information is being passed, or government programs in the area.

5. What kind of educational, health or occupational programming is most needed?
   • Do you have thoughts about how they could be made more effectively available?

**Part 6: Understanding New Media and Technologies**

(Note - Often the specific questions will emerge from the responses in the quantitative survey. Here you seek more qualitative and wide-ranging background. Appropriate questions will vary substantially from location to location and person to person. Similar questions will be asked of tech-savvy youth and key influencers)

1. What new forms of media and technology have become available to you in recent years?
   • How do you get access to them? How did you learn to use them?
   • What are the main sources that you use? Which do you trust and distrust?
   • What do you use them for? What positive, or negative, influences have they had on your life?

2. What media sources do you feel you need, but don’t have access to? How might or could you get access to them?

**Part 7: Understanding Change**

1. What media is deemed “off limits”, problematic or offensive because of cultural or Islamic values?
   • Which ones are shunned?
   • Which ones are widely consumed anyway?
   • Who accesses them and how?
   • Who tries to police their use and how?

2. Do you think more could be done to emphasize achievements and progress? Is it needed? How and what should be done? Explain.

3. Are there examples of a media source or story, or some information that instigated a positive, meaningful change in your life or community? Explain.

4. Are there examples where a form of media or media story instigated a negative, harmful change in your life or community that was based in a lie or manipulation? Explain.
Annex 5: Key Informant Interview Guide for Youth/Tech Savvy People

Introduction: Understanding Life Circumstances

Can you tell us about a typical day?

What do you do for work and during free time? What other obligations influence your day?
Who do you talk with on a daily basis? What are your typical conversations like?

(Probe for: Amount of time spent, conversations had, information exchanged.)

Where do you go on a typical day? What about in a week?

(Probe for: Amount of time spent, conversations had, information exchanged.)

There are 7 sections in the questionnaire. You do not have to cover all the sections but do cover at least 4 sections – the most relevant one for the respondent (you can ask him what he prefers to talk about)

Part 1: Understanding Needs

1. Information about your family:
   
   • Do you live with your family? Do you have family that live outside this community? How do you get information from them, about their health, weddings or funerals, or just to say hello? How often do you communicate?

   • When was the last time you really needed to get information to or from someone in your family? What was it? What did you do?

   • Who is the best-informed person in your family about affairs in your community? About political or medical issues? Why are they better informed?

2. What is the most significant event to occur in your community in recent years?
   
   • How or from who did you hear about it?

   • What did you learn about it? What did you do? Who did you speak to?

   • How did it affect you? Who did you speak to confirm or explain the event?
   
   (Clearly identify the community you intend.)

3. What are your main ways to find about:
   
   • Community events (Note: Try using an example)

   • National events (Note: Try using an example)

   • World affairs (Note: Try using an example)

   • Healthcare (Note: Try using an example)

   • Education (Note: Try using an example)

   • Your profession or occupation (e.g. farming tools and techniques, or market prices for different goods, etc.)

   • Elections and political processes
4. What kinds of topics or news items do feel you have insufficient information about and why is that information not available?

5. What topics do you have sufficient information about, and even have too much of?

Part 2: Key Questions for Tech Savvy People / Youth
(Note – These questions are more likely to be a focus of people in Microyan and, to a lesser extent, Herat.)

1. How have the ways in which you get information changed in recent years?  
   (Probe for: Technology usage and habits.)
   • What are your uses of [the technology they have mentioned in quantitative survey and above]?
   • How does it make your life easier?
   • What are the shortcomings to using [technology]?
   • How have the ways in which you get information changed over time?  
   (Probe for: Technology usage and habits.)

2. How do you communicate with your family? With friends? With classmates? Work colleagues?  
   • When was the last time you communicated with each one of these groups?
   • What was the reason for the interaction? Can you describe it for us?

3. Do you know what a mobile phone app is?  
   • Which do you use?
   • Can you imagine an app that would be most useful to you, or most useful in Afghanistan today?

4. Do you think that youth can influence their families and communities?  How?  

5. Do you think that educated tech-savvy can influence others? How? Who?  
   This is likely follow up to media channels mentioned earlier on.
   • What kind of radio shows / TV programs / websites do you like? Why?
   • What kind do you dislike? Why?
   • What are the ways in which you access and share information using your radio / TV / website / mobile?
   • When did you start using this tool? Why do you keep using this tool?  
   (Probe for: Use of person-to-person SMS, radio call-in shows, SMS subscription, preferred websites, social networking sites, etc)

6. Are there groups that send out unsolicited advertisements or information?  
   • How do they do this?
   • What are your thoughts about these ads or messages that you then receive?  (Probe for: Political parties sending out SMS messages or other examples, and respondent’s views on these.)

7. How do you respond when you receive an SMS from someone you don’t know personally?  
   • How do you decide whether or not to respond?
Can you tell me about the last time this happened?

How frequently does this happen?

8. Are there any risks or challenges associated with using technology?
   - Can you describe these to me? How do they impact your access to or usage of radio / TV /
     website / mobile?

9. Has anyone in your community encountered any difficulties or threats as a result of using technology?
   - What happened? How were they using technology, and what were the problems that arose?
   - Who was opposing their usage?
   - How has this impacted other members of the community?
   - Is this a common occurrence?

Part 3: Understanding Access

1. What are your most valued and important sources for reliable, news, and information?
   - It could be news media and/or people.
   - Which do you rely on more?
   - Probe for: Reliance on media sources (eg. radio, TV, internet, newspapers, etc.) versus people
     (friends, family members, community leaders, village leaders, teachers, doctors, etc.)

2. Did you hear about:
   - the recent protest march in Kabul (“Zabul 7” on Nov 11)?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
     - What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?
   - the earthquake in northern Afghanistan (on Oct 26)?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
     - What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?
   - the exodus of Afghan refugees to Europe?
     - How did you first hear about it?
     - What did you hear about it?
     - What did you do? Does and how does (or did) it influence you?

3. What could be done to make information about events like these more available?
   - Probe for: Whether they thought the news was believable. Why or why not?

4. What are the main limits to greater access? Money, electricity, education, availability, insurgency, trust,
   etc? Explain
Part 4: Understanding Trust

1. How do you know if what you hear or read is accurate?
   • How do you check to see if it is accurate? Give an example
   • (Probe for: what is done to verify information is trustworthy.)

2. What sources of media and information do you distrust and why? List specific examples of sources and ask about trust and distrust.

3. What sources of media and information do you trust and why? (Probe for: why trusted and distrusted.)

4. With your research managers come up with a list of 5 popular media sources in each community, (eg. Tolo, local sources, BBC or VOA, etc) and probe for why distrusted and trusted.
   • Who in your community do you trust for information about important issues?
   • You don’t have to name them but what are their roles or positions?
   • Why do you trust them?

Part 5: Understanding Flow (Emphasis on Governance and Civil Society)

1. What people and sources do you follow or consult to monitor insecurity, corruption, and (un)employment?

2. If you needed information about a government service or action where would you go?
   • Have you ever done this? Give an example.

3. If you wanted the government to do something - build a road, clinic, well or school, apprehend a criminal, stop a corrupt official - what would you do and who would you approach?
   • Have you ever done this? Give an example.

4. Ask about government programs or projects in the area.
   (Identify with research supervisors 1 or 2 in the area to ask about consistently.)
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1. What new forms of media and technology have become available to you in recent years?
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Annex 6: Mini-ethnographic Research Guides

A. Understanding How People Act: 3 Lives

Drawing from amongst the best key informant interviews, people identified in focus groups discussions, and a deep pre-existing knowledge of the community, the research team will select an individual for a sustained mini-ethnography per location. Semi-structured in-depth interviews about information and media practices will be combined with life history to consider the roles of information - both available and unavailable - in life decisions, community resilience and responses to national events.

Goal – 3 mini-ethnographies, one per location, involving an in-depth analysis of an individual and their niche in information ecosystems.

A 4 to 6-hour period of ethnographic observation of 3 individuals (one per province) will include shadowing and a transect walk observing and discussing information access, use and dynamics in situ. The result will be a sustained case study of individuals with attention to their communication experiences, practices, needs, and information niche in relationships with a family's, community's and the national information ecosystem.

The field-researcher must design hand drawn maps, record audio files, take photographs, collect artifacts and observation reports. This will contribute to the case studies of individuals as we explore the role, flow and blockages of information in their successes and struggles, and consider local sources of resilience in evolving socio-political and economic circumstances. At this early stage we envision a homemaker, security worker, and an unemployed, educated youth as desired backgrounds to be targeted, but the final decision will be determined based on the suitability of people identified in the field.

B. Understanding How People Act: Transect Walks

Goal – A transect walk with the individual focused upon for a mini-ethnographic case study, with two additional transect walks conducted, 1 per week, for each location.

How To: Do a Transect Walk

1. Identify a suitable candidate: Ideally someone with some face recognition in the area that the walk is conducted, friendly, talkative and analytic.
2. Based on what you know about the area and our research interests prepare some preliminary research questions and topics.
3. Before embarking, draw a map of the route and discuss where you going and why.
4. Ideally a recording devise in the pocket of the respondent. Test the recording before leaving.
5. Ask your respondent to discuss where you go, what you see, and the people you meet, with attention to how the needs and flow of information.
C. Understand How People Act: Shadowing

Shadowing is similar to a transect walk but less focused on understanding information flow in a community and more focused on an individual’s information practices in daily life. “Shadowing” involves following people as they conduct daily tasks to understand why they do what they do, and factors that influence their thinking or behavior.

Goal: 1 shadowing exercise per week per researcher, to be conducted as someone is doing an activity related to getting information or communicating with others.

How To: “Shadow” Somebody

1. Ask KII/FGD respondents whether you might be able to follow them as they are conducting a certain activity, as that will help you better understand daily life in that area.
2. As you are shadowing them, ask respondents to “think out loud” when they are doing any activity to help you understand their thinking process and why they might do certain things.
3. Take notes on what they are doing, and why they say they are doing it.
4. Note down anything that surprises you about the reasons they choose to do things they way they do.
5. Add your own analysis and interpretation in your notes, based on your observations.
6. Take pictures.
7. Are there any interesting patterns in people’s behaviour?
9. Is there any about the environment that make it useful for getting information and what the other activities take place?
10. What types of communications materials can we see in the environment?
11. What appears to motivate the discussion?
Annex 7: Short Survey – Respondent Index Form

Name of interviewer___________________________________   Date _________________________

Name (or ID number) of interviewee ____________________________________________________

Place _______________________________________________________________________________

Instructions:
1. After interview, fill in this form based on interview findings and ask or confirm the questions that remain.
2. During the interview, write down in your notes many of the answers as they occur.
3. At the end of every day, make sure all the information for this interview is clearly organized.

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<td>A1</td>
<td>Location: Home</td>
<td>Where is your place of birth? (village, district, province)</td>
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<td>B1</td>
<td>Location: Current</td>
<td>Where do you currently live? (village, district, province)</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>[researcher fill out]</td>
<td>Male Female</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>How old are you? (Age in Years)</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>What is your ethnic and tribal background?</td>
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<td>H1</td>
<td>Language Speak</td>
<td>What is your mother tongue?</td>
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<td>H2</td>
<td>Language read</td>
<td>What languages, if any, can you read?</td>
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<td>H3</td>
<td>Language speak</td>
<td>What other languages, if any, do you understand?</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Radio: Frequency</td>
<td>In general, how frequently do you listen to the radio?</td>
<td>1. Every hour 2. Two to three times a day 3. Once a day 4. Two to three times a week 5. Once a week 6. Less Often 7. Never / Do not listen to radio 8. Refused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Radio: Ownership</td>
<td>How do you and your family typically listen to the radio? (Circle all that apply.)</td>
<td>1. Own our own radio 2. Listen to the radio on my mobile phone 3. Listen to the radio on my family’s mobile phone 4. Use someone else’s radio when we need it 5. Not Applicable / Do not listen to radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>TV: Frequency</td>
<td>In general, how frequently do you watch the TV?</td>
<td>1. Every hour 2. Two to three times a day 3. Once a day 4. Two to three times a week 5. Once a week 6. Less Often 7. Never / Do not watch TV 8. Refused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>TV: Ownership</td>
<td>Do you or your family own your own TV, or do you use someone else’s TV?</td>
<td>1. Own our own TV 2. Use someone else’s TV when we need it 3. Not Applicable / Do not watch TV</td>
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5. Wealthy: We can mostly afford to buy most non-essential goods we want, such as TV sets, brand name clothing.  
6. Very Wealthy: We can afford to buy whatever we want.
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| M3 | TV: Usage      | What information do you get from TV? (Circle all that apply.)            | 1. News about my community  
2. News about Afghanistan  
3. News about the world  
4. Entertainment (eg. music, radio dramas)  
5. Information to help me in my day-to-day life (eg. information about critical services)  
6. Religious information  
7. Political information  
8. Other _____________  
9. Not Applicable / Do not watch TV |
| N1 | Mobile: Frequency* | In general, how frequently do you use a mobile phone?                  | 1. Every hour  
2. Two to three times a day  
3. Once a day  
4. Two to three times a week  
5. Once a week  
6. Less Often  
7. Never / Do not use mobile  
8. Refused |
| N2 | Mobile: Ownership * | Do you own your own mobile phone, or do you use someone else’s? If so, what kind? | 1. Own my own mobile phone  
   a) Basic phone  
   b) Feature phone  
   c) Smart phone  
2. Use someone else’s mobile phone when I need it  
3. Not Applicable / Do not use mobile phone |
| N3 | Mobile: Who Uses* | Do you use the mobile yourself, or does some else help you?             | 1. Myself  
2. Someone else  
   a) Spouse  
   b) Son  
   c) Daughter  
   d) Friend  
   e) Other  
3. Not Applicable / Do not use mobile phone |
| N4 | Mobile: Usage*  | What do you do with your mobile phone? (Circle all that apply.)         | 1. Make phone calls  
2. Receive phone calls  
3. Sends SMS  
4. Receives SMS  
5. Listens to radio  
6. Listen to music  
7. Uses the internet  
8. Take pictures |
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<td>N6</td>
<td>Mobile: Costs*</td>
<td>In a typical week, how much do you spend on mobile phone credit? (Afs)</td>
<td>9. Watches videos 10. Other 11. Not Applicable / Do not use mobile phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O1</td>
<td>Internet: Frequency</td>
<td>In general, how frequently do you use the internet?</td>
<td>1. A few times a day 2. Once a day 3. Two to three times a week 4. Once a week 5. Less Often 6. Never / Do not use internet 7. Refused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O4</td>
<td>Internet: Costs</td>
<td>In a typical month, how much money do you spend to use the internet? (Afs)</td>
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