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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SNAPSHOT

# Promoting Civil Society through TV

### Support to commercial TV helps promote civil society



A journalist from Kandahar's Hewad TV interviews a local man about the province's economic struggles.

***“Voice of the People is a valuable program. It's in the local language, and nice to see that the station is inviting authorities [so people can] share the problems with him/her without any censorship.” -Roqiya Abdal, Kandahar***

*Voice of the People* was a 24-episode series that brought the views and questions of regular Kandaharis to their government and civil society leaders. Hewad Television produced the show with USAID support as part of the Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP). The Kandahar-based television channel recorded a series of interviews on topics relevant to local citizens. The show highlighted stories of everyday hardships, such as widespread unemployment and the violation of women's rights (two episodes were dedicated solely to women), but also featured more entertaining features on local sports and culture.

Hewad TV placed an emphasis on fostering two-way dialogue between leaders and their constituents. Government officials and prominent civil society activists had the opportunity to directly respond to citizens' concerns, resulting in a lively debate not only via television but across social media as well: Hewad's Facebook page regularly received an average of 40 comments on each episode.

Engaging media and civil society through television helps bring important civic debates to Afghans through regional and national networks. Supporting TV stations' coverage of civil society and issues important to citizens helps provide Afghans with alternative views, and helps them hold local government accountable. This type of media support is particularly important in an environment in which these shows are still not as commercially viable as a soap opera or music videos.

Two other outlets – Setare-e-Sahar TV (SSRTV) in Balkh and Lapis/Tolo in Kabul – produced similar programs, also supported by ACEP. SSRTV broadcast its own *Voice of the People* in Mazar-e-Sharif, complete with vox pop interviews and responses from government officials. It also broadcast a companion two-part drama series on corruption in the government. Lapis/Tolo's *Everywhere with the People* aired feature stories from provinces around Afghanistan on society and civic life.

Underlying all of these shows was a commitment to allowing viewers to learn more about civil society, issues of local debate, and how they can take part in change across Afghanistan.

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