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AFGHANISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Radio Programs Promote Responsive, Transparent, and Accountable Municipal Government



The new Mayor of Chaghcharan using local radio to introduce his plans for the city



Photo: RAMP UP West

The Farah Construction Manager live 'on air' asking citizens to keep construction materials off city streets

"I heard a municipal official talking about drains on the radio. I and other shopkeepers had a problem with our local drains so I called the radio station and reported it. The next day municipal staff came to un-block the drains!"

**Mohammad Ashraf,
Farah shopkeeper**

Telling Our Story

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Municipalities in the Western Region recognize more and more that improving services requires gaining the support and cooperation of citizens. One aspect of this involves providing better information about municipal activities. As urban populations grow, the effectiveness of informal social networks and traditional outreach through Wakil-e-Guzars (sub-district leaders) dissipates. This forces municipalities to seek new more innovative communication strategies.

USAID, through its RAMP UP West (RU-W) project, supported the municipalities of Chaghcharan, Farah, Herat and Qala-e-Naw to develop a strategic communications plan to improve communication and outreach. Using mass media to communicate with citizens became a central element of this plan.

Municipalities surveyed their local media landscape and identified radio as the most cost effective way to reach citizens. Municipalities then identified the topics where citizen involvement would have the greatest impact: business registration, paying Safayi, the city master plan, greenery, Wakil-e-Gozar elections, city cleanliness, parking and solid waste management.

A local media company and each municipality scripted and recorded a 10 minute comic drama for each topic. The use of local companies and local actors meant the dramas included local accents and reflected local concerns and attitudes. Each municipality identified a popular local radio station and, over the course of three months, broadcast all 10 half hour shows led by the comic drama, followed by a live phone-in and discussion of the topic featuring a municipal official.

Most callers asked questions or requested information based on the week's topic. Some callers offered complaints. In Farah, Mohammad Ashraf, a resident of sub-district #3, called to complain about blocked drains in the Shah Bazaar. The next day, Juma Khan the Head of the Solid Waste Management Department visited the area and shortly thereafter municipal staff cleaned these drains.

Some calls highlighted examples of corruption. In Qala-e-Naw, a caller reported that municipal staff charged citizens an inflated business registration fee and pocketed the difference. The Revenue Manager responded by confirming the genuine rates and asked citizens to continue reporting any corruption. As a further step, the Mayor published his direct number in the monthly municipal magazine and asked citizens to report corruption directly to him.

These examples demonstrate that, by improving transparency and enabling citizens to directly interact with their representatives, citizens will ask for information, hold municipal officials accountable and demand better services.

The programs proved popular with local radio and municipal officials. Radio stations re-broadcast the comic dramas and welcomed further topics and introduced on air new Mayors in Chaghcharan, Farah, and Qala-e-Naw. In Qala-e-Naw, the local radio station hosted a program to introduce municipal business and property registration free of charge.

In response to this success, all four municipalities have allocated funds in next year's budget for radio programs and will soon design new programs.