

Communication for stabilisation in southern Afghanistan

## Annex 5: Survey of media use by Pashtun diaspora in Dubai

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**Media** support

# Survey of media use by Pashtun diaspora in Dubai

## Introduction

**This report was researched by MSPA country Director, Dr Mohammad Akbar, during a five day trip to Dubai where he spoke to a number of Afghan and Pakistani Pashtuns living and working in Dubai. A list of those interviewed is at the end of this section of the report. The results presented below address Dr Akbar's terms of reference, but are inevitably impressionistic as no detailed population survey was carried out. However, the insights gained give, we believe, a useful impression of media use and opinion forming mechanisms amongst Pashtuns in Dubai.**

### 1. Media preferences:

News accessed mainly from TV and radio stations (According to some around 20 F.M. radio stations operate in UAE). However among Pakistani audience TV is the main source of information, especially TV channels such as Geo News (Urdu News Channel), ARY Digital News (Urdu) and to a lesser extent: Aljazeera, BBC World and CNN.

Radio on the other hand is the most popular source of news and current affairs for Afghan Pashtuns. When it comes to news and reliability of the news, BBC (Pashto) and Radio Free Afghanistan (Pashto) are still the main sources. However Pakistani Pashtuns listen to BBC Urdu as the most tuned in to news programme (less to Pashto) and to Voice of America (most probably Dewa radio)

'Call in' programmes: Almost nil, as Pashtuns do not participate in the call in discussions in those radio programmes, which are not in Pashto.

There are no Pashto music or feature programmes on local FM radios and no Pashto radio drama is ever broadcast over these stations. Mr. Ehsan Shirpao of Kings Productions Company who works closely with Urdu TV channel ATV, indicated he is ready to deliver Pashto radio drama to local F.M. stations and he thinks there is also a good popular demand for it. He said radio stations will not ask for air-time fee in this case and possibly they may be willing to pay for a good radio product in Pashto.

### 2. Media :

No Pashto Newspaper or Magazine is published in Dubai. Two main reasons:

- Less literate people among Pashtuns in Dubai
- Those who are literate mostly come from Pakistan, who are likely to, preferring to read in Urdu
- Demand for Publications in Pashto is high, among Pashtuns from Afghanistan, but not so high among Pakistani Pashtuns.

There are no Pashto Radio or TV stations either. Pashto films are no longer shown at the local cinemas in Dubai. There are hundreds of cinema houses, with an average capacity of about 60 seats. Most of these houses show films from Bollywood, English films and Arabic films. Bollywood films are the most popular among uneducated Pashtuns and the 'drivers' category. English films are most popular among the new generation of young Pashtuns who are studying in higher learning institutes and universities in UAE. Among the same group Bollywood films are much less popular. They rarely go to cinema and watch mostly DVDs.

**3. Music preferences:**

- Pashto and Indian music is generally popular; however some young Pashtuns prefer to listen to English music. Arabic music is less popular. All kind of Pashto music is listened to, but the choice depends mostly on age group and education. People from older generation are more interested in folk music, while for younger generation Nazia Iqbal, Haroon Baadshah and Zeek Afridi are more attractive.
- Most Pashtuns love to listen to Pashto music. Audio cassettes are still popular among taxi drivers. Different Pashtun communities have different popular singers, e.g. Fareshta (female), Nazia Iqbal (Female), Saima Naz (female), Shahensha (male), Azim Khan (male), Haroon Baadshah (Male) and Takar (male singer) are popular among Pakistani Pashtuns, while Naghma (female) and Muqury (Male) are popular among Afghan Pashtuns.
- Musical shows are popular and almost every two months there is a musical show organized by a show biz company, attracting large audiences (2000-2500 per show). These shows and musical concerts are held for one day in Dubai and one day in Abu Dhabi. According to Mr. Shirpao the tickets for such shows are sold at a higher price of 50-100 DHs. The DVD films of such concerts have a good market, about 500 of such DVDs are sold within few days of the show. These shows are not purely musical, but also have comedy slots and poetry. Usually good promotion is done for such shows through colorful pamphlets. These shows may also be organized on special occasions like the Independent days of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Any such show tries to have some representation of Pashtun artists from either side of the line to be able to attract Afghans as well as Pakistani audience.

**4. Demand for Pashto FM Radio station:**

- Highest level of demand for a Pashto FM radio station exists among taxi drivers, many of whom are Pashtuns from Pakistan, mostly from the tribal areas. (However, no statistics are available. Pakistani embassy in Dubai may have figures).
- Reasonable demand for Pashto radio was noted among middle class Pashtuns such as businessmen who live with their families in UAE, journalists, and community leaders.
- There is less demand for radio station from shopkeepers and small businessmen.

**5. Advertising trends**

- Pashtuns place adverts on TV stations that have audiences back in UAE or Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Examples: Alakozai Tea, Pamir shampoo and Pir Baba Motor Oil Company, giving their adverts to AVT Khyber, Shamshad and Tolo group.) However, according to Mr. Ehsan Shirpao of the Kings Production company, Pashtun business community is promoting their businesses much less than any other business community in UAE. Probably because they are less sophisticated in marketing.

Indian companies trading in UAE target Pashtun consumers and place adverts to convince them to buy their products. Some examples: Adverts targeting Pashtuns for Leon Tea- Produced by Choitram, adverts for Tapal tea, rainbow milk, motor oil etc.

## 6. Associations and literary societies:

- There is not a literary society established by Pashtuns, but every one I spoke to, thought it will be an excellent idea to have literary circles and evenings with combined programmes of music and poetry.
- There are many individual poets there, but not connected to each other or to a literary circle. I met Mr. Latif, from Dir district in NWFP, who writes in simple and popular language and has an extraordinary memory, as he recited to me at least 5 of his long poems! Here is a couplet from one of his poems, in which he complains of the high prices of telephone calls from UAE to his wife:

Gule pa miasht au pa haftho baa aos khabare kawoo  
*(Oh my love- now we have to talk once a week or once a month)*  
 Masaparee shwa pa neto baa us khabare kawoo  
*(In spite of being far away from home, and in spite of all my desire to talk,*  
*- I still have to fix the date for each conversation and decide when we could talk.)*

Da nimo shpo keese kho lare haltha pathe showle  
*(The stories of meeting each other at mid nights are left behind)*

Daltha da lmar pa rakhatho baa aos khabare kawoo  
*(Here we could only talk when the sun rises*  
*as the phone rates at the start of the day are cheaper in UAE than any other time of the day)*

- There are no youth associations there, but a number of community associations exist. Almost every UAE state has an association of Pakistani Pashtuns and there is an association of Afghan Pashtuns in Alain (headed by Haji Abdul Samad).
- Abdul Nabi Bangash, an active member of ANP (Awami National Party of Pakistan) is the Head of Pakistani Pashtun Association and Mr. Abdul Ghafar, who comes from SWAT valley in North West Frontier Province is the Deputy Head.
- UAE law doesn't allow for the formation of any kind of union or association, but still Pashtuns have established at least half a dozen of such associations, in addition to professional unions, such as the Union of Pashtun Transporters, headed by Mr. Jadoon from Swabi in NWFP. These associations are pretty influential and provide a lot of community services, including fundraising if a member from the community dies (up to Rs. 1.6 -2.00 Million could be raised to help the family of the deceased. Two members of the association then take the dead body back to its home town and these costs are also raised from members of the association.) This is a very beneficial system; as such incidents among other ethnic groups in UAE are not less than a disaster for the family and friends of the deceased person. On most such occasions members of other communities have no choice but to beg on road side to meet the expenses.
- These associations may be an attempt to replace close tribal links for Pashtuns in UAE, however most are not based on mere tribal relation but are rather an indication of a sense of Pashtunwali and the Pashtun customs of supporting each other while abroad.

**7. Statistics on Pashtun Population:**

- No statistics are available on the exact numbers of Pakistani Pashtuns in UAE, however, most people that I spoke to were of the opinion that Pashtuns may comprise 60% of the total number of Pakistanis working or settled in UAE. Again, there are different accounts of the total number of Pakistanis in UAE. Two hundred fifty thousand to 350,000 would be more realistic estimate of the total number of Pakistani Pashtuns (who have a valid UAE visa and work permit), which according to Mr. Abdul Ghafar, Deputy Head of Pashtun Union of Dubai, is approximately composed of the following percentage of Pashtuns from different areas of NWFP and Baluchistan:
- The common view was that 50% may be Pashtuns from tribal belt and southern NWFP. 40% are Pashtuns from Peshawar, Swat, Dir, Mardan and Swabi (i.e. the northern areas of NWFP) and another 10% may be Pashtuns from Baluchistan.

**In total there may be around one hundred thousand of Afghan Pashtuns currently working in UAE.**

**8. Literacy rates:**

- Again, no reliable statistics available on the total literacy rate among Pashtuns, but a very modest and cautious estimate puts it as low as 8% of the total Pashtun community. This is a similar picture of literacy as estimates from south eastern Afghanistan and tribal areas in Pakistan. However, the number of literate and educated Pashtuns is on the rise, as now there is ever increasing number of the young generation of Pashtuns whom are brought up in UAE, attending schools, colleges and universities. On the other hand the number of Pashtun doctors in UAE hospitals is on increase, as there is a growing demand for doctors able to speak Pashto.

**9. Professional categories:**

- Job wise most Pashtuns from Baluchistan and Afghanistan are busy with small businesses in the form of a retail shop in traditional Dubai markets. People from tribal areas work in transport industry (There are five taxi companies in UAE; one has 5000 drivers employed and this one is owned by the son of Sheikh Mohammad of Dubai. Four other companies have each 1800 drivers as employees and Pashtun drivers make up about 50% of the drivers in these taxi companies). Some are manual workers and laborours in the construction industry.
- Rich Pashtuns are entering slowly but loudly in the real estate and construction sector. I was invited to a presentation on Emirates City Tower being constructed in New Ajman by R Holdings, owned by Sheikh Rashid Bin Humaid Al Nuami with an estimated cost of 15 Billion UAE Dirham (around \$3 Billion). Pashtuns from NWFP and tribal areas (such as Mr. Khyal Khan Orakzai, and two other businessmen-a Shinwari and an Afridi) are the main investors in the building. The presentation encouraged fellow Pashtuns in Dubai to invest in the tower by joining the list for the first time buyers. In itself this was a unique and a very modern way for promoting business among Pashtuns.

**10. Amount of money sent home:**

- The amount of monthly remittance sent by Pashtuns in UAE back to their homes is between 500 to 7,000 UAE Dirham, an average of say 2,000 each. If the above figure of 350,000 as the total number of Pakistani Pashtuns is accepted. This give us a total figure of the monthly remittance of 700, 000, 000 UAE Dirham or more than US \$192 million per month. Annually in this way Pashtuns send US \$ 2.3 billion back home.
- Most of the money sent back home is by money merchants rather than by bank or Western Union. (Illiteracy, unfamiliarity with banking system, filling complicated forms and waiting in long queues in the banks or western Union counters, in addition to the huge transfer fee by Western Union, are the reasons why Pashtuns prefer to send money through money remitters or what they call hondai)

**11. They learn it the easy way:**

- Most Pashtuns learn about the rules from their fellows and andeewals (house mates) in the bachelors' residential house or Dera. Dera is a kind of training school for newly arrived Pashtuns either from Pakistan or Afghanistan. It is also a good example of Pashtun commune, where at least 10-15 people share, two to three bedroom houses with a single kitchen and a single bath. These places are smelly, congested; dirty and unhealthy. This shows how difficult it is to be an uneducated manual worker in UAE. Here they talk, share information, share the same food and contribute towards a common monthly budget for expenses. Here they also know about labour rules, government rules, visits to health clinics, traffic rules etc.
- Another source of information for Pakistani Pashtuns is the Urdu newspapers, which publish information on any new rule introduced in UAE that affects the life of overseas workers. One example of such a rule that affects workers life (most of whom are bachelors) is a new rule by Dubai government asking all single men to leave the city and move to Dubai's industrial area. Afghan bakers who are mostly living as bachelors found this rule very unfair and approached a photo journalist in an English daily newspaper to see if he could help. This also demonstrates the importance of printing a Pashto daily in UAE for the Pashtun community there, which will give them easy access to information in their own language.
- Radio is the other main source of information on a wider range of subjects including news from their areas. As mentioned, there is no local radio station for Pashtuns living in Dubai. If this gap were filled it would help especially low paid Pashtun workers by reducing for them the burden of hard work and being far away from their homes.

**12. Occasions and places for social gathering:**

- Usual occasions for gathering are Fridays, Eid holidays, National days, wedding ceremonies, personal invitations and funerals (mostly close friends, relatives or members of association gather).
- Fridays' gatherings are more common and happen in the main city grounds in Sharja and Dubai known as Rola. Here, not only Pashtuns, but people from different overseas communities gather. Pashtuns chat, play some of their traditional games and hold tournaments for Makha (using arrows and bows-main players are people from Sawabi and Bunir NWFP-from Yusufzai's tribe- the largest tribe of Pashtuns on the other side of Durand line). During most of these gatherings serious issues such as politics are not discussed, but personal problems are discussed, especially those related to life or rules and regulations in workplace and advice is sought.
- Mosques are well attended but there is a ban on political content in sermons. There is no indication of Saudi influence on the Afghan ulema who are usually from the north of the country (Takhar and Badakhshan).

**13. Happy and Satisfied?**

- Money wise most Pashtuns have no problem, but still they don't think they are happy or satisfied. Being away from home and family was cited as the main reason by many for their unhappiness and dissatisfaction, when I spoke to them.

**14. Educational trend:**

- There are 8-10% of Pashtuns settled in Dubai along with their families. They send their children (girls as well as boys - in fact more girls than boys, as the boys may start work sooner) to schools (many to private schools, colleges and universities). Most schools are up to the level of colleges i.e. equivalent to FA and FSC levels in Pakistan. It was indicated to me that there are 2 private Pakistani schools in Dubai and one each in Sharja, Ajman, Al Ain, Ras al Khaima and Abu Dhabi. Most of the students prefer computer studies, while finance, MBA, medicine and engineering are other, but less common choices.
- Younger generation loves English music or modern Pashto music, uses internet, most English web sites by Pakistani Pashtuns and Pashto/English web sites by Afghan Pashtuns. Watching English and Indian films or playing computer games are other forms of entertainments. These students also visit their friends, frequently from other Asian or Middle Eastern communities.

**15. Visits back home:**

- The number of visits home depend on which socio-economic class that one belongs to. UAE's Pashtuns come from three types of economic backgrounds. Roughly 8-9% belong to business community, who may visit Pakistan or Afghanistan every 2-3 months. Those coming from the office workers class like managers, project officers on construction sites, engineers, doctors or others with similar jobs, would be able to pay a visit once every year and the largest class that is comprised of laborours are only able to go once every second or third year.

**16. Use of mobile telephones:**

- Mobile telephones are extensively used, by children as little as 7-8 years old and those elder than this. These are used for messages as well as calls. In UAE most mobiles are used for calls and less often for messages. These mobiles are also used to send jokes to friends and cousins in Pakistan. The messages are sent more from Pakistan to UAE, rather than the other way round. This is also the case with telephone calls, as the call rate in Pakistan is cheaper than that in Dubai, where only one company (Etesalat) has the monopoly.
- Mobile phones are also used for passing on the breaking news or finding out about the situation in their home town after a suicide attack or bomb blast or any fighting incident. (Two examples are Dara Adam Khil fighting and suicide attack in Makan bagh Swat. In both cases mobile calls were used more than mobile messages.)

**17. Worried about the situation back home:**

Every one that I met was worried about the situation back in their area. The worry was greatest when talking to people from the tribal belt, Swat and Parachinar. No one was thinking what the Taleban does is correct or according to Islam, but there was equally no sympathy towards Americans. People on several occasions told me that there is some kind of global conspiracy against Pashtuns, as it is only the Pashtun land which has been changed in to a battle ground for the war against terror, whether it is in Afghanistan or in Pakistan, the same story played on two neighboring stages.

- Some saw the situation in Pakistan as the spillover of the Afghan situation and were saying that neighboring countries have a hand in the deteriorating situation in Pakistan (meaning India and Afghanistan) most people, like Mr. Abdul Ghafar-Deputy Head of Pashtun Association in Dubai - were also blaming President Musharaf as responsible for bringing war to Pashtun areas and for the rising tide of terror and Islamic fundamentalism. They saw the solution only in Musharaf leaving office, Pakistani army evacuating the tribal area and Swat and the re-instatement of traditional Jirga, while others were more interested in introducing multiparty democratic system to the tribal areas even if this costs them their traditional jirga structure. There were also those who wanted some kind of negotiation with Taleban in Pakistan (Qari Mahmood-Ex Provincial Minister of from NWFP).
- On Afghan side, people were either indifferent to the politics in Kabul, which they believe is not representing them, or were not trusting though to share their real views. But **generally the feeling was that a settlement has to be negotiated with Taleban.**

**18. Participation in General election:**

No voting facility was provided to Pakistanis in UAE (including Pashtun voters) to participate in the general election on 18th February 2008. They said that previously such facilities were provided by the local embassy.

Some Afghans were saying that they do not expect a government to provide them voting facility in future, which ignored millions of refuges in Iran and Pakistan, to vote during the first parliamentary election after decades of war in the country.

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