

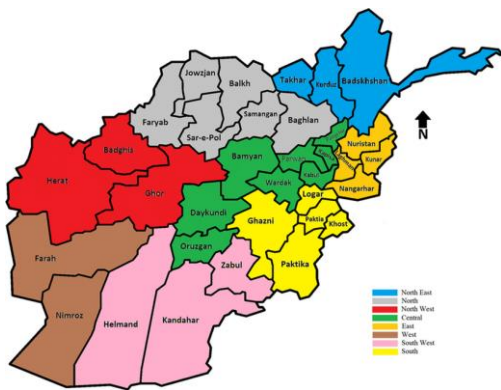


USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

Strengthening Women-Owned Radio Stations

The USAID Afghanistan Support Program strengthens civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and journalists, helping them protect and advance basic rights and freedoms.



USAID/ASP

Radio X broadcasts programs discussing women's rights to work and to an education from an Islamic perspective.

“We run a lot of call-in programs because the audience likes them, and we get to hear their opinions and concerns. With solar panels and batteries, our signal reaches across the province and even beyond. We get male and female callers from everywhere.”

Imagine, if you can, a local radio station in a remote part of Afghanistan. Its equipment is aging, and staff are either volunteers or earn so little that they may as well be volunteers. Electricity is intermittent; their internet is spotty and most days mobile data flows like molasses. Not only that, but they have a strict, conservative local government operating under the extremist de facto authorities. Each day they walk a tightrope, trying to deliver critical information to a needy audience spread across the province and beyond while simultaneously not drawing the ire of the de facto authorities. Finally -- as if more challenges were needed -- the radio station is owned and managed by a woman, focuses on women’s issues, and has a largely female target audience in a country where women’s voices are being harshly silenced, and their public presence extinguished.

This is the reality of Radio X, a woman-led radio station in Afghanistan, owned and managed for years by a brave and experienced female journalist who made the decision in August 2021 to continue her life’s work in the face of incredible challenges. *“We haven’t stopped broadcasting despite all the problems,”* says the director, who is not identified her to protect her safety. Surrounded by her small team, which includes young women and men, she explains how they have cleverly managed the relationship with the authorities. *“In fact, we speak with them often. We don’t engage with the ones at the top, but through people at the Ministry level, and we get along ok.”* Radio X is one of several radio stations assisted through USAID’s Afghanistan Support Program (ASP) with a rapid response grant, training, and mentoring.

USAID ASP has trained six journalists from Radio X on critical topics, including digital safety, digital media literacy, lifeline communications, and editorial essentials. The journalists have learned how to provide accurate and impartial news and information to the public, build and retain trust and credibility with their audiences, and manage their online business safely. The journalists also received mentoring and coaching support to help them produce quality content and programs. The director is clear that this support is incredibly important for Radio X. *“Since the return of the de facto authorities, the advertising market has collapsed, and without this help, it would be so hard to continue.”*

Furthermore, USAID/ASP provided Radio X with desperately needed equipment, including laptops, sound recorders, printers, enhanced internet connections, and more. *“This was really important. We often had to leave the station at night just to find a way to print something, and for our female staff, that is scary and potentially dangerous,”* says the director. Along with office and radio equipment, Radio X has received funding for solar panels and storage batteries, which allowed the station to broadcast for up to 16 hours a day as Afghanistan’s power grid continues to be unreliable.

USAID assistance is keeping Radio X on air when it might otherwise have been silenced, and they are determined to carry on, reaching women across the province with vital news and information and having those voices heard by others.