Annual Conference of MPS - AFG

MEDIA SYSTEM IN AFGHANISTAN: Catalyst of Collapse or Social Change?

Lectures, panels, discussion of/by Researchers, experts, journalists, activists, politicians, etc.

07-08 DEC 2023

Leipzig University + Online

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG
Forschungszentrum Entwicklungskommunikation – Communication for Social Change

VolkswagenStiftung

Navigating the intricacies of media development in fragile states presents a pressing challenge that demands multifaceted exploration. With this imperative, our interdisciplinary conference, scheduled for 7th and 8th December 2023 at Leipzig University and organized by the Centre Communication for Social Change, aims to serve as a collaborative platform. The event will engage academics, policymakers, and media professionals in nuanced discussions about the complex evolution of media systems in fragile states, focusing particularly on Afghanistan.

The development of the media system and the emergence of public spheres in Afghanistan can be described by several interdependent factors. On the one hand, processes of social transformation and democratization can be observed. On the other hand, the liberalization of the media market has led to a fragmentation of public spheres, which correlates with an increased fragility of social and state structures. Topics will discuss the consequences of media liberalization in Afghanistan, a nation characterized by deep ethnic and religious divisions and limited state authority. The conference will also scrutinize the role and influence of external paradigms in Media Development Cooperation (MDC) on Afghanistan's media structures. A critical assessment will be conducted to ascertain whether external strategies primarily lead to expanding media outlets or, indeed, foster a qualitatively diverse media landscape.

By leveraging insights from Afghanistan scholars, journalists, and policymakers, the conference aims to enrich the European discourse on Afghanistan and deliver a substantive contribution to the field of communication studies.

Questions of Conference:

1. What role has the media system in Afghanistan potentially played in the collapse of the state?

2. How can media systems in fragile states promote social change without exacerbating public fragmentation?

3. To what extent have Media Development Cooperations (MDCs) integrated local knowledge into their approaches?

The conference consists of three parts:

1. At the macro level, we will discuss the structure of the Afghanistan media system, how media governance in Afghanistan has emerged and functioned, and what problems it has had.

2. At the meso level, we will critically discuss media laws and procedures and their strengths and weaknesses.

3. We will examine stakeholders' roles on a micro level, including those who support and challenge the media.

PROGRAM

DAY 1 — 7.12.2023

10:00 - 10:10
Prof. Dr. Patrick Donges
Dr. Kafajat Hamidi
Dr. Daniel Grabić
Welcome and Presentation of the programme MPS-AFG

10:10 - 10:50
Keynote: Prof. Dr. Carola Richter (FU Berlin)
Media Systems beyond the West

10:50 - 11:30
Keynote: Dr. Timor Sharan, Author of Inside Afghanistan & Former Senior Policy Analyst CrisisGroup
Charting Afghanistan's Path Forward: An Exploration of Political, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems

11:30 - 12:10
Keynote: Barry Salaam, Senior Program Officer for Afghanistan at USIP
Afghanistan Media Under Taliban: Challenges and Opportunities

12:10 - 13:30
Break

13:30 - 15:00
1st Panel (English)
Media System of Afghanistan: How was/is it structured?
Moderator: Hazrat Bahar
Guests:
1. Prof. Wazhmah Osman
2. Prof. Abdul Qahar Jawad
3. Lotfullah Najafizada

15:00 - 15:30
Break (Coffee and cake)

15:30 - 17:00
2nd Panel (English)
Media Laws and Procedures in Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Analysis from 2001 to Taliban Takeover
Moderator: Hamid Obaidi
Guests:
1. Mujeeb Khalwatger
2. Said Jafar Rastin
3. Farida Naikzad

20:00
Dinner

DAY 2 – 8.12.2023

10:00 - 10:10
Dr. Kefajat Hamidi
Dr. Daniel Grabić

10:10 - 11:40
3rd Panel (English)
The Role of Women in Media Leadership
Moderator: Laili Habib
Guests:
1. Najeeba Ayobi
2. Murtaza Meraj
3. Zahra Nader

11:40 - 12:00
Farewell
EC4SC

SESSION: KEYNOTES

Keynote 1# Media Systems beyond the West

Prof. Dr. Carola Richter (Freie Universität Berlin)

Media systems are often described and analyzed by using criteria developed in the Western hemisphere. However, applying these models and criteria to non-Western countries like Afghanistan often lead to unsatisfactory results. Using media systems in the Arab world as starting points, this key note shares some ideas on how to conduct meaningful media system analysis beyond the West.

Keynote 2# Charting Afghanistan's Path Forward: An Exploration of Political, Administrative, and Fiscal Systems

Dr. Timor Sharan

Drawing upon the invaluable lessons gleaned from two decades of tumultuous democratisation experiences in the Islamic Republic and the failure of past political systems, I will discuss the quest for the most appropriate political, administrative, and fiscal systems tailored to Afghanistan's unique needs. With a focus on nation-building objectives, enhancing national cohesion among Afghanistan's diverse micro-societies, and empowering communities in the decision-making process, I will discuss the political and technical trade-offs and complexities within these systems. Moreover, I will examine how the future political and administrative system can facilitate economic growth and employment opportunities. This talk seeks to provide not only an analysis of what is achievable but also offers valuable insights

into the pathway forward for Afghanistan. Building upon my extensive professional background acquired during my tenure at the Independent Directorate of Local Governance for the Islamic Republic and drawing insights from diverse contexts, I aim to illuminate the strategic path that can lead Afghanistan towards a future characterised by greater stability and prosperity.

Keynote 3# Afghanistan Media Under Taliban: Challenges and Opportunities

Barry Salaam

In his keynote speech, Barry Salaam will explore Afghanistan's independent media under Taliban rule. He'll discuss the media's struggle with scrutiny and censorship, yet its ability to continue as a semi-autonomous institution, upholding its past legacy of informing, educating, and advocating for the people.

SESSION: PANELS

Panel 1# Media System of Afghanistan: How was/is it structured?

Chair: Dr. Hazrat Bahar

Guests:

1. Prof. Wazhmah Osman, Filmmaker and Associate Professor at the Klein College of Media and Communication at Temple University;
2. Prof. Abdul Qahar Jawad, Professor at the Communication and Journalism School of Kabul University
3. Lotfullah Najafizada, an Afghan Journalist and Co-founder of Amu TV

After the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001, media in Afghanistan witnessed unprecedented developments. The Constitution (2004) and media law (2009) founded a relatively free foundation. Hundreds of media outlets owned by various actors emerged. It was 'generously' supported by the international community. How was the system developed and structured regarding ownership, model, political parallelism, audience, and donors? What role did the system play in the past two decades?

Panel 2# Media Laws and Procedures in Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Analysis from 2001 to Taliban Takeover

Chair: Hamid Obaidi

Guests:

1. Sayed Jafer Rasteen: Former Director of Publications for the Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan
2. Mujeeb Khalwatger: Former Director of Nai (Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan)
3. Farida Naikzad: Founder of Center for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists in Afghanistan

This discussion panel examines the development of media laws and procedures in Afghanistan between 2001 and August 2021, after the Taliban regime's fall and its recent takeover of the country. The primary inquiry revolves around the changes in media laws and procedures after the Taliban's fall and how these changes affected the media landscape.

What were the key milestones and challenges in developing media laws and procedures during this period, and how did they shape the media environment in Afghanistan?

In light of the recent Taliban takeover, what are the immediate and long-term implications for media laws and procedures in Afghanistan, and what challenges do journalists and media organizations face under the new regime?

Panel 3# The Role of Women in Media Leadership

Chair: **Laily Habib**
Guests:

1. Murtaza Meraj: Program Officer for Media and Communications, Open Society

2. Najeeba Ayobi: Former Director of Khalid Radio

3. Zahra Nader: Chief Editor of Zan Times

The third panel will critically examine the role of women in media leadership and management in Afghanistan. According to various reports, the presence of women in the decision-making levels of the media has been insufficient or symbolic, even though it has been identified as a key objective by the international community.

Although the role of women in the decision-making levels of the media tended to be subordinate, some media outlets in Afghanistan were nonetheless run by women. In this discussion, we will ask the guests: Has it been possible for women to achieve leadership positions in the media? What obstacles have women faced in the media? The discussion will also look at the removal of women from the media after the fall of the Afghan government and the prospects for women working in the media.