

Afghanistan: Nov '07

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IWPR trainees snapped up by local, national and international media.

When IWPR set up its Journalism Training and Reporting Programme in Lashkar Gah, Helmand province, in January, 2007, the media scene was quite sleepy.

There were a few state journalists who turned up for press conferences, dutifully recorded what the government official had to say, and then went away.

Alternative viewpoints were few and far between.

All of that has changed over the past year. Lashkar Gah now has a dedicated pool of professional reporters who are being eagerly sought after by local, national, and international media. Through their efforts, news about Helmand is making headlines all over the world.

Two IWPR trainees, Aziz Ahmad Shafe and Aziz Ahmad Tassal, made a risky but productive trip into Taliban stronghold Musa Qala, bringing back some of the best footage that has been taken from that small, beleaguered town. Together with two colleagues, they have provided film and photos to the BBC, Al Jazeera, the Canadian Broadcasting Company, as well as to Ariana Television in Afghanistan.

Photos that appeared on the IWPR website were further syndicated to Afghan national newspapers, and appeared in the Kabul Weekly and the Afghanistan Times, among others. A Canadian publisher has indicated an interest in running a series of IWPR stories, based on the **Musa Qala coverage**.

Ahmad Naweed Nazari, an IWPR trainee, is now working for Shamsad TV, a national non-governmental station. In addition, he produces a weekly radio call-in show for Helmand Radio and Television, sponsored by IWPR. His newly acquired technical skills are now being used to bring listeners of HRT some of the most progressive programming on air.

The first call-in show, on the poppy problem, brought dozens of calls into the studio, which were answered by a panel of experts. What started out as a stilted, formal presentation ended up as a lively debate. As a result, the head of HRT overcame his initial reluctance to have live call-in shows, and agreed to a weekly programme. This will help give the people of Helmand province a forum in which to voice their concerns, and a chance to ask their government for answers.

Matiullah Minapal, who recently became an IWPR staff reporter, has been approached by Noor Television, another private national channel, and asked to provide news and information for their programmes as well.

Matiullah has an investigative reporter's flair, and has uncovered several stories that would otherwise have been buried. It was his insistence that produced coverage of a possible massacre by foreign and Afghan troops in southern Helmand, a story that is still causing shock waves in Afghanistan and abroad.

Other trainees have helped to revitalise the print sector: several are assisting in a new Helmand monthly, Sistan, and others provide material for Bost, a monthly publication that covers Helmand, Kandahar, Kabul and Quetta.

IWPR provided the training and the impetus for these developments, but the real achievement belongs to the courageous reporters who are gathering information in the face of almost unimaginable odds.

Location: [Afghanistan](#)

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