

# Research Summary

## Encouraging peace and good governance through the media in Nepal



*“I think Sajha Sawal represents the people rather than the media.”*

Female, 18-25 years, rural listener, Banke

*“When I see ordinary people talk in the programme I feel motivated and it gives me confidence that I can also speak in public.”*

Female, 46+ years, rural listener, Surkhet

### Summary

- BBC Media Action’s *Sajha Sawal* (Common Questions) is funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID). It was launched in 2007 and has an audience of 5.8 million adults – nearly one in three adults in Nepal.
- The programme has been successful at increasing levels of civic knowledge and political engagement and action amongst its audience.
- Audience research and anecdotal evidence shows that *Sajha Sawal* has been effective in holding Nepal’s government to account.
- The main strengths of *Sajha Sawal* are its inclusiveness and unbiased nature, which should be maintained in subsequent shows.

### Context

Nepal is a federal republic with a multi-party system. According to Freedom House, Nepal scores low on accountability and public voice, civil liberties, rule of law, anti-corruption and transparency.<sup>1</sup> The quality of government was undermined by a lack of coherence, disagreement and constant meetings which did not result in decisions or action. The constitution is still being written and the initial deadline for a constitution of 27 May 2012 was not met. In this context, *Sajha Sawal* has provided a forum to people in Nepal to hold government officials to account. The programme was broadcast on both TV and radio platforms to reach a wide audience. Radio penetration is 93% and TV penetration 74% in Nepal, with radio a more popular medium in rural areas and TV in urban.

### The project

Since 2007, *Sajha Sawal*, a 45-minute weekly programme, has been bringing different political leaders and government officials before a live audience to answer questions. The project aimed to create an impact across different levels of Nepal’s society: the general audience, practitioners, and at organisational and systemic levels. Therefore, along with national broadcasts of *Sajha Sawal* on TV and radio, the project also included building the capacity of local radio stations and enhancing the journalists’ skills.

### Research methodology

To understand the impact of *Sajha Sawal* across various levels in society, BBC Media Action commissioned audience research (qualitative focus groups and a quantitative survey with 4,000 audience members) and interviewed journalists and managers from partner radio stations and key informants of society i.e. public figures and NGO representatives.

### Findings at audience level

- Strong reach: nearly one in three adults (15-65 years) in Nepal have watched or listened to *Sajha Sawal* which equates to 5.8 million viewers or listeners.

<sup>1</sup>Freedom House: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/search/Nepal>

- High engagement: the majority of listeners (75%) and viewers (64%) watch or listen to the programme regularly (at least twice a month) and more than half of the audience has discussed the programme with others.
- Relevance and lack of bias: *Sajha Sawal* was seen to represent the public's views and provide an equal opportunity to the audience and to panellists to voice their opinion.
- Increased civic knowledge, political engagement and action: Those exposed to the programme were more likely to report that it is their right to have a say in how a country is run (86% of those exposed agree, compared to 65% of non-exposed; 69% intended to vote in the next general election compared to 59% who had not seen or heard the programme).
- Impact irrespective of attitude towards governance: Further analysis showed that there are three different groups of people in Nepal based on their attitude towards political process: 'aware and involved' (40% of people fall under this); 'aware but uninvolved' (41%); and 'uninterested' (19%). Within each of these three groups, those who were exposed to the programme had higher levels of civic knowledge and propensity to be involved in public action, than those who were not exposed.
- Using both TV and radio has a larger impact: Audiences exposed to *Sajha Sawal* through both TV and radio display significantly higher scores on impact measures than those exposed to just one medium. Radio and television are considered to be more reliable sources of information than newspapers (radio is trusted more by rural and minority communities, and TV more by urban).
- Appetite for more follow up: Although *Sajha Sawal* was largely seen as the best political discussion show in the country, audiences want it to do more to follow up with politicians over time to enhance accountability.

### Findings at practitioner and organisation level

- Effective training for media professionals: almost all the journalists felt that learning through practice rather than only through classroom training was the most effective part of the training. The journalists and managers said the training helped them learn about the importance of work division and teamwork as well as effective communication between teams.

### Findings at system level

- In-depth interviews with public figures, media professionals and NGO representatives revealed that they felt *Sajha Sawal* encourages political leaders to be responsible for their actions. Important anecdotal evidence also included: a letter from the current prime minister of Nepal to BBC Media Action expressing his appreciation of the role the programme plays in raising relevant issues; stories of local impact such as a decision to reopen a school post-strikes after the issue was discussed on the radio; and a letter from the Department of Roads documenting how the programme had helped them to avoid communal violence.

### Implications

- Future media development initiatives should use TV and radio and avoid use of newspapers
- Radio should be used to increase reach within rural areas and minority communities, as radio shows higher penetration amongst these communities
- Cross-marketing of the programme on TV and radio could help improve its impact
- The inclusiveness (covering all relevant issues) and unbiased nature (giving equal importance to audience and panellists) of *Sajha Sawal* content is liked by its audience and should be maintained in the subsequent shows.
- Most respondents felt the programme should initiate a follow-up programme where the panellists can be re-invited to explain their actions on commitments.
- Partner organisations require further training in business development skills in order to be more effective in seeking and securing sponsors and ensuring that the programmes continue running successfully.

### Contact

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