Afghan Media in 2010

Priority District Report

Saydabad (Wardak)

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1 Introduction

1.1 District profile

Saydabad district is located in southeast Wardak province, at an average altitude of 2,400m. It is a large district covering an area of 1,151km^2 split into six areas (*hawza*), including Ownkhy, Shash Gaw, Shniz, Saydabad, Shikh Abad, and Tangai. It borders Logar province to the east, Jaghato and Chak districts of Wardak province to the west and northwest, Nirkh district (Wardak) to the north, and Ghazni province to the south.

The provincial center is not in Saydabad district, but in Maidan Shahr. However, more than one-fifth of the population of Wardak province lives in Saydabad[1]. Saydabad is approximately 75km from Kabul and 50km from Maidan Shahar.

Figure 1: Map of Saydabad district

The district's population is estimated at 114,793 spread over 173 villages[2], including Salar (population 2,689), Otari (2,418), Sultan Kheil (2,368), and Mahro (2,200) (CSO 2005 figures, which are likely to have increased in recent years). The population is 100% Pashtun, and Pashto is the primary language, although 80% of the population also understands Dari.

Saydabad's economy is weak, with approximately two-thirds of the population unemployed. The main source of income is laboring in the surrounding provinces and Iran, where people go for extended periods of time, sending remittances to their families. The average monthly

[1] UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile, 2003.
[2] Central Statistical Organization (CSO) household listings, 2005.

income of a typical family in Saydabad is $100. Winters are long and the growing season short, and only a single crop of wheat is therefore possible. Farmers of Wardak province grow maize, onion, potatoes, rice, and alfalfa. Wardak province is famous for its fruits, including apples and apricots; much of this is exported to neighboring countries. Milk cows, sheep, goats, and chickens play an important role in the daily diet; since there is no market, however, the number of these animals is low.

The majority of the population of Saydabad does not have access to clean water, instead using hand pumps. There is no hospital in the district, only two Comprehensive Health Centers and six Basic Health Centers. There are six high schools, including one high school for girls, six primary schools, seven secondary schools, and fifteen or sixteen *madrassas*.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is developing the bazaar in the district. There is a development *shura* (council), but this is currently inactive; apparently, the traditional *shura* was dismantled for fear of insurgents. The government controls only the district center.

1.2 Methodology

A total of 12 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted, with 9 community leaders, 2 journalists, and 1 outlet manager. The community leaders included *maliks* (village chiefs) and government officials. KIIs were conducted in a number of villages across the district.

Additionally, 150 interviews were conducted and feed into the audience findings of this report.

2 Media landscape

Saydabad has a relatively bare media landscape, with no terrestrial TV coverage and no local publications. There are, however, three local radio stations, two of which are military. There are no video shops, no ice cream shops, and no public places showing TV or radio. There are five Public Call Offices (PCOs) and some dish antennas are visible on the roofs of houses in the district center.

2.1 Media outlets

There is no terrestrial coverage in Saydabad district (and there are no local TV channels). Eight radio stations are received, two of which are local. Five newspapers and magazines are reportedly distributed in the district, none of which are local.

2.1.1 Television

TV channels in Saydabad can be viewed only through satellite. There are no cable networks.

2.1.2 Radio

Besides the shortwave radio stations that are available throughout Afghanistan, eight radio stations are available in the district:

Name	Scope	Ownership	Frequency	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Yawali Ghag	Local	Private	94.4 FM	Saydabad	45km
Sol-e-Paigham[3]	Local	Military	95.5 FM	Sultan Kheil (Saydabad)	-
Saday-e-Sulh[4]	Local	Military	90 FM	Tangi (Saydabad)	-
Kabul RTA	National	Government	105.2 FM	Kabul	400km
BBC	National	Private	89 FM	Kabul	30km
Sada-e-Azadi	National	Military	88.5 FM	Kabul	-
VOA/Ashna	National	Private	100.5 FM	Kabul	25km
Azadi	National	Private	100 FM	Kabul	25km

Yawali Ghag

Yawali Ghag ("Voice of Unity") was the first private radio station established in Saydabad (in 2004), run by a businessman called Hazratudin (a Saydabad native), whose vision was to start a business venture and provide the population with a local station.

The outlet has a 40m antenna positioned in the center of the district, close to the governor's office. The transmitter has a power of 150W and a broadcast radius of 45km, but people in Logar province are unable to receive good quality reception because of the mountains. The station manager plans to buy a repeater and an antenna so he can increase his coverage in Logar and in western areas of the district.

The radio station broadcasts seven hours a day (7-11am and 3-6pm). Programs are 60% Pashto and 40% Dari. Programming includes educational and Islamic programs, music (14

[3] Names of military radio stations in Saydabad are constantly changing: Sol-e-Paigham has been renamed Karawan.
[4] See previous footnote: Saday-e-Sulh has been renamed Tangi.

hours a week), and news. Salam Watandar is broadcast 7-9pm every day[5]. Additional external content on governance and parliamentary news comes from the BBC, as does "New Home, New Life" (drama) and *Adalat* ("Justice"), an educational program (for a total of four hours a week). Local content is produced for a total of seven hours a week (encompassing local news, security issues, and development news). There are programs broadcast for the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), encouraging people to enroll and discouraging them from poppy cultivation. There is also an educational program produced by a non-governmental organization (NGO), Afghan Support Education and Training, called "Let's Know," which the station is paid to broadcast. There is no live programming, but listeners can call in to leave questions and feedback.

The station employs six staff, all male. Two of them work as journalists and the rest work as part of the production and support team. Staff capacity is low and training is required.

Monthly costs include salaries ($500) and electricity ($100). All funding for the station comes from advertising and from broadcasting awareness campaigns from ANA, ANP, and NGOs, generating monthly revenues to a total of $600.

Sol-e-Paigham

Sol-e-Paigham ("Peace Message") is a military station that broadcasts from a US military base in Sultan Kheil. Unfortunately, the outlet manager refused to be interviewed. The station was established in 2009 and broadcasts to only 10-15 villages close to the base. The station broadcasts 8-12pm and 4-10pm. Programming is only music and therefore is not very popular. As of September 2010, Sol-e-Paigham radio was renamed Karawan.

Saday-e-Sulh

Saday-e-Sulh is one of the numerous military stations set up by the US army under the generic name "peace media" (*sulh* in Dari and Pashto). It broadcasts from Tangi in Saydabad. As of September 2010, Saday-e-Sulh was renamed Tangi.

Others

Additionally, the following national and international radio stations are received: Kabul RTA, Watandar, the BBC, Sada-e-Azadi, Voice of America (VOA)/Ashna, and Azadi.

2.1.3 Newspapers

There are no formal distribution channels in Saydabad. Five newspapers and magazines were said to be read by the local population, including Hewad (government daily newspaper from Kabul), Killid (monthly magazine from Kabul), Sada-e-Azadi (International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) biweekly newspaper), and Irada (daily newspaper from Kabul).

[5] A few respondents in our survey mentioned Salam Watandar as an outlet independent from Yawali Ghag (when asked to mention trusted outlets in Saydabad).

2.2 New media

2.2.1 Mobile media

There are reportedly no video shops in Saydabad. A few PCOs provide ringtones and video clips.

2.2.2 Internet

There is no public access to the internet in the district and therefore there are no internet cafés. There is no access point to the District Communication Network (DCN).

2.3 Media and information actors

2.3.1 Government

Government radio stations and TV channels received in Saydabad are limited to Kabul RTA, both through satellite. There are no representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) or Bakhtar News Agency (BNA). There is one bookshop in the district center selling educational books in Dari, Pashto, and English.

2.3.2 Outlet managers and journalists

Only two journalists (working at Yawali Ghag radio) are working in the district, Mr. Ahmed Javed and Mr. Mohammad Rafiq. They have been working for the radio station for six and three years, respectively.

The two Yawali Ghag journalists specialize in news stories, local security, education, and economics, although they have never received any training in these fields. Academic training provided by journalism schools is considered insufficient for those who want to become professional journalists, and both journalists would be willing to receive training on new technologies (internet is unsurprisingly used only occasionally). Insecurity also constrains their work, in that they cannot travel to all villages within the district.

It was reported that, in order to protect the staff of the radio station and to reflect the local population's needs, the station remains independent and is not affiliated with any political group. The station manager claimed that he does not receive any pressure to censor or bias content. The biggest challenge is the quality of the transmission and the capacity of the staff. The two journalists reported limited interaction with ANA, which they contact occasionally about security or critical news. There is generally good contact with the government, *maliks* and *shura* members, as well as with people in general, "*because journalism is the tongue of people.*" No regular contact is maintained with insurgents, although they approach the station occasionally.

2.3.3 Other content providers

Sol-e-Paigham has no major content besides music. Yawali Ghag receives rather a wide range of external content, from Salam Watandar, the BBC, ANA, ANP, and an NGO called Afghan Support Education and Training.

2.3.4 Media NGOs

There is no media NGO in Saydabad.

2.3.5 Traditional information sources

As confirmed in the section below, radio is the first source of information for the local population in Saydabad. Teachers, *maliks*, *mullahs*, and other knowledgeable community members are alternative sources of information on topics such as health, agriculture, and local news. It was reported that district governors are generally not approached in the case of community problems, out of fear of the insurgents. Traditional sources of information are only accessible by men; women cannot meet with *mullahs* or *maliks* directly. Women must discuss their issues with husbands, who will then consider approaching the local community.

2.3.6 Insurgents

Insurgents distribute *shabnama* ("night letters"), contact people (including journalists) by phone, and may also visit people in their homes. Insurgent messages may threaten people against cooperating with the Americans, the government, or international NGOs.

2.3.7 Military

As mentioned above, there is only one local military radio station in Saydabad: Sol-e-Paigham. It has not been particularly successful with the district's population. There is limited interaction between the national military and local official media (i.e. Yawali Ghag), often limited to broadcasting informational campaigns.

2.3.8 Others

No other interest group was reported.

3 Audience

The following is a description of the audience in Saydabad, based on 150 cases.

3.1 Equipment and usage

3.1.1 Household equipment and media usage

In terms of equipment rate, Saydabad is below average compared with other districts in our study. TV ownership is particularly low, which is normal in the absence of terrestrial coverage. Inhabitants seem to compensate through satellite (64% own a dish antenna), in spite of the price (the average household income of the sample is $246, one of the lowest among the districts surveyed).

Figure 2: Equipment and usage

The main reasons given by the interviewees for not having a TV set were high prices and poor coverage. A total of 66% have private generators and 1% benefit from city power.

Figure 3: Reasons not to have TV

As in a few other locations, there is a major gap between TV ownership and viewership (21% and 45%). The number of people watching TV in their homes (31%) is almost the lowest among all districts. Half of the respondents (47%) rely on their relatives' houses to access TV, with a further 7% and 6% watching in friends' houses and work offices, respectively.

Printed press readership, at 13%, is disappointing, taking into account the unusually high education level of interviewees: 19% have a university degree and 30% have completed high school.

The high mobile phone equipment rate is related to the existence of different networks (AWCC, Roshan, Etisalat, and MTN cover the whole district).

Around 4% of interviewees declared using the internet, which may seem unlikely in a poor rural district. However, most interviewees gave clear answers to follow-up questions on their internet connection (consumption frequency, price and quality of the connection, internet sites visited, etc.). The socio-demographic profile of these internet users was consistent as well (young males with higher education). As for the 2% claiming internet access at home, they may have been referring to another house, belonging to relatives in the provincial center or in Kabul, for instance, at which they live for work or study.

3.1.2 Sources of information

As in other locations, radio is the primary source of information for Saydabad respondents, although its dominance on matters of religion and developmental projects is not that strong. In the case of the former, religious leaders are far more popular than the radio. For news on the latter, the audience also turns to TV and the *shura*.

Table 1: What is the most used source of information?

	No interest	*Mullah*, mosque	Newspapers	Radio	TV	*Shura*	*Khan*, *malik*, commander	#
Politics	1%	0%	0%	83%	17%	0%	0%	145
Religion	0%	61%	0%	32%	7%	0%	0%	147
Local news	0%	0%	0%	95%	4%	0%	1%	143
National news	0%	0%	0%	89%	11%	0%	0%	146
International news	0%	0%	0%	81%	19%	0%	0%	147
Development projects	0%	0%	0%	66%	20%	13%	1%	145
Movies and songs	0%	0%	0%	82%	18%	0%	0%	134

"The media is good for all information, so we have an alternative to traditional sources. People enjoy Indian, American, and Arabic films and sport. Some also watch Iranian programs, as they know the language."

3.1.3 Usage patterns

Evenings are highly preferred in terms of media usage. In the case of TV, there is almost no usage until early evening, and 78% of respondents prefer to watch between 7pm and 11pm. This is also the peak for radio listeners (78%), although listenership preferences are spread more equally over the day, with small peaks in the morning and at lunchtime.

Figure 4: Preferred times to listen to the radio

Figure 5: Preferred times to watch TV

3.2 Preferences

3.2.1 Outlets

Radio

National (Azadi) and international (BBC) stations are the most preferred. Local Yawali Ghag comes third, with 51% of the sample. Its high position probably reflects the station's well-known political independence. Next among the most popular are national stations (Kabul RTA, Ashna/Voice of America (VOA)), and provincial media broadcasting from or in neighboring areas (Sada-e-Azadi and Radio Sulh).

Figure 6: Preferred radio stations (3 choices)

Television

In this Pashto-speaking district (100% of the sample), the two most popular TV channels are those targeted at Pashtuns: Shamshad (66%) and Lemar (58%). Ariana, with its mixed languages, comes third. Dari Tolo is ranked surprisingly high (40%). Also strong, Kabul RTA is preferred more than the "local" Wardak branch of this government network.

Figure 7: Preferred TV channels (3 choices)

Printed press

Preferences regarding printed press are not as clear as in many other districts, and the top five newspapers secure similar levels of readership. Killid comes first, with 36%, followed by Hewad (29%), Azadi, and Irada (14% each).

3.2.2 Programs

TV is popular for information gathering. Among the most preferred TV programs are national (46%), local (43%), and international news. Entertainment content comes in as the second most desirable type of programming: general entertainment, drama, and music attract 46%, 27%, and 18% of responses, respectively.

About 30% interviewees expressed a lack of interest in health, music, political debates, and drama on TV.

Figure 8: Preferred TV programs (3 choices)

Unlike TV, radio programming preferences are not that unusual: news and entertainment dominate the ranking, with religion playing an important part. The only striking element is that this district has the lowest preference for hearing national news on radio among all

districts in the study. Saydabad is also the district where health radio programs are the most disliked, which could be because it has been overwhelmed by them, although this is only speculation. The sample is also the most opposed to general entertainment on the radio (each fifth respondent mentioned this type of program as the least preferred).

Figure 9: Preferred radio programs (3 choices)

3.2.3 Advertising

Saydabad's respondents are slightly more supportive of radio advertising than TV advertising: 79% respondents like radio commercials and 73% say the same about TV commercials. Overall, up to 83% of the sample finds advertisements useful, with 60% of TV users saying they are very useful. In both groups, around 60% of respondents assessed the level of advertising as appropriate. The rest felt there were too many advertisements.

Figure 10: Feelings towards commercial advertising

Saydabad's radio advertising market seems to be dominated by mobile operators: 57% of interviewees remembered these advertisements. The next most remembered are three times less remarkable (banks). On TV, the situation is different: bank trailers are remembered by 39% of viewers and mobile phone advertisements by 10%.

3.2.4 Personalities

The most mentioned personalities in Saydabad were Education Minister Farooq Wardak (21%) and writer Haseebullah Rafi (21%). President Hamed Karzai was the third most mentioned (10% of respondents).

3.3 Participation and impact

3.3.1 Comprehension

Saydabad has one of the lowest radio comprehensions rates (73% of respondents) among districts in the study. For TV and printed press, the rate is higher (78% and 75%, respectively), which means that radio is the most difficult to understand of all media. The most challenging are international news and health-related programs. The former may be broadcast in foreign languages, leading to problems, but there should not be such issues with health programs. Political debates and national news are also challenging, but not to such an extent (13-16%). Surprisingly, 18% of respondents mentioned religious content as demanding. Difficult terminology may explain this (89% of the sample). On TV, difficult terminology was the most common complaint (63%), followed by pronunciation (56%).

3.3.2 Participation

Saydabad respondents are eager to interact with radio stations (24%) more than with TV stations (10%). Major reasons for interacting with a radio outlet are to request songs (65%) and to ask about a program (47%). Passing on messages is of significance too (12%). Interaction methods are quite sophisticated: although traditional phone contact dominates (58%), text messages and interactive voice response (IVR) are also popular (15% and 21%, respectively).

Although the most popular local radio station is also the most often contacted (Yawali Ghag), the first point of contact for respondents is usually Azadi.

Figure 11: Have you ever contacted radio stations or TV channels?

3.3.3 Trust

Saydabad respondents trust the radio stations they listen to, with the trust ranking almost matching the preference ranking. The BBC is trusted by 56% of the sample, which is a very high result. The BBC is followed by another international radio station, Azadi (54%). Other stations secure lower trust levels: local Yawali Ghag was mentioned by 40% and Kabul RTA by 30%. A few respondents in the survey mentioned Salam Watandar as an outlet independent from Yawali Ghag (when asked to mention trusted outlets in Saydabad). The number of these respondents was small, but this implies that figures on trust for Yawali Ghag can be rounded up slightly so as to include perceptions of Salam Watandar.

Figure 12: Which radio stations do you trust most?

People were undecided as to whether to trust information on TV or not. Half of respondents (47%) mostly trust it. It could be said that the only trusted source of information for any topic is radio (at least two-thirds of interviewees trust it on any topic), with religion the only topic where convincing information may be obtained from another source (mosque).

Figure 13: Do you trust what you see on TV?

3.3.4 Perceptions of local media

The radio station that most people identify as their local station is Yawali Ghag, and the level of satisfaction is quite high (43% consider it good and 47% very good).

According to respondents, having local radio brings benefits to the community. It mainly means more local news (68% of respondents noted this impact). In addition, 46% mentioned more services (including public announcements). Nevertheless, local media do not change news objectivity much (17%).

3.3.5 Circulation and impact

The media is perceived as having an impact in Saydabad, although 36% of respondents think the radio brings no change to community life and only 11% said the same about the impact of the radio on private life. This is in spite of 96% of respondents claiming that radio brings new ideas quite often (often or sometimes), and that these ideas are good (97%). Radio content is discussed by 98% of the sample.

Although TV exposure is lower than radio exposure, TV's impact is more positive. TV has changed the opinions of 93% of respondents. For 94%, it has brought new ideas and for 95% these ideas are good. Results are similar to those for radio, and TV content is discussed as much as radio content is (98% of the sample).

Figure 14: Does local radio impact your community?

Figure 15: Can TV make you change your opinions?

3.3.6 Development project communication and educational campaigns

Educational campaigns can be heard on Yawali Ghag on topics such as poppy production, mother and child vaccination, and hygiene. These are perceived to be carried out by the government and the UN and, according to the key informants, have had a positive effect on behavior among the population.

3.3.7 Insurgents

The border with Pakistan seems to have exposed Saydabad to insurgency: 56% of the sample noticed their presence and 35% receive information from them. With no illegal radio station in the district, *shabnama* are the dominant form of communication (41%), although the insurgents do not avoid face-to-face meetings (11%) and also send text messages (3%). The quality of insurgent communication is reportedly good (and even very good according to 29% of respondents).

4 Conclusions and areas of opportunities

Despite its closeness to Kabul, Saydabad lags behind with respect to its media community. The district features a dearth of terrestrial channels, although this does not imply a complete absence of TV viewers in the district, as a considerable proportion of the population watches satellite TV. The presence of three local radio stations (including one private relatively popular and trusted radio station established as early as 2004) and reception of the main nationwide radio stations mean the district does not compare too poorly with other districts.

Figure 16, which classifies the districts analyzed for this study into four groups on the basis of TV usage and quality of local radio content, illustrates Saydabad's positioning in relation to the others.

Figure 16: Contextualizing the priority districts analyzed

Considering how much reception issues hinder TV ownership, installing antennas could contribute greatly to increasing TV equipment and usage rates. Given the high penetration of radio, most opportunities here are related to quality of content. Sol-e-Paigham, the military radio station, is not very popular and could increase buy-in by the local population by diversifying its content (i.e. cutting down on its music programming) and by tailoring its programming to a specific audience. If military radio stations were networked for common program production, successful external content could also be used. Indeed, Yawali Ghag's popularity confirms that richer content can represent a "quick fix" for limited listenership. This radio station could also consider using a powerful transmitter to increase its coverage, which so far seems to be limited to a few villages around the military base.

Given the proximity of Kabul and relatively high educational levels of the local population, there also seems to be room to boost readership further by supporting formal distribution of print (e.g. Nye Express).