BBC MEDIA ACTION

TRUST. DEMOCRACY. TRANSFORMED LIVES.

STRATEGY 2024-27

May 2024

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

May 2024

In 2024, BBC Media Action celebrates 25 years of delivering impact for diverse communities around the world. We are so thankful to our audiences, local partners, funders and the BBC who have been with us on this journey.

In 1999, we were established as the BBC World Service Trust to promote high-quality journalism, particularly in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and use entertaining media and drama to address social issues at scale. Today, the need to support free and independent media and to leverage storytelling as a force for good is urgent once again.

Civil society and democracy face grave threats from polarisation, disinformation and the decline of free media. People consume content and information in entirely new ways. Advancements in artificial intelligence offer enormous potential, and great risk. Tackling cross-border threats – like the climate crisis – require close collaboration and the free flow of trustworthy information.

To meet these challenges head-on, we are making three major strategic shifts, while continuing to reach at least 100 million people each year. We will sharpen our purpose to **focus on information disorder (including mis- and disinformation, and information poverty), distrust, and division**. We will expand beyond primarily running quality local programmes to also **act as a global public good, influencing the global media ecosystem** for the better. And we will **better leverage our link to the BBC, sharing its values and expertise** in ways that fit local contexts.

To maximise our impact, we will **focus on three critical areas: stronger democracies, a safer, more habitable planet, and inclusive societies**.

We will do all of this from our position at the very heart of the BBC, drawing upon the incredible skills and experience of the world's leading broadcaster, augmented by our deep local knowledge and partnerships, and our unique mix of journalists, creatives and international development experts, bound together by a common passion to make the world a better place.

Our work to bring people together, foster trust and understanding, counter mis- and disinformation and protect the right to access trustworthy information has never been more critical – particularly as we approach the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals.

With this strategy, we aim to provide a critical antidote to the "polarisation, noisy culture wars, disinformation, [and] persecution of the free press"[i] across the world, while building on our formidable track record and delivering even more impact for those who need it most.

Simon Bishop
Chief Executive Officer

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i)   BBC Director-General Tim Davie's speech, 26 March 2024

OUR PURPOSE

BBC Media Action works with partners around the world to provide impartial, impactful, trustworthy media to people in need so that they can make informed choices to transform their lives.

In a world of disinformation, distrust and division, we share the BBC's values, skills and experience to bring people together, and foster greater understanding and trust.

> **From 2024-27 we will reach 100 million people in need a year, inspiring them to learn, discuss, and take action on the important issues in their lives.**

WHO WE ARE

We are the BBC's international charity. We use media and communication to help deliver stronger democracies, a safer, more habitable planet and inclusive societies. We bring together a unique blend of journalistic, creative, research and international development expertise; deep local knowledge of our audiences in the places we work; our strong networks of local partners; and our invaluable link to the BBC and everything it stands for.

WHO WE SERVE

We exist to serve people who are most vulnerable to **information disorder (including mis- and disinformation and information poverty), division, and distrust,** with a focus on people underserved by public interest media, and at the frontline of global challenges, risks and crises. We have a particular affinity for and track record of working with young people as agents of change; they will continue to be a central focus.

WHERE WE WORK

We are working in 30 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Central Europe, and Central America and the Caribbean.

STRATEGY 2024 – 2027

We will make the following strategic shifts:

1. **A sharper, more relevant purpose:** We will narrow and deepen our purpose to focus on **information disorder**, **distrust**, and **division**.

2. **Positioning BBC Media Action as a global public good while committing to localisation and a partner-first approach in our delivery:** While continuing to deliver local projects, we will shift to acting much more as a global public good, influencing the global media ecosystem for the better.

3. **Maximising our link to the BBC:** We will leverage new opportunities to maximise our link to the BBC, sharing its values and expertise in ways that fit local contexts and benefit local partners.

Our shifts will be enabled by:

» Upskilling for an increasingly **digital** world

» Ensuring we are a **sustainable** organisation

» Continuing to strive to be a great place to work for our **people**

» Increasing efforts to generate **unrestricted (flexible) income**

WHAT WE DO

Media development
Media policy	Media content
Research
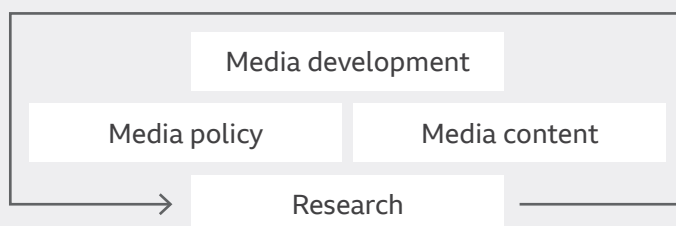
OUR IMPACT AREAS

We are committed to delivering measurable impact across these areas:

› Stronger democracies
› A safer, more habitable planet
› Inclusive societies

OUR APPROACH

› A great place to work
› Partner-first
› Committed to localisation
› Leveraging digital
› Committed to sustainability

25 YEARS OF MEASURING IMPACT

(1999-2024)

Worked in

60

countries

total income raised and used to deliver impact

£651 MILLION

over 25 years

average annual reach (since 2013):

100 – 200 MILLION

(including contributing 16-23m people per week to the BBC's global audience)

" Its ability to carve out a space for challenging programming stands in some contrast to the general decline in media freedom worldwide.**"**

| DFID (now FCDO)

In 2023-2024, BBC Media Action reached more than 100 million people around the world, working in 24 countries

In 2023-2024, BBC Media Action co-produced content in more than 50 languages

BBC Media Action is uniquely placed to deliver measurable impact through our work, which is rooted in audience metrics and advanced impact metric tools. We measure the impact of our programmes on people, communities and media ecosystems and prioritise understanding of **what brings about change**, **how** and **why**.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES – CLIMATE CHANGE – POLARISATION – POLYCRISIS – VULNERABILITY

The years 2024 and beyond will bring new levels of challenge. **Democratic decline** and **climate change** will continue to pose a critical threat to humanity, and **polarisation and social exclusion** challenge communities and the global order. There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between these macro trends and growing **information disorder** (including disinformation, misinformation and information poverty),[i] **distrust** and **division**. They are further compounded by media and communication landscapes that are increasingly characterised by fragmentation, co-option,[ii] and by rapid and substantial technological evolution.

DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

More than 80 countries are holding elections in 2024, yet for the first time in more than 20 years, the world is home to more closed **autocracies** than liberal democracies.[iii] Infringements on freedom of expression are on the rise, with shrinking civic space for open discourse. According to Freedom House, "**global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year in 2023**".[iv] The manipulation of elections has been a leading cause of this decline. Threats against, and the imprisonment of, journalists are both at a record high; these disproportionately affect women and those representing minority groups.[v] At the same time, media viability faces new challenges across all contexts.

As an organisation deploying media and communication expertise around the world, BBC Media Action is particularly concerned with trends relating to the flow of trustworthy information, as well as how storytelling shapes societies. As an international organisation, BBC Media Action is most concerned with how these information flows affect the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable people, living in some of the world's most fragile contexts.

The optimism of the post-Cold War era – that global economic integration would shore up democracy and political alignment – now seems misplaced. A growing scepticism about multilateralism is shrinking space for collective action, even on significant and potentially existential global threats such as the climate crisis and accelerating advancements in AI. Instead of moving towards greater cross-border collaboration, countries are rerouting supply chains to political and economic allies, reinforcing "cliques" on the international stage.

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i) "Information disorder" is a term to capture the range of disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, rumours, myths, conspiracy theories, hyper-partisan content, propaganda and manipulated media that contribute to the spread of false or misleading information.

ii) Increasingly, media practitioners are being co-opted in the contest for power. Governments, corporations, oligarchs, political elites and other factions buy, create or seek to control media organisations to advance their political or economic interests.

iii) V-Dem Institute (March 2023) Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the face of Autocratization

iv) Freedom House (2024) Freedom in the world 2024

v) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2020) Threats that silence: Trends in the safety of journalists

Like-minded nation states banding together in opposition to adversarial states foments **distrust** and reinforces **division** on a global level. Economic pressures and competition for resources also drive division among communities within countries. Meantime, we no longer share a common and trustworthy informational experience; this has been displaced by disjointed and competing narratives from a multitude of information-providers, all accessible with the tap of a finger.

Alongside rapidly developing AI and accelerated – though still unequal – access to digital platforms comes a growing wariness of what we see, read or hear. **Trust** in the news has fallen, "reversing in many countries the gains made at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic".[i] News avoidance is on the rise and younger generations especially are "preferring to access news via side-door routes such as social media, search, or mobile aggregators"[ii]. They may sidestep news entirely in favour of entertainment. Young people can be sensitive to media content that appears inauthentic, yet they often lack the knowledge and skills to distinguish fact from fiction. Trust in science has fallen, too, which had real implications in the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across all contexts and communities, conditions are ripe for **information disorder** to proliferate and undermine democratic institutions. Safeguarding civic space for open discourse, providing impartial content and platforms that enable citizens to understand their rights, and improving accountability will help to counter these headwinds – especially for communities which are currently overlooked and especially vulnerable.

CLIMATE CRISIS

The years 2015–2023 have been the hottest eight years on record, and July 2023 was the hottest month ever.[iii] To reach the goals of the Paris Agreement – climate stabilisation at well below a global temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius – clean energy technologies will require four times as many minerals as we use today,[iv] potentially another fault line in global geopolitics.

BBC Media Action mentor Patrick Mulehi interviews Ekusi, a young mother in Turkana County, about how her family is adapting to climate change with farming instead of relying solely on herding livestock.

Although climate change will impact everyone, it will continue to disproportionately impact the lives, livelihoods and health of the world's most vulnerable people. These communities need support to adapt, leverage climate finance and have their voices heard in the global conversation. Powerful stakeholders – whether state or non-state actors – may focus efforts and resources on addressing their most direct and proximate threats, compounding climate injustice between richer and poorer countries. There are also vested interests in distorting information flows related to climate change, allowing **disinformation**, **misinformation** and broader **distrust** and **division** to flourish, and undermining climate science and solutions, leading to climate inaction.[v]

i)   Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2023) Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023

ii)   Ibid.

iii)   Climate Copernicus (August 2023) July 2023 sees multiple global temperature records broken

iv)   International Energy Agency (March 2022) The role of critical minerals in clean energy transitions

v)   Center for Countering Digital Hate (2024) The new climate denial: how social media platforms and content producers profit by spreading new forms of climate denial

EXCLUSION AND POLARISATION

A significant number of people – some in rural communities or among the urban poor for example – are socially excluded. Gender inequality and other forms of social exclusion limit people's – particularly women and girls' – voice, power and agency to make decisions about their own lives, and decisions about their families, communities, companies and countries. Discrimination affects political attitudes: people who are excluded are more likely to feel those in power do not represent them or consider their needs, often resulting in political or civic disengagement or protest.

Many excluded groups also lack access to information that could radically improve their lives and enable them to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life. Although internet access and use continues to increase worldwide, a digital divide persists. Less than one-third of citizens in low-income countries are connected to the internet.[i] This digital exclusion can be particularly profound for women and girls, and groups who already face social exclusion or discrimination. History, culture, norms and access to information, media and technology can deepen inequalities, social exclusion and discrimination.

Women are under-represented in both media ownership and content, and gendered disinformation is growing – particularly on social media.[ii] Worryingly for the media sector, "online violence against women journalists is one of the most serious contemporary threats to press freedom internationally".[iii]

Access to media and technology, particularly public interest media that represents diverse groups' interests, perspectives and needs, can help to overcome stigma and discriminatory norms. However, this access is not without risks.

The World Economic Forum's Global Risk Perception Survey 2023 – 2024 found that, after mis- and disinformation and extreme weather events, societal polarisation is the third biggest global risk facing the world in the next two years.

Social media was initially heralded as a way to foster connection between diverse individuals across borders and social groups. Its potential to do this at scale remains great. But the use of these platforms for discussing and sourcing information about critical issues – particularly in a world of generative AI and "deepfakes"[iv] – can also provide anonymity in heated debate, and echo chambers that solidify peoples' perspectives. This, in turn, wears away at social cohesion and reinforces tendencies to deem other, particularly marginalised, groups inferior. Social media's threats to social cohesion, and even people's attention spans, are a subject of increasing scrutiny[v], particularly in relation to its negative impacts on young people – especially adolescent girls.

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i) International Telecommunication Union (2023) Population of global offline countries steady decline to 2.6 billion people in 2023

ii) United Nations (2023) UN human rights expert warns of rise in 'gendered disinformation'

iii) International Center for Journalists (November 2022) The Chilling: A Global Study of Online Violence Against Women Journalists

iv) Merriam-Webster definition of deepfake: an image or recording that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said

v) Jonathan Haidt (March 2024) 'End the phone-based childhood now'. *The Atlantic*

The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa aims to harness digital technologies and transformation for "innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth",[i] targeting digital empowerment across the continent by 2030. It also identifies key threats, including "limited supervisory capacity to identify and mitigate risks which are exacerbated by digital technologies"[ii] and a "gender gap in mobile access and usage".[iii] A youth bulge will see 375 million young people entering the continent's labour market in 2030 – an incredible asset that poses enormous opportunities as well as risks. Amid these challenges, safeguarding civic space for open discourse, supporting the provision of impartial content and platforms, and equipping people with the digital and media literacy skills needed to navigate a digital transition will be critical to more peaceful, equitable development and democracy.

Meanwhile, AI threatens to exacerbate economic inequalities as it threatens the value of human labour.[iv] This would affect already marginalised groups, such as women, who disproportionately bear the burden of inequality and inequity, or young people, who can be socially excluded from political and decision-making processes too. Here, too, democratic institutions are at risk of being undermined – from the mis- and disinformation that flourishes when societies are not prepared for the risks of AI, and "through increased elite influence, corruption, populism, and greater public discontent".[v]

A NEW OPERATING CONTEXT

Until recently, it was predominantly state actors who could effect change generating spillover effects on geopolitics, information ecosystems, societies and our planet. Increasingly however, some non-state actors now also have this capability – including technological giants with market capitalisations rivalling the gross domestic product of middle-sized economies. Their role threads through:

› Securing supply chains critical for technological dominance

› Gaining access to precious resources essential for a green transition

› Shaping societal relations, through algorithms that connect communities and citizens

› Creating the media content, knowledge, services and jobs of the future

This capability gives a new dimension to the existing global order, compounding the global "polycrisis", an interlocking chain of multiple issues, creating a new context larger than the sum of its parts.

In this context, a critical role for BBC Media Action will be supporting the equitable distribution of the benefits, and mitigating the risks, of this new world, largely driven by technology, across societies, media, marginalised groups and populations under-served by public interest media.

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i) African Union (2020) The digital transformation strategy for Africa 2020 – 2030

ii) Ibid

iii) Ibid

iv) Stephanie A. Bell and Anton Korinek (October 2023) 'AI's economic peril'. Journal of Democracy

v) Stephanie A. Bell and Anton Korinek (October 2023) 'AI's economic peril'. Journal of Democracy

BACKSLIDING OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

These major headwinds – democratic decline, climate change and polarisation – mutually reinforced by **information disorder**, **distrust** and **division** – are global. Media and information ecosystems everywhere are under threat, facing different needs across different contexts. These needs are most concentrated where audiences are under-served by public interest media.

In many of the contexts where BBC Media Action works, these global trends are coinciding with – and indeed contributing to – worrying signs for international development. In "an age of polycrisis… global challenges are threatening to derail hard-earned progress towards the SDGs".[i] Competition for development funding is fierce, with notable factors including post-pandemic and cost of living aid budget pressures, inflation eroding the spending power of the funding that is available, and multiple crises ranging from conflicts to climate-related disasters.

Put simply, there is less funding available to deal with a greater number of urgent issues. There is also, rightly, greater scrutiny on the added value, value for money and effectiveness of intermediary partners operating from high-income countries. Alongside this, there is widespread recognition that authentic localisation can unlock better outcomes for the people the international development community exists to serve. Preventing a reversal of decades of progress requires targeted intervention, mobilising significant resources and smart, localised partnerships. BBC Media Action's 2024-2027 strategy is specifically designed in recognition of and to help respond to this challenging global context.

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i) United Nations (2023) The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023

A BBC Media Action Bangladesh team films Shabjan (right) and her neighbour for our Living Climate Change series. Fresh water is scarce in their village in southern Bangladesh because water sources have become too saline to drink.

Our Indonesia team.

WHO WE ARE

We are the BBC's international charity. We are a media and communication organisation that operates in contexts where people and communities are most vulnerable to the effects of information disorder, division and distrust. This means we work across a full and varied spectrum of audiences – from rural communities without access to digital platforms who need lifeline information, to urban, digitally-connected sections of society where market incentives distort the media ecosystem, preventing the delivery of trustworthy information.

We bring our media expertise to wherever it is needed most, applying it to the most pressing issues facing the communities we serve. We have an excellent and proven track record in using media and communication to improve outcomes related to fostering democracy, a safer, more habitable planet and inclusive societies.

We bring together a unique blend of journalistic, creative, research and international development expertise; deep local knowledge of our audiences in the places we work; and our invaluable link to the BBC and everything it stands for.

Our work is aligned with, and furthers, the BBC's public purposes. We support the BBC's determination to pursue 'truth with no agenda' and 'bring people together' to counter polarisation. We champion impartiality, creativity, and diverse representation in a vast range of international media and information landscapes.

BBC MEDIA ACTION'S CORE STRENGTHS

› Applying the BBC's values, skills and experience to our work

› Bringing together a unique blend of creative, media and international development experts

› Conducting high-quality research that gives us an unparalleled understanding of local audiences

› Having a deep understanding of how to effect change through media

› Collaborating through far-reaching, equitable partnerships

› Achieving reach and impact at scale

› Using and generating evidence to accelerate our impact

› Being able to shape global debate

A reporting team from Zaborona, a Ukrainian online media platform with support from BBC Media Action, at work. / Photo credit: Zaborona

OUR PURPOSE

BBC Media Action works with partners around the world to provide impartial, impactful, trustworthy media to people in need, so that they can make informed choices to transform their lives.

In a world of disinformation, distrust and division, we share the BBC's values, skills and experience to bring people together, and foster greater understanding and trust.

The world has changed significantly since BBC Media Action published its last strategy in 2018. While we will continue to play to our core strengths, in 2024–2027 we will prioritise three key shifts – recognising a drastically different operating context.

1. **A sharper, more relevant purpose:** We will narrow and deepen our primary focus on three of the most pressing global trends – information disorder (including disinformation, misinformation and information poverty), division and distrust. Our activities in media development, content, policy and research will contribute to three key impact areas that are strongly compounded by information disorder, division and distrust – namely, stronger democracies, a safer, more habitable planet and inclusive societies.

2. **Positioning BBC Media Action as a global public good, while committing to localisation and a partner-first approach in our delivery:** Historically, much of our efforts have focused on local project delivery. We will continue to deliver local projects, with a commitment to localisation and a partner-first approach. But we will also shift to acting much more as a global public good, influencing the global media ecosystem for the better and leveraging insights from our deep local programming experience and research. We will seek to deliver impact across a wider range of geographies, working with partners for greater reach.

3. **Maximising links with the BBC:** BBC Media Action's work benefits from being part of the BBC, a world-leading public interest media organisation with a depth and breadth across the global media landscape that few others can match. Better leveraging this relationship will drive even greater impact, and sharing BBC values, skills and experience in ways that fit local contexts and benefit local partners will be at the core of our approach. We will look to work with new and emerging BBC products to help expand the impact of our work.

These shifts are a strategic choice for BBC Media Action, and will be underpinned by the following internal enablers:

› To best position ourselves for impact in an increasingly **digital** world, we will continue to upskill, and leverage the wider BBC's digital expertise and learning, as well as the best talent from across our countries and partners. This is a non-negotiable for an organisation in the media and communication space wishing to remain relevant and effective.

› We will keep our environmental impact to a minimum and ensure that our own organisation is environmentally **sustainable**. Addressing the impact of climate change is central to our work, and it is important to us that this is also embedded in the way we operate and run.

› We will continue to strive to be a great place to work for our **people**. We want working in the BBC Media Action team to be the best experience possible, driving a culture of belonging, inclusivity and engagement, where people can do their best work and feel fulfilled. We want to continuously build and strengthen our capacity, recognising where we can and should upskill.

› We will increase efforts to generate **unrestricted income** (flexible funding that is not tied to delivery of a specific programme). For too long we have had an imbalanced reliance on restricted (to specific programmes and projects) funding. While this has funded fantastic programming and impact, we have not had the unrestricted income needed to invest in research and development, and proactively invest in better systems and capacity-building. We need more unrestricted funding to be as effective as we can be.

OUR VALUES

As the BBC's international charity, we share the BBC's values:
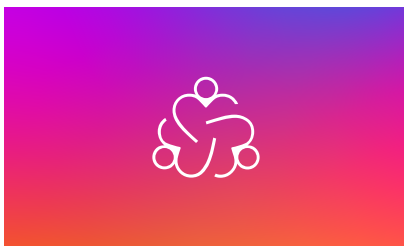
AUDIENCES are at the heart of everything we do
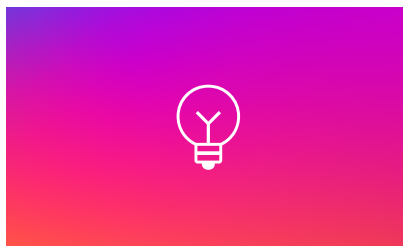
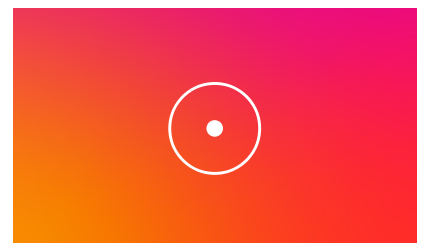**CREATIVITY** is the lifeblood of our organisation

TRUST is the foundation of our work – we're independent, impartial and truthful

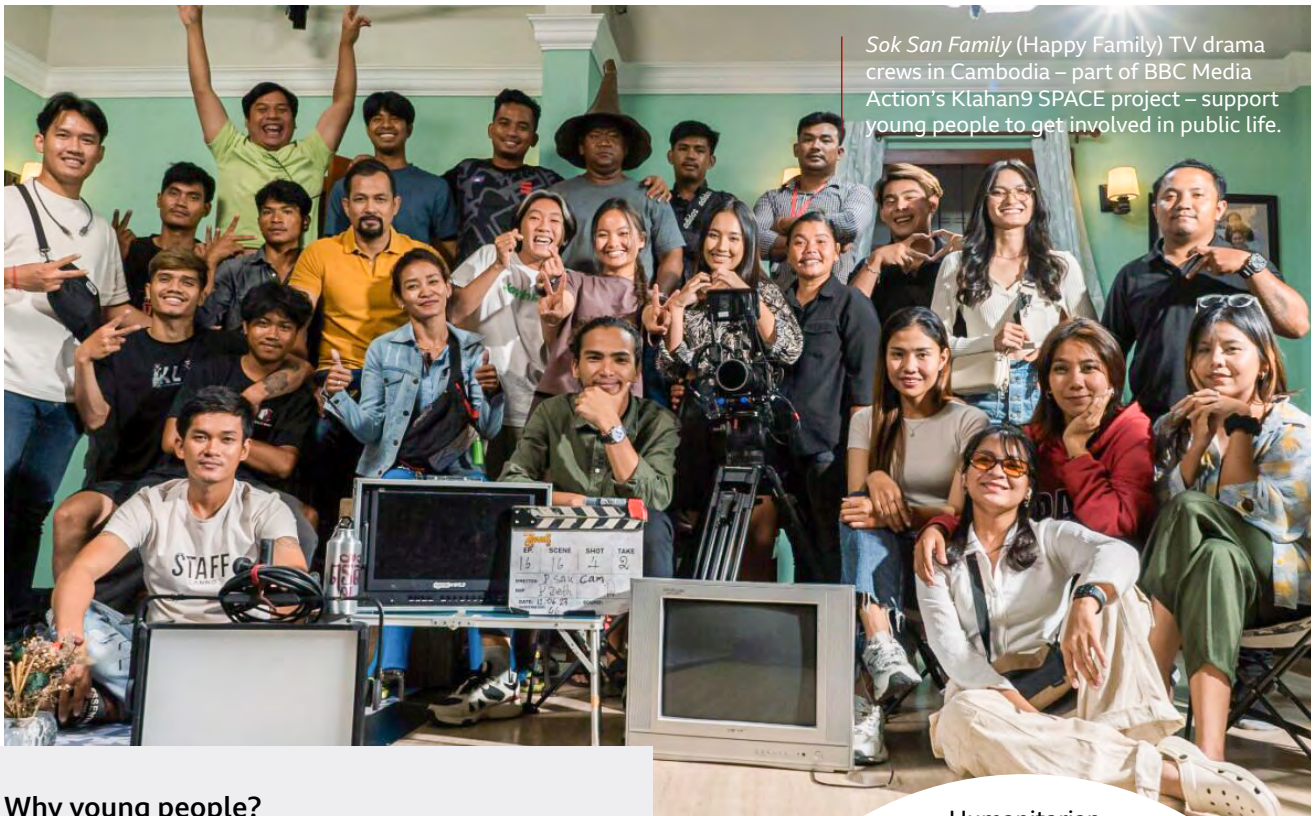We **RESPECT** each other – we're kind, and we champion inclusivity

We are **ACCOUNTABLE** and deliver work of the highest quality

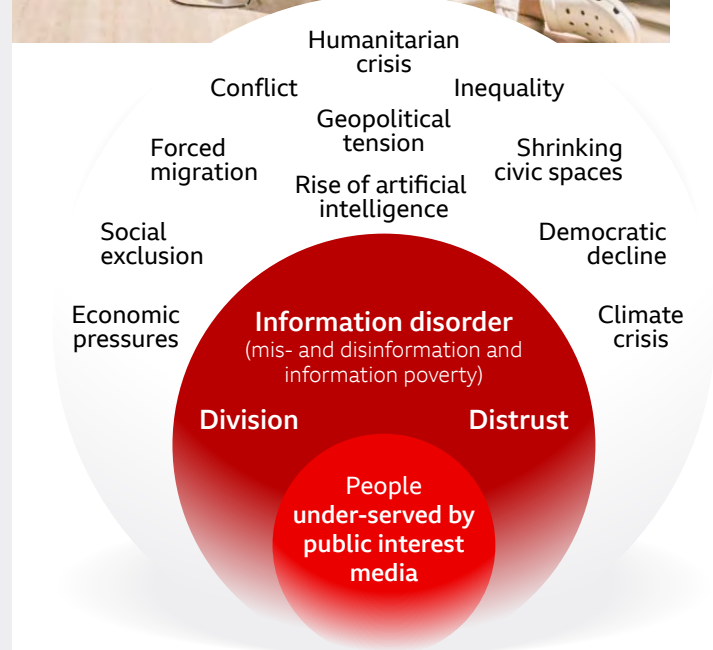We are **ONE BBC** – we collaborate, learn and grow together

WHO WE SERVE

BBC Media Action exists to serve people who are most vulnerable to information disorder, division and distrust, with a focus on people who are also under-served by public interest media and at the frontline of global challenges, risks and crises. We have a track record of working with marginalised groups as well as young people as agents of change across the communities they live in. They will continue to be a central focus of our activities as we work to contribute to the SDG commitment to "leave no one behind", by meaningfully including people who are most often marginalised, excluded, not seen or listened to.

Sok San Family (Happy Family) TV drama crews in Cambodia – part of BBC Media Action's Klahan9 SPACE project – support young people to get involved in public life.

Why young people?

Young people (aged 15–34 years) have immense power to both shape future global trends and leverage the opportunities of changing technology. They face specific challenges over their lifetimes, including climate change, which will impact them more acutely than previous generations. Some social norms mean they have less agency or respect in certain contexts, and they can be excluded from political decision-making processes. They are also among the most vulnerable to the negative effects of life in a digital age and are coming online as AI becomes increasingly prevalent. This demographic urgently needs to acquire the skills and confidence to navigate information and media ecosystems safely and effectively.

Humanitarian crisis
Conflict
Inequality
Geopolitical tension
Forced migration
Rise of artificial intelligence
Shrinking civic spaces
Social exclusion
Democratic decline
Economic pressures
Climate crisis

Information disorder
(mis- and disinformation and information poverty)

Division   **Distrust**

People under-served by public interest media

Graphic: BBC Media Action's audience focus in a world of polycrisis

Our focus group, project manager and research manager in Indonesia working with Indonesian youth to engage them on climate change.

Understanding a generation of Indonesian youth to inspire climate action

Our *Kembali ke Hutan* (Return to the Forest) project creates engaging digital and TV programming that focuses on climate change and deforestation in Indonesia.

Our pre-implementation research found that Indonesia's young population felt disconnected from the natural world and didn't know how they could get involved in accelerating the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient development. Issues related to climate change and sustainable development, therefore, needed to be communicated in a way that resonated with young people, through multiple formats and platforms.

For example, Bodo, the lead character in our TV show, starts his journey with no real concern for the environment, but goes to contest and eventually win a local election based on a sustainable development mandate.

Our evaluation, including a rigorous experiment with Columbia University, found that viewers who followed Bodo's story were more knowledgeable about environmental issues, more motivated to participate in public discussion on climate change, more supportive for policies to address it and supported more media programming on the issue. 65% of those exposed to the drama or social media content could also name actions they had taken as a result of viewing.
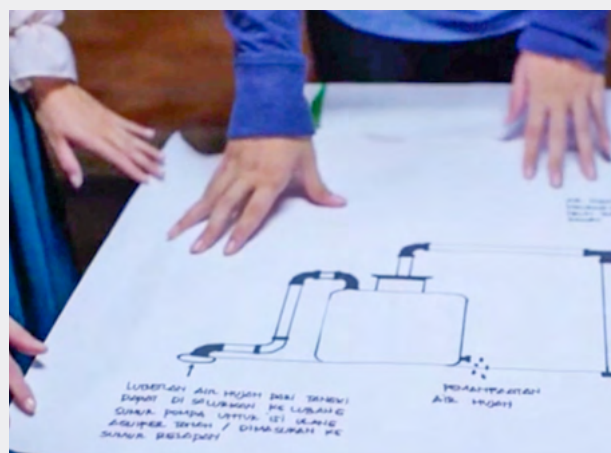
A still from our TV show where lead characters are discussing plans to save water.

WHAT WE DO

We combine world-leading media support, creative storytelling and evidence-based advocacy to provide impartial, trustworthy media content to people and communities in need around the world in order to reduce information disorder, division and distrust. Our work is delivered through four activity types:

Media development	Media policy	Media content
	Research	

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

We support the development of **healthier media ecosystems**, so that more people have equitable and sustained access to media content that is in the public interest. We support the development of **public interest media content and platforms** that expand civic space and create inclusive public spheres with a view to promoting democratic, sustainable and inclusive societies.

Healthy media ecosystems are central to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.10, which aims to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms". Countries that enjoy a free media have less corruption, more cohesive societies and more

BBC Media Action supports healthier media ecosystems around the world, through work with media organisations and networks, and academic partners.

We support local media to provide trustworthy news, current affairs and social-impact entertainment programming.

We help to build resilience in public interest media, in the face of disruptive technology, rising authoritarianism and conflict.

Supporting high-quality media across Solomon Islands

Ahead of elections in April 2024, BBC Media Action trainers worked with Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) and other local journalists from across this Pacific Island nation to improve their investigative and production skills.

For the first time ever, SIBC aired a debate and discussion programme, Voice *Blo Iu* (Your Voice) across the country, allowing citizens to share their concerns directly with election candidates. The episodes aired on television and live-streamed on Facebook, receiving tens of thousands of views, despite intermittent and expensive internet connections in the country.

Launch of *Voice Blo Iu* (Your Voice), a first-ever debate and discussion programme aired by Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) ahead of April 2024 elections. BBC Media Action, with support from the FCDO, has been working with SIBC and other local journalists to improve their investigative and production skills.

accountable democracies. Providing citizens with unrestricted access to information is recognised by the 2030 Agenda as an essential precondition to achieving all of the SDGs, including those on gender equality, climate action, poverty elimination and reducing inequality. Crucially, supplying trustworthy information via media platforms that reach people at scale is one of the most effective antidotes and responses to the pressing challenges of information disorder.

BBC Media Action's holistic approach to media development is firmly rooted in understanding the dynamic and interconnected media ecosystems in the contexts where we work. We use research insights to develop bespoke strategies – often sharing tools and approaches developed at the BBC – that strengthen a particular media ecosystem.

Driven by evidence of what works, we employ multiple pathways to:

› Increase public interest content

› Enhance media financial viability at the organisation and operating environment level

› Support technological adaptation

› Build collaborative partnerships

Our approaches to boost the **provision of public interest content** are tailored to the challenges and opportunities in any given context. For relatively open political environments, we use a network model – supporting existing organisations, individuals, networks or alliances of media producers to reach people at scale with public interest content. We work with media practitioners and local and national

Our media development activities

⌕ System-wide diagnostics

⛬ Information ecosystem and audience research

⤬ Development of bespoke strategies

↻ Support for technical adaptation

▭ Promotion of digital and media literacy (DML)

ⓘ Building individual and societal resilience to the risks of information disorder

🤝 Building collaborative partnerships

| Photo by Martin Martz on Unsplash

Media resilience in a world of AI

BBC Media Action occupies a unique position in the media development sector, with the opportunity to leverage the BBC's investments in the responsible use of AI to help other media organisations respond to opportunities and risks it brings.

All areas of media partners' operations, from back office to technology, product development, journalism and content can be supported. BBC Media Action champions the equitable benefits of AI throughout the media value chain, and the safe use of AI tools.

BBC Media Action activities to support our media partners' ability to use AI in positive ways will include developing their AI literacy; facilitating the use of AI tools for newsgathering, analysis and content generation; and wider issues around developing newsrooms that take advantage of AI without compromising editorial integrity.

media organisations to strengthen their capacity to tackle information disorder, such as building skills to conduct investigative journalism and apply fact- and source-checking approaches.

In less politically open contexts, we take an incremental approach, supporting small-scale changes in specific areas within existing organisations, or supporting the establishment of new public interest media organisations. In the most restricted environments, we focus on capacity-strengthening for individual media practitioners.

Our **media viability** approach works with media partners to assess their resources, workflows and organisational structures, improve management practices and business planning, support their security and protection and diversify their commercial revenue streams or increase their donor funding. We bring media partners together to improve the local enabling environment for the sector. Where media markets are distorted, we help to explore and test fresh approaches to public subsidy, inspired by our roots in the BBC. Whatever the operating context, we use our research to support media partners to better understand and meet their audiences' needs.

Ultimately, our media development work seeks to:

› Uphold people's rights to equal and sustained access to media content that is in the public interest

› Increase the provision of content that is relevant, inclusive, engaging and trusted, and that expands opportunities for civic engagement

› Enable regulatory and financial environments that allow media practitioners to serve diverse audiences without political or commercial interference

Supporting public interest media and working in wartime Ukraine

❝ We had to build our TV and radio station back from zero [after the invasion] and without support from … BBC Media Action, it [would have been] impossible. We appreciate your support and are very thankful for you.❞

| Mykola Chernotytskyi, Director-General, Suspilne

From April 2019 to March 2020 BBC Media Action led the Eastern Partnership Independent Media (EPIM) project supporting public interest media in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Support to Ukrainian media partners continued after the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Amid shrinking media and donor revenues, contribution analysis conducted with an independent evaluator found evidence that our support to independent media in Ukraine before the war contributed to increases in local media partners' revenues. This included 152% growth in one partner's non-donor revenue.[i] The evaluation found that our support also helped organisations to be more resilient to the fast-changing news and media environment of wartime.

| BBC Media Action supporting public interest media in Ukraine. Photo credit: Suspilne (2022)

i) INTRAC (2022) Eastern Partnership Independent Media Final Evaluation and Contribution Analysis.

MEDIA CONTENT

We create, commission and support the production of **trustworthy, engaging content** for distribution at scale using broadcast and digital media platforms, including those of the BBC and our partners.

Our content informs and inspires under-served audiences about the most important issues in their lives, bringing people together across divides and building trust. It is carefully tailored to meet audiences' needs, taking into account what is possible in their environment and what will both reach and engage them.

From entertainment to news stories, storytelling is at the heart of media. Malign actors are increasingly misusing the power of stories to control, divide and coerce people around the world. Amid increasingly interconnected battlegrounds of competing narratives, evidence-based, high-quality media content remains a powerful and highly cost-effective way to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between large numbers of people, playing a key role in driving positive social change.

On broadcast and digital media platforms, BBC Media Action and our partners deliver storytelling that informs and inspires under-served audiences about the most important issues in their lives.

Our content work builds digital and media literacy, bringing people together, bridging divides and building trust.

Our media content activities

- Story-based broadcast and digital media content in all its formats to **build and engage audiences**
- **Comissioning** or **co-producing** high quality output with local partners
- **Creating** trustworthy, engaging content ourselves, where the market does not support a commissioning model or there is a void of public interest storytelling to support audiences

Addressing information disorder to strengthen social cohesion and prevent conflict in Libya

In Libya, our research into information disorder showed that while social media is a key source of information for younger audiences, mis- and disinformation, hate speech and content that deepens "othering" of different tribes and ethnicities is widespread, visible and often very influential.

We support independent, public interest journalism in Libya through *El Kul* (For Everyone), our online news and information platform that has over 1 million followers (out of a total population of 6.4 million). In a polarised media landscape financed by those with vested political interests, *El Kul* provides Libyans with an impartial and unbiased source of news and media.

With funding from the United Nations Development Programme, and in partnership with The University of Cambridge, we are testing how pre-bunking approaches – supporting audiences to recognise false information or news stories prior to encountering them – and digital and media literacy content can be adapted and scaled in the Libyan context using *El Kul*.

Our work centres on the transformative power of **storytelling as a force for social good**.

The power of storytelling to achieve impact at scale

There is a growing body of rigorous evidence – our own and others – evaluating the power of storytelling to achieve change in low resource settings on a wide range of issues: climate change, safer sexual behaviours, gender-based violence, social cohesion, intergroup-prejudice, gender norms and adolescent issues. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis reviewed the persuasive effects of narrative entertainment (e.g. TV or radio dramas and short or feature films) from 81 experiments in low, middle and high income countries, and found that narrative entertainment is influential, with effects lasting weeks to months.

How do we evaluate media effects using experiments? Challenges of controlling 'exposure' and assembling 'dosage' make natural experiments more useful. This study in Brazil showed links between telenovelas featuring 'aspirational' families with fewer children and drops in the fertility rates in cities receiving these soap operas. The study evaluating our TV drama, *Life Navrangi*, which reached nearly 60 million Indians, showed it was an effective, low cost and scalable tool to engage people around faecal sludge management – a critical and silent social issue. Similarly, the BBC's own long running and original radio drama, The Archers, saw a 20% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline after it explored an emotional abuse storyline. The ITV drama series, Mr Bates v The Post Office, is another powerful example of storytelling driving real change – sparking outrage and generating discussion in the UK parliament, leading to a new law.

Our Indian web series *Life Navrangi* (A Colourful Life) which explored themes of everyday life and love in a local neighbourhood facing ever-present sanitation issues. An independent randomised controlled trial showed that viewers were more likely to look up information and report illegal dumping of waste, showing the power of digital storytelling.

Innovation Poverty Action has recently put 'edutainment' under its 14 Best Bets – advocating for the need to broaden evidence-backed edutainment programme partnerships. Similarly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is funding an evidence review that looks at the role of entertainment media in influencing social norms. The power of storytelling is also effective in investigative journalism, as BBC Media Action has evidenced in Eastern Europe, and in fact checks that tackle misinformation through empathetic narratives in podcasts, as shown by Africa Check and JPAL.

We use story-based broadcast and digital media content to build and engage audiences, particularly those more vulnerable to the effects of declining democracies or under-served by public interest media. We employ our rich history of storytelling – in fact and fiction – to support the creation of locally-conceived, culturally-relevant media content that contributes to positive change. By targeting audiences with content in the right tone and format, featuring people that they respect or relate to, and telling stories that resonate with them, we help to have a positive impact on people's lives.

Life in Lulu: Promoting peaceful co-existence in South Sudan

Welcome to Lulu, a fictional village in rural South Sudan. Lulu is 50 km from the nearest town, made up of green and yellow maize farms, circular thatched homes and a thriving village market; it is also home to a lively line-up of characters in our radio drama, Life in Lulu, which explores what happens when people make good (and bad) decisions.

A behind the scenes photo of a voice actor for Life in Lulu.

For more than 10 years, Life in Lulu has echoed the experience of people in villages across the world's youngest country. The programme is broadcast nationally in South Sudan in six languages through partnerships with 28 radio stations.

Since its first episode aired in January 2013, Life in Lulu has tackled issues ranging from maternal and newborn health to peaceful conflict resolution and gender-based violence. Its characters help share trusted information, dispel myth and rumour, and model positive behaviour. The programme has a regular audience of 1.4 million (38% of the adult population).

We increasingly focus on commissioning or co-producing **high-quality output with local media creators**. When there is a compelling case to do so – such as helping to tackle taboos, stigma or accountability when local partners feel unable; or in parts of the world where the market does not support a commissioning model – we produce media content ourselves, while simultaneously finding ways to support local media ecosystems to do this in future.

Much of our content helps to build **digital and media literacy** (DML), helping people to safely access the full media, digital and information ecosystem and navigate digital spaces safely. This involves improving understanding of how media and information represent people, events and issues, and enhancing people's ability to actively use media and information in their lives. This is particularly important for young people, who are future changemakers in their communities, and women and girls, who have so far benefited less from digital transformation than men and boys.[i]

Liudmyla Tiahnyriadno is a reporter and presenter for Ukrainian Radio in Kyiv. Ukrainian Radio is part of Ukraine's public broadcaster Suspilne, which has been a BBC Media Action partner since 2014. During the war in Ukraine, we have been working with funding from FCDO and others to ensure our media partners can stay online and share trusted information that people can rely on to help them stay safe.

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i)   Equals Global Partnership (February 2024) [Towards a gender transformative approach](#)

The content that we commission, produce or support is a creative force within local media markets, enabling experimentation with new forms of digital storytelling, engaging new audiences and drawing attention to neglected social problems through high-impact entertainment. We join with others who share our commitment to high-impact content, including creatives, storytellers, journalists, civil society actors, data scientists, researchers and academics around the world.

Ultimately, our media content work seeks to:

› Engage audiences

› Facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between large numbers of people

› Play a key role in driving positive social change

› Draw attention to neglected societal challenges through entertainment content

› Inspire action in support of stronger democracies, a safer, more habitable planet and social inclusion.

› Respond to the weaponisation of storytelling by malign actors around the world, across multiple platforms and formats

› Encourage and enable experimentation with new forms of digital storytelling

› Enhance skills and knowledge to navigate information critically and responsibly

MEDIA POLICY

Our media content activities

🔲 Sharing and publishing research and analysis

🏛 Convening high-profile events

@ Participating in policy debates and supporting our partners to do the same

BBC Media Action acts as a global thought leader in media policy, future journalism, and the role of media in tackling the world's biggest challenges.

Our policy work leverages unique and deep insights and evidence of our impact in diverse contexts. It draws on, and amplifies, the analysis and voices of our partners and audiences, bringing them to a global stage.

Our policy work:

› Draws attention to the harmful impacts of information disorder and distrust on people's lives, demonstrating how public interest media can play a role in ameliorating these

› Advocates at local, national, regional and global levels for policy to support enabling environments for healthier media and information ecosystems, and people's fundamental right to access information, freedom of speech and media freedom

› Supports local, regional and national media actors to engage with policy debates on the relationship between media and technology companies, and the governance of the digital sphere

› Champions the equitable distribution of the benefits and advantages of technological change in the media sector, including AI, for different users across the world, particularly those who are most at risk of missing out on these benefits or who are otherwise excluded

› Facilitates the contribution of media to strengthen democracy, ensure a safer, more habitable planet and advance social inclusion

We will focus on informing policy discussions within and between government agencies, philanthropic funders and the multilateral system. This also involves networking with other media and communication organisations, and research and academic communities, producing and publishing high-quality research, evidence and analysis, convening high-profile events, and bringing the voices of our partners into policy debates.

We will work to advise funders globally on how best to invest in media support programming, and how work to improve information ecosystems can be woven effectively into wider governance-focused initiatives. We will liaise closely with the Media Freedom Coalition secretariat and, where appropriate, ensure our work is integrated with other key policy processes, including the OECD DAC Governance Network and upcoming high-level fora on the Sustainable Development Goals.

We will also work closely with sectoral partners ensuring that existing learning and technical expertise – such as published by the Global Forum for Media Development – is effectively channelled into, and informs policy via a range of mechanisms including the Democratic Governance Centre of Excellence hosted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Other policy-level efforts will include inputs into, and support for implementation of internationally agreed principles on freedom of expression, the role of media in good governance, and efforts to counter information manipulation.

Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED)

PRIMED was a three-year programme to support the provision of public interest media in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, beginning in October 2020 and funded by the FCDO. BBC Media Action led a consortium of media development organisations to deliver the programme.

In Sierra Leone, PRIMED's work with local partners helped to secure a government pledge to develop a National Action Plan to ensure the viability of public interest media in the country.

Sierra Leone's parliament also approved a new Independent Media Code of Practice, developed by the country's Independent Media Commission, after an extensive consultation process supported by PRIMED.

Collectively, these achievements should strengthen the sustainability, quality and governance of the country's public interest media, to benefit its population.

A national conference in Sierra Leone bringing together government, media organisations, industry leaders and other stakeholders, to explore the options and create a national action plan to strengthen public interest media in the country

RESEARCH

Our media research activities

- Research is embedded throughout a programme lifecycle, from pre-design, to pre-testing, implementation and evaluation
- Content analysis and social listening to understand online trends
- Nationally representative surveys to understand media use
- Ethnography techniques to explore how people use media platforms
- Audience panels to obtain timely feedback
- Digital experiments to test approaches to address information disorder
- Support for media partners to improve their capacity for conducting media research and understanding audiences effectively

Research is a vitally important, cross-cutting function at BBC Media Action, underpinning all of our work and evidence of impact. We have deep and long-standing expertise in research to understand under-served audiences and media ecosystems. And we share research insights widely, for the public good.

We are a **global leader in media research practice**. We have particular expertise in working in fragile and conflict-affected societies, in humanitarian emergencies and in understanding the needs of vulnerable groups in contexts where political, security or other factors mean that mass media is one of few ways to reach them.

Research is embedded in our project cycle, from informing project design through formative research, to pre-testing and piloting content, tracking programme effectiveness and assessing impact through evaluative research and high-quality evidence. This enables us to understand not only what works, but also **how** and why change happens, and to identify **where** future policy, investments and interventions should focus.

Media landscapes are changing fast. We specialise in understanding audiences' needs for public interest media, and how people perceive, share and are influenced by false and misleading information. Our partnership with BBC Monitoring helps us to thoroughly analyse information sources and information flows in diverse languages and contexts.

Research informs how we can most effectively use media for social change by identifying drivers of change – in knowledge, action, social norms and systems – that can be influenced by media.

We use robust and appropriate research methods for different purposes:

- Content analysis and social listening to understand online trends
- Nationally representative surveys to understand media use
- Ethnography techniques to explore how people use media platforms
- Segmentation to target our approaches
- Audience panels to provide timely feedback on how content is resonating
- Digital experiments to test approaches to address information disorder

We also support our media partners to strengthen their own capacity to conduct media research and understand their audiences effectively.

Media consumption in Afghanistan

Under difficult circumstances, BBC Media Action conducted a groundbreaking national media survey in Afghanistan in 2023 that aimed to understand Afghans' access to, and preference for, different media content and platforms, and their trust in media. This research was also designed to learn how people use and share mis- and disinformation and possible ways to counter these. In addition, the study aimed to understand how media organisations operate in Afghanistan to minimise the impacts of restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities.

Our team uses findings from this survey to inform all of our projects in the country, including our choice of platforms, partners and broadcast timing. We also use the findings to inform our future work, considering the needs and preferences of male, female, urban, rural, younger and older audience segments.

A further use of the survey findings is to help our many broadcast partners in Afghanistan understand audience trends and interests, as they have neither the capacity nor the funding to undertake this kind of work themselves.

Social media users, Wardak province, Afghanistan

We measure the impact of media using insight and a wide range of approaches drawn from behavioural and data science. Following best practice, the mix of methods for each setting are triangulated and cross-validated with desk reviews of available evidence and audience data.

Our extensive network of research partners allows us to access crucial local insights and deliver rigorous research and analysis. We also work closely with data scientists and researchers across the BBC.

Our research is underpinned by the **highest ethical, safeguarding and quality standards**.

Ultimately, our media research work seeks to:

› Identify drivers of change – the specific factors that can be influenced by media that can lead to changes in knowledge, action, social norms and systems

› Drive evidence-based programme design across the BBC Media Action portfolio

› Generate actionable insights for external stakeholders, influencing broader strategy, policy and practices across the sector
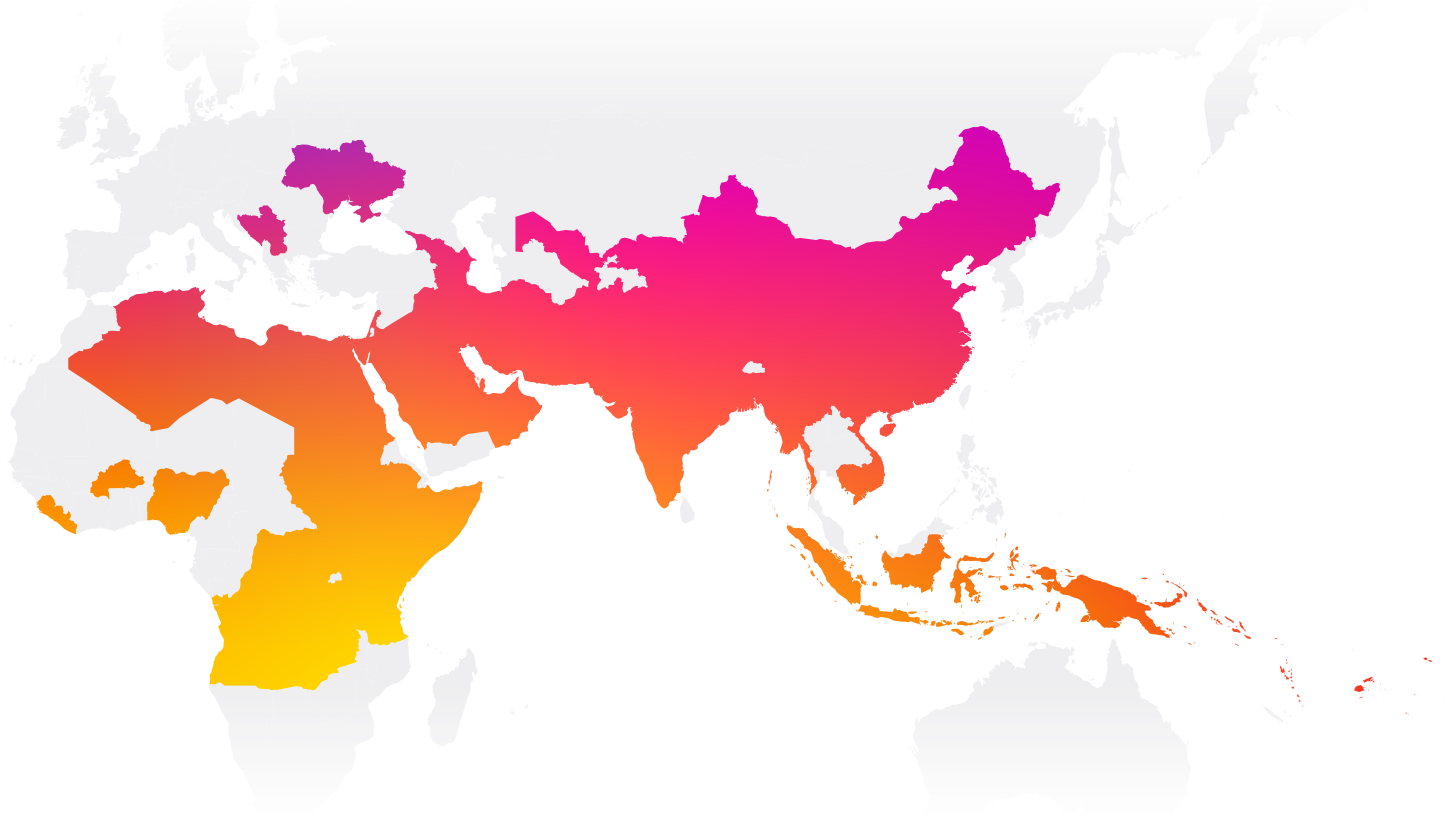
WHERE WE WORK

BBC Media Action works to counter information disorder, distrust and division where people are under-served by public interest media and at the frontline of global challenges, risks and crises. We are working in 30 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Central Europe, and Central America and the Caribbean. We work in geographies where one or more of the following factors are distorting the free flow of trustworthy information:

› Marginalised groups do not have equitable access to media content
› Illiberal policies or regimes actively prevent the flow of information
› Low levels of digital and media literacy prevent safe and secure access to media
› Market disincentives prevent the dissemination of critical information

Our 25 years of operations on the ground have given us deep experience and knowledge in certain contexts. Over this strategy period we will continue to apply this experience, doubling down in countries where we already have a presence and track record for greater impact. Our aspiration is also to use that experience in a strategic way for impact in other geographies too. With a greater focus on cross-border, global threats associated with information disorder, division and distrust, we can take lessons learned to new contexts. We will be agile and responsive to where needs are greatest across the world.

WHY WE DO IT

BBC Media Action's Theory of Change

	Information disorder	Distrust	Division
In a world of:			

and communities facing:	Media fragmentation & technological disruption Humanitarian emergencies	Democratic decline Conflict Polarisation	Climate change & environmental degradation Social exclusion & inequality

we leverage:

> Our unique blend of creative, media and international development experts

> The BBC's world-leading values, skills and experience

> Gold standard research providing unparalleled understanding of local audiences

> Deep understanding of how to effect change through media

> Far-reaching, equitable partnerships

> Reach at scale

> Our ability to shape global debate

to deliver:

Media development	Media policy	Media content
	Research	

which supports: Trustworthy media and information for people and communities in need

contributing to:

Accountability throughout society	Bringing people together and fostering greater understanding and discussion	Building trust	Shaping norms

in order to: Ensure people are able to make informed choices and inspired to take action to transform their lives

In turn, our work supports:

STRONGER DEMOCRACIES	A SAFER AND MORE HABITABLE PLANET	INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

In this strategy period, we will prioritise three key impact areas: **democracy, planet and inclusion**. Our in-house capacity and learning initiatives, our external policy and influencing activities and our global and regional programming will focus on these areas. These three impact areas are strongly linked – for example, a less habitable planet threatens democracy, and amplifies division and social exclusion.

We may occasionally work on topics outside these focus areas, where our blend of skills and experience can help meet particular and locally relevant needs. In doing so, we remain context- and audience-driven, working with partners to address whichever issues are important to targeted communities.

Across all our work, BBC Media Action draws on expertise and evidence to ensure that communities can:

› Access trustworthy, timely, engaging, clear and understandable information

› Navigate information critically and responsibly

› Share and discuss what they have seen and heard, and weigh up their options

› Be inspired, imagine new realities and innovate

› Raise issues with decision-makers, and increase transparency and accountability

› Develop appropriate skills

› Challenge harmful social and behavioural norms

› Ultimately take positive action, both individually and collectively (using the resources and institutional support available to them)

A woman responds to a question in a town hall as part of our Tuyajenge (Let Us Build) radio show in Tanzania, which addresses a wide range of themes including women and girls in leadership and political participation.

STRONGER DEMOCRACIES

We **strengthen democracy**, by supporting public interest media content and platforms that enable vulnerable people to participate in democratic processes at all levels, as active and informed citizens who are better able to understand and address the biggest challenges they and the world are facing.

Independent, editorially robust and trusted media are of fundamental importance to effective democracies and inclusive, peaceful societies. However, rapidly changing media ecosystems, declining trust, the threat of mis- and disinformation and the challenges facing those creating public interest content mean that it is often difficult for people to know where to turn for reliable, impartial and trustworthy information that can help them address the problems in their lives. In some contexts, trusted, trustworthy public interest media may not be present at all.

Our work supports broadcast and digital media that provides people with **trustworthy information**. Our programmes:

› Enable people to understand their rights and the responsibilities of those in power

› Create opportunities for inclusive public discussion on issues that matter to people

› Support accountability and influence powerholders by enabling people to interact directly with decision-makers

› Facilitate free and fair elections

› Tackle information disorder

› Help people live together more peacefully

Through our media development and media content activities, we support **political and civic participation** and **improved accountability** at local and national levels, by increasing audiences' understanding, encouraging them to discuss politics and governance issues, and helping them to develop the knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation to take action to influence them. In addition, our work helps to

shift unhelpful norms and negative attitudes and remove barriers to participation in public life.

Our work strengthens the role of media across the **electoral cycle** to support transparency, civic participation and accountability: ensuring that audiences have access to trustworthy information, tackling rumours and mis- and disinformation, facilitating forums for debate and helping societies to negotiate pre- and post-election tensions peacefully. We also provide strategic support to a range of media standards bodies, media decision-makers and journalists as a sustainable way to improve media coverage of elections.

A SAFER AND MORE HABITABLE PLANET

We contribute to a safer and more **habitable planet** by providing an information lifeline in humanitarian emergencies, by supporting information flows that help people adapt to climate change, live sustainable lifestyles and protect nature, and by supporting balanced discussion of conflict and division.

Climate change is making it more difficult for the most vulnerable communities – those often at the frontline of its impacts – to live healthy, productive lives. Media has enormous potential to be a force for climate action and environmental protection at scale. It can provide space to discuss equitable and just solutions to the climate crisis and, more immediately, benefit the millions already affected by it by informing, role modelling and increasing their capacity to adapt and find ways to cope.

Our work centres on media content that is produced for, rather than about, people who are adapting to climate change, maximising individual and collective efforts to address it cost-effectively at speed and scale. In some contexts, we also help people interrogate efforts to reduce carbon emissions and

Journalism for democracy: the *Moto* project, Zambia

In 2022, in partnership with the Free Press Initiative, we launched the *Moto* (Fire) initiative to support women working in broadcast news and investigative journalism in Zambia. To inform the project, we worked with BBC Monitoring to undertake a comprehensive study on the levels and originators of mis- and disinformation in Zambia. Women working in journalism from across the country were invited to apply for bespoke mentoring and training.

For nine months, our selected group of eight women received training in newsgathering, investigative journalism, fact-checking, and packaging and presenting media content. They then used their new skills to produce six content packages and some of the scheme's participants attended the Summit for Democracy's events in Lusaka in March 2023, applying their skills to covering the lead-up and the summit itself.

This project continues with a new cohort in 2023-24.

Journalist Ennie Kishiki, a participant in the *Moto* (Fire) project, an initiative launched in 2022 between BBC Media Action and Free Press Initiative to support women working in broadcast news and journalism in Zambia.

challenge unsustainable behaviours. During our 2024–2027 strategy period, we will maximise our impact by working collaboratively with the BBC's world-famous Natural History Unit, connecting its global reach and engagement with our local and national programming.

We help vulnerable populations to mitigate the **risks they face related to extreme weather** and from other natural hazards, including those that are not climate-related. We support people to reduce and manage risks from sudden events and long-term trends, and to respond to shocks without compromising their long-term potential.

Collaborating to support climate adaptation in East Africa

From 2018–2020, BBC Media Action supported local media organisations across Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, where pastoralists, farmers and fishers face extreme weather, to produce trusted and accessible weather forecasts.

Accurate forecasts can be critical when making decisions to protect crops, animals and people. Yet until recently a gulf between climate scientists and local media organisations in East Africa meant that communities affected by extreme weather had no access to forecasts that they could understand and trust. Climate scientists provided complex reports and struggled to explain probabilities. And radio producers lacked the confidence to question these scientists' reports. Short of funding, local radio stations stuck to tried and tested programming rather than overhauling their weather reports.

BBC Media Action supporting people in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya to adapt to the changing weather.

Our Weather Wise project aimed to unite climate scientists with local radio producers to create practical, actionable weather forecasts that local communities could understand. Over a series of carefully orchestrated sessions, the climate scientists and media producers came to understand the pressures of each other's jobs and how collaboration could benefit their work.

We provided both groups with in-depth research into the everyday lives of farmers, pastoralists and fishers. With support, the scientists learned how to break down complicated concepts and write more effective press releases and the radio producers learned how to create engaging programmes that prioritised practical content that is relevant to audience members.

Our work also supports **conflict prevention, mitigation and peace-building** in fragile and conflict-affected settings. It enables people to appreciate different viewpoints, increases tolerance of difference, improves social cohesion, reduces the acceptance of violence and helps societies to negotiate inclusive political settlements. We use role modelling to encourage non-violent conflict resolution and tolerance. And we create storylines and characters that resonate with audiences' own experiences, and illustrate the role of men, women, youth, elders – and formal and informal institutions – in preventing, containing and resolving conflict.

We are experts in providing **life-saving information and emotional support in humanitarian emergencies**. Our content amplifies the voices of crisis-affected people, enabling them to express their needs and preferences so that aid providers can better support them. We also strengthen aid efforts by enabling aid providers to reach people who cannot be accessed by traditional services, or when physical access is obstructed.

INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Media has the power to advance equity and inclusion. It can also deepen inequality – where people are excluded from information access, public discussion, and fair media representation. Our work contributes to meeting the SDG commitment to "leave no one behind", by meaningfully including people who are most often marginalised, excluded, not seen or listened to.

Actors recording lines for the recent season of Story Story. The radio drama explored and challenged negative stereotypes and myths around disability and neurodiversity; regression analysis showed that regularly listening to, and engaging with, Story Story was significantly associated with more discussion of issues affecting people with disabilities.

Using radio to challenge attitudes to disability in Nigeria

Set in a traditional West African market, our radio drama Story Story – Voices from the Market has aired on BBC World Service in Africa and local Nigerian stations.

In its 2021-22 season, the radio drama explored and challenged negative stereotypes and myths around disability and neurodiversity in relatable ways. A household survey of more than 5,600 respondents conducted in the project's five focal states found that 28% of listeners said they had done something differently as a result of the programme, including treating people with disabilities more kindly (81%), being more friendly with people with disabilities (69%) and no longer discriminating against people with disabilities (60%).

Importantly, 47% of listeners said they had discussed what they learned with family or friends – highlighting the potential multiplier effect of positive media content. Regression analysis showed that regularly listening to, and engaging with, Story Story was significantly associated with more discussion of issues affecting people with disabilities.

Media representation shapes the way that people see their own and each other's lives, and influences attitudes, societal norms and actions towards others. We use non-stereotypical portrayals to highlight the needs, experiences and skills of people whose lives and voices have been overlooked, positively influencing the way that audiences see and accept different groups. Our coverage of these groups also increases individuals' self-esteem and confidence to be themselves. We avoid speaking on behalf of others and makes space for people to tell their own stories, including when talking about our work.

Media can influence power dynamics by framing and enabling public discussion. The choices and decisions made by those who initiate or organise public discussions can shape who has a voice, and which issues are considered important by society. Our work sparks national and even global conversations that previously may have been uncomfortable.

Photo credit: Nicolas Mirguet

Gender norms and implication on phone use among young women in India

Digital technologies have helped some women in low- and middle-income countries to access trusted news and information, gain employment, increase their incomes, and access cost-effective healthcare and education services. Yet our research and research by the GSMA has highlighted the gendered dimensions of mobile phone and social media access and use in India.[i] That's why we are working with research partners – Penn Song and Oxford Policy Management and several grassroots development organisations like Shramik Bharti, WISE and EMPOWER to understand how social norms impact the mobile gender gap.

Our research shows young women are more likely to have their phone use monitored or supervised – due to perceived reputational risks, relationships with bad friends, mobile use by women seen as a waste of time or women being more vulnerable to financial fraud. These views are also being internalised – the majority of young women agree their phones should be monitored.

Our research with young men also shows that while many support mobile phone use among women, they also exhibit less progressive attitudes on gender equality, and perceive themselves as 'protectors' of women. These findings align with evidence of growing gender divides among young men and women across the globe: women are increasingly more liberal than their male contemporaries. This trend has been linked to social media use and the divisive effects of some cultural influencers.

i) See BBC Media Action's landscape studies: Why aren't women part of the conversation? A study of the gender gap in social media use in India, its causes and the implications for women's empowerment; Increasing women's digital literacy in India: what works and Connecting Empowerment: How social network expansion in women's collectives helps bridge the gender digital divide.

Shola Darwesh Yousufi, a presenter at the all-women Hareem Zan radio station, Afghanistan.

Media created by people who fully reflect their audiences is more relevant and valued by all. The media in most parts of the world is still predominantly owned and produced by men from the dominant social group in that context. There is a clear relationship between diversity and inclusion within media organisations and the content that they produce.

We support **diverse leadership and creative teams** who work in an inclusive way by encouraging and bringing together different perspectives, lived experiences and backgrounds to create appealing and engaging media content. As a result, previously excluded people are routinely and meaningfully included, heard and better able to participate equally in decision-making at all levels of our organisation, the media and society.

A key focus of our work is to bring about **transformative change for women and girls**, who experience widespread social disadvantages and discrimination in most of the countries where we work. This is compounded for women and girls from minority ethnic groups, lower social classes, those who are particularly young or old, living with a disability or who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+).

All of our projects strive to ensure that diverse women and girls are seen and heard through balanced and meaningful representation in media content, within media organisations and in social discourse. This work often uses the methodologies developed by the [BBC's 50:50 project](#) to help content-makers better reflect the audiences they serve.

Empowering adolescent girls in Sierra Leone

Out-of-school girls in Sierra Leone face many challenges and multiple harmful socio-cultural norms and practices, These include risks of violence, economic barriers to opportunity, few opportunities to learn or train outside of formal classrooms, few safe spaces for learning and a lack of female role models.

An interview with Aminata Tholley

Our Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project harnessed media and communication to challenge negative attitudes and practices that hinder adolescent girls, particularly the most marginalised. Through radio programmes and social media content, the project challenges barriers to accessing education, training and employment opportunities.

Our radio programme, *Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap* (When a Girl Child Stands), featured young presenters and inspiring stories of girls who have returned to school or who earn an independent living. This included Aminata, a young woman who uses a wheelchair, who told listeners how she was able to transition from begging to starting a business selling toiletries and hygiene products.

OUR APPROACH

A GREAT PLACE TO WORK FOR OUR PEOPLE

BBC Media Action continually strives to be a great place to work for our people, our greatest asset. We want to maximise our people's fulfilment and enjoyment at work, as well as our potential as an organisation to deliver our ambitious strategy.

Culture

We will promote a positive workplace **culture** that is aligned with our values, builds staff **engagement**, and promotes **equity**, **diversity** and **inclusion**. Revolutionising our people experience across the organisation and focussing on what matters to our people will be our top priority. We will develop principles for a One BBC employee experience and standard across all global locations. When we are making people decisions, they should be global by design.

We will continue to use staff surveys and other engagement platforms to find out what matters to our people and identify focus areas for improvement. We will strive to build a high-performance culture and support meaningful career development for our staff. Our comprehensive EDI Approach and Strategy will guide our ambition to 'leave no one behind' both in our work and in our internal ways of working, structure and behaviours.

Capacity

We will continually build our **in-house capacity** so that we are equipped with the skills and knowledge we need to deliver impact. Our focus in this strategic period will be on ensuring we have the competencies and skills needed to make our key strategic shifts and internal enablers a reality. New core competencies include:

› Policy, influencing, communications and marketing as part of our shift to be more of a global public good, influencing media ecosystems

› Deepening understanding across the organisation of the BBC, particularly how it is changing in response to a fast-changing world, as part of our shift to maximise our BBC relationship

› Upskilling to match our digital ambitions, both through internal capacity-building and better leveraging and learning from the skills and experience within the BBC

PARTNER-FIRST

Partnership and collaboration are at the heart of our model. We hugely value our hundreds of partners around the world, including implementers, donors, research partners, sector peers and others. We cannot deliver impact without them – given the scale and complexity of the global issues we work on, moving the dial requires like-minded and motivated organisations to collaborate towards achieving common goals. We recognise that solutions are more likely found through diverse coalitions, such as when different sectors – government, private, civil society, academia – each bringing different skills, resources and perspectives, come together in innovative partnerships.

We recognise, celebrate and leverage the specialist skills and experience that enable our partners to deliver in ways that we cannot. To maximise our own value-add we must be ruthlessly focused on our unique strengths and capabilities, and work in partnerships where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

These are the reasons why we are committed to collaboration and to a partner-first approach.

CENTRING LOCALISATION

BBC Media Action is committed to centring localisation in our approach – prioritising locally-led development and recognising that **the knowledge, capacity and agency of local actors is fundamental to achieving sustainable development outcomes**. We recognise that an organisation's shift to localisation should include measurable actions to demonstrate an inclusive and equitable approach to partnerships and development, and this will underpin our localisation strategy in this period.

A radio presenter at Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation at work.

We approach opportunities with the following key questions in mind:

› Are we crowding out others from the market? Are we stopping local creatives from accessing opportunities?

› Is there a local organisation able to do what we can do, with or without support?

› Do partners want us to play a role? Can we work in support of a local partner, rather than leading ourselves?

› Does this contribute to shifting resourcing, access and leadership to local organisations?

BBC Media Action will prioritise partners and collaboration with local actors, making space for them to lead and have a voice in decision-making forums. Where it is most beneficial for local partners to deliver, we support or enable them to do so. Where it is useful for us to have a more substantial role, because of time, capacity or security constraints, we work with local stakeholders to ensure that we do this in a contextually appropriate way with a view to ultimate local ownership.

During this strategy period, we will take on less direct delivery work and increase the amount of work we deliver or commission through local partnerships. In each country where we operate, we consider how we work with partners, which partnerships we develop, and how we support the media ecosystem locally to ensure that strategy, decision-making and power sits with local actors. Our country-specific approaches help us to determine which partners to work with, who to collaborate with, and who to seek advice from, to ensure that any intervention is culturally sensitive.

Our localisation and partner-first guiding principles:

› Local actors are equal partners

  › We work with partners to co-design project proposals and approaches

  › We look to extend our partnerships in each country to include local research, policy, and thematic and creative organisations, as well as media organisations

  › Local actors actively participate in meetings, communication and co-ordination with donor agencies to support relationship building, facilitated by us as needed

› We prioritise long-term, locally-led partnerships with media practitioners and others, which produce the most relevant, effective and sustainable results. We work with local partners to co-develop long-term, capacity-strengthening plans based on:

  › Local partners' identified needs

  › An understanding of local partners' strengths

  › An assumption that capacity-strengthening is a two-way exchange between us and our partners

› We recognise that local partners tend to carry disproportionate financial and security risks. To be an equitable partner and good faith intermediary, we work with our partners and funders to understand and prioritise risk mitigation and ensure that risks are shared fairly among us.

› Our advocacy efforts use local insights and knowledge to inform our approach and apply these learnings to strengthening the local systems in which we operate.

Each path towards greater localisation is different. We retain governance and editorial control of our entities, activities and outputs to protect the BBC brand, which is often a key asset in achieving reach and impact, particularly when addressing stigma or operating in contexts where trust in local media is low. This means we cannot adopt a franchise model. Rather, we prioritise greater collaboration and stronger partnerships – including supporting others to build and maintain their own independence and editorial integrity as they work alongside us.

To further our commitment to localisation, by the end of 2024 we will:

1. Set ourselves a tangible target for a fair and transparent sharing of overheads with local partners

2. Develop and start to follow a measurable organisation-wide plan, in consultation with local partners

Research conducted by BBC Media Action with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to understand the gender gap in social media use in India, and its causes and implications for women's empowerment

DIGITAL

Throughout all of our work, we are increasing the pace of our digital adoption, moving in step with the diverse needs of our audiences. Our commitment to prioritising digital development will enable us to innovate, expand our creativity, responsibly deploy technology to serve our audiences, and support our partners in their own digital transformations.

This will help us continue to test new technologies, including AI. We will support our partners to be bolder in their own digital adoption, and more resilient to the threats this may pose to wider media ecosystems.

In partnership with the BBC Responsible AI team, we will communicate and work with media partners to adopt the Responsible use of AI principles and choose sustainable AI solutions. We will follow the basic principle that we must balance AI and human agency.

We will join global conversations around democratising the data economy, to help ensure the use of generative AI benefits all, not just large information technology corporations and high-income countries. We will partner with Project Origin – a BBC collaboration with media and technology stakeholders – to create a reliable, effective system to signal the integrity of media content to audiences. We will also collaborate with BBC Research and Development, to call for content creators to authenticate their content and highlight its nature and provenance. This will complement our existing work to promote the safe and responsible use of technology and social media platforms.

A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

The next five years will be critical in the global effort to curb emissions and transition to a low carbon economy, in line with the Paris Agreement. Climate impacts will continue to be felt by our target audiences over this period and are likely to intensify – and so too the clamour for action. The case for bold leadership has never been more urgent.

Maintaining a sharp focus on climate and sustainability through our projects and programmes, while intensifying efforts to cut our own carbon and reduce our impact on nature, as part of an integrated strategy, is a smart and necessary choice. BBC Media Action's sustainability strategy will be implemented through the following areas:

Thematic offer: We will maintain focus on climate through projects and programmes that deliver provable impact at speed and scale through innovative means.

Fundraising and partners: We will refine and expand our programmatic offer and increase our profile with donors and partners to optimise for climate funding opportunities. We will not accept funding from the fossil fuel industry; and we will consider the environmental credentials of organisations we partner with.

Programme delivery: We will model sustainable programme delivery approaches, striving to show leadership and innovation in terms of how to run projects with minimal environmental impacts.

Planning & targets: We will set ambitious, but realistic, long and short-term targets to reduce carbon emissions (buildings, travel, procurement) and our impact on the environment. We will create a plan with tangible, innovative and timebound actions, to drive towards targets and collect and publish data.

Engage and inspire: We aim to generate ideas and momentum by engaging staff and partners in collective action, including with the wider BBC.

'And…Action!', our COP26 event was livestreamed from BBC Scotland

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

The core measure of our success remains the impact that our work has on the ecosystems, partners and communities we serve. We are specialists in measuring the impact of media. The way we define impact is tailored to each project and its context: our organisational and project theories of change determine how we measure impact. These draw on different models and communication theories to achieve our desired outcomes. We have a strong legacy of understanding and partnering with others, including academics and independent third party evaluators, to rigorously measure our impact.

We will continue to build on our strengths and innovations in research that is grounded in our understanding of both audience metrics and impact. Across our portfolio, we use the best available data and evidence to guide our approach and demonstrate the impact of media. We ensure that our data supports learning and recommendations for adapting and further developing our work.

During this strategy period, we will continue to strengthen the quality and impact of our research and pursue efforts to generate and communicate robust evidence from our work to influence media and development sector policy and organisational learning.

In the next three years, **we will also track self-reported aggregate measures** that we know are important precursors or indicators of impact, including:

› **Reach: In 2024–2027 we aim to reach 100 million people a year.**

› **"Discussion as a result" of the intervention:** For example, in Afghanistan, 63% of people listening to our Darman (Healing) radio programmes discussed the content with others afterwards

› **"Learning from" the intervention:** For example, in Zambia, 54% of people listening to sexual and reproductive health radio programmes we supported said that they had learned something from this

› **"Taking action as a result of" the intervention:** For example, in Indonesia, 65% of people reached by our television or online content on climate change said they had taken action as a result of watching

We will also introduce cross-project measures that track how our work is having an effect on media organisations and ecosystems, and explore cross-project measures relating to our three focus impact areas (democracy, planet and inclusion).

| A group of Ebola survivors in Waterloo, Sierra Leone, 2016.

> **"** During the world's worst ever Ebola outbreak in west Africa, there was so much distrust and misinformation doing the rounds on social media and within some of the worst affected communities – a sign of things to come with the COVID pandemic. But BBC Media Action was able to mobilise trusted voices within Sierra Leone quickly, and deliver engaging and informative programming on the facts of the outbreak and the simple measures people could take to better protect themselves.**"**

| Tulip Muzumdar, BBC Global Health reporter

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