

CAPABILITY STATEMENT

# GENDER EQUALITY AND RIGHTS

Established in 1999, BBC Media Action is the international development organisation of the BBC, working with creative communication and trusted media to achieve positive change. We support the independent media essential to democracy and development, and we inform, connect and inspire change in our audiences – by sharing trusted information and stories that generate debate and discussion and challenge prejudice. Harnessing mass media, interpersonal communication and community mobilisation, we achieve impact at scale across our focus areas of **media development, governance and rights, health, resilience, humanitarian response and gender equality and social inclusion**. We have expertise in fragile and conflict-affected societies and environments where political, security or other factors mean that media is one of the few options available to reach and engage groups that have been marginalised.



We work in 23 countries

**Asia**

Afghanistan  
Bangladesh  
Cambodia  
India  
Indonesia  
Myanmar  
Nepal  
Solomon Islands

**Africa**

Ethiopia  
Kenya  
Nigeria  
Sierra Leone  
Somalia  
South Sudan  
Tanzania  
Zambia

**Middle East and  
North Africa**

Algeria  
Libya  
Tunisia

**Europe and  
Caucasus**

Armenia  
Georgia  
Moldova  
Ukraine

## Our approach to gender equality and the rights of women and girls, in all their diversity

BBC Media Action's [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy](#) outlines our commitment to ensuring the needs, perspectives and experiences of diverse people, including groups that have been marginalised, are at the heart of what we do. This includes a commitment to advancing gender equality through our activities and content, and supporting equality for people of all genders, not just those that identify as male or female. However, the focus of our current work is to bring about transformative change for women and girls, in all their diversity. This is because they make up half of the world's population and have suffered widespread social disadvantage as well as discrimination in most of the countries in which we work. This disadvantage is compounded where other factors such as sex, race, age, class, disability and sexuality intersect with gender identity. The deep-rooted belief that women and girls do not deserve equal treatment underpins violence against them and is used to deny their rights, such as: access to quality education, health and reproductive and sexual rights; freedom from violence; decent work; control of assets such as land and property ownership; and a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

All BBC Media Action projects strive to ensure all women and girls are seen and heard through balanced and meaningful representation in media content, within media organisations and in social discourse. In addition to adopting a gender-sensitive approach across all our work, we also design gender transformative initiatives that aim to intentionally contribute to gender equality, whilst managing backlash, in key impact areas: increasing women's economic, social and political empowerment; supporting access to health and education rights; reducing gender-based violence; and strengthening more gender-balanced media organisations.

We are also committed to using media, communication and social dialogue to challenge the underlying social and structural drivers of gender inequality, with particular focus on shifting discriminatory gender norms. We seek to be targeted and strategic in our projects, focusing on addressing the issues, norms and themes where catalysing change is most likely to bring about significant progress towards gender equality. We actively involve men and boys as allies. We recognise that gender equality is not a women's issue but requires active contribution and input from both women and men as equal partners and has benefits for society as a whole.



### Our gender equality strategies and impact

We seek to increase gender equality through the following strategies:

- ▶ Empowering women and girls to access their rights and men and women to come together to talk about issues
- ▶ Creating space for women and girls to be seen and heard, express their views and concerns on public platforms and demand answers from those in power
- ▶ Shifting discriminatory gender norms
- ▶ Strengthening more gender-balanced media organisations.

## Empowering women and girls to access their rights

Media and communication can build knowledge, efficacy and skills that enable and encourage women and girls to make informed voluntary decisions, set the agenda or take action in their communities. Our work also encourages men and boys to champion equality in their homes, communities and wider societies. BBC Media Action projects aim to empower women and girls in different areas of their lives, for example:

### Transforming opportunities for a generation of girls in South Sudan and Sierra Leone

We produced the Our School radio series in South Sudan which highlighted practices or attitudes that hinder girls' education, and through positive role models, sought to show girls, parents and the community how they can address those barriers. The project also involved community mobilisation activities across the country – from listening and discussion clubs to community dialogues and interactive drama. The radio programmes reached nearly a third of the adult population in South Sudan. Regular listeners consistently demonstrated higher levels of knowledge about education compared with non-listeners, and understanding of the benefits of girls' education increased over the project period. Regression analysis showed that regular listeners were more likely to discuss education with their daughters than non-listeners, even when other factors, such as age, gender and education level, were taken into account. And, critically, listeners with a daughter were significantly more likely to say she was in school than non-listeners. The community mobilisation component was also effective in increasing parents' understanding of the importance of saving money for schooling and using cash transfers appropriately for girls' education.



## How we do it? Four Mutually Reinforcing Activity Sets

### Research

to understand people's media and communication habits, needs, attitudes, behaviours and influencers to inform and programme. Programmes are monitored and evaluated to ensure they remain relevant and have maximum impact.

### Capacity Strengthening

for local and national media organisations, civil society organisations, development agencies and governments to work effectively with media and communication to achieve positive outcomes.

### Production and Dissemination of Media Content

using TV, radio, digital and mobile platforms and a range of factual and entertainment formats (such as dramas, discussion programmes and short social media content).

### Outreach: Community Mobilisation and Interpersonal Communication

to stimulate household and community discussion that can empower people, help them to localise issues and discover innovative solutions. Discussion groups, live recordings and community events allow us to extend reach to communities that have limited or no access to media.

In Sierra Leone, under the Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project, BBC Media Action produced a weekly gender-transformative and disability-inclusive radio discussion programme *Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap* (When the Girl Child Stands) and drama radio show *Kotoku Baray* (Open Secret) to challenge negative attitudes and practices that prevent girls that have been marginalised from accessing, or remaining in, education, training or employment. This included girls who are pregnant or are mothers; girls who are survivors of sexual violence; girls who can't afford indirect costs; girls who are engaged in income-generating activities; girls with disabilities; and girls who are heads of households. Our endline evaluation found that almost a third of the population (31%) aged 15 and above listened to the EAGER radio shows. Listeners regularly reached by the programmes were significantly more likely to strongly agree that girls and boys should have the same right to education, and over half (54%) reported that they had taken an action in support of girls' education (such as enrolling their daughter/girl in school or speaking with their daughters/girls about their education). Our results also indicated that the radio programming contributed to improved knowledge and understanding of the negative impacts of early and forced marriage on women and girls.



### Supporting women and girls to have greater control over their own bodies and health

We are committed to supporting women and girls to have greater control over their own bodies and health, recognising that discriminatory gender norms pose a major barrier in many contexts. For example, in Myanmar our research found social and gender norms in relation to relationships and sex prohibit young people from talking about and accessing reliable sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) resources and services, or making informed decisions about their SRHR. Our innovative SRHR project - *Ma Shet Ne* (Don't be Shy) - therefore used social media content to support young people living in Yangon to access quality information and realise their rights. Our evaluation of the first phase of the project (2019-2021) found *Ma Shet Ne* gained as many as 1.3 million followers, and 84% of audiences reported learning something new from the content – in areas ranging from contraception, relationships, to menstruation. The evaluation also found exposure to *Ma Shet Ne* was associated with more open attitudes about sex, and audiences were significantly more confident than non-audiences to talk about SRHR topics offline – such as with medical professionals, friends and partners.

From April to June 2022, in Somalia BBC Media Action adapted its 15-minute weekly radio programme, *Tusmada Nolosh*, to focus on the topic of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). The programme had a 10-minute discussion and five-minute drama segment. This was then broadcast by seven of BBC Media Action's local partner radio stations across the country and we created complimentary social media content for Facebook. Participants in our research described '*Tusmada Nolosh*' as a 'wake-up call' for the community as it informed them of the dangerous effects of FGM/C. Men talked about how the programme informed them about the problems that their wives go through from the effects of FGM/C, such as pain while giving birth. The research highlighted that providing information around the harmful effects of FGM/C from influential people such as religious leaders in the programmes can have an influence on changing people's perceptions towards it.

## Tackling gender-based violence (GBV)

Globally, it is estimated that one in three women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. We have produced a wide range of media and communication activities in countries including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal and Sierra Leone to: increase knowledge and understanding on GBV; provide signposting of available and trusted services; increase confidence to disclose violence; challenge the discriminatory norms, attitudes and practices that drive violence; engage whole communities in dialogue around the acceptability of violence; and put GBV on the political agenda. In Zambia, we are working to increase knowledge and understanding and spark discussion around gender equality so that young women and men are less accepting of sexual and gender-based violence and more willing to access support services. We support three local radio stations to produce a weekly radio show and public service announcements (PSAs) for broadcast across two Northern provinces, train young women and men to be champions in their community and create safe community spaces for constructive intergenerational dialogue. Our midline survey has shown: 84% of the 15-49 audience reported they had listened to either the radio programmes or the PSAs; over a third (37%) of listeners had discussed the issues addressed in the programmes with friends and family; regular listeners showed more progressive attitudes around sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) than non-listeners; and regular listeners were more likely to report incidents of early marriage and SGBV.

We also consider GBV within our humanitarian response. We carried out qualitative research in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), which highlighted how deeply rooted and normalised child marriage and intimate partner violence are within the Rohingya refugee community. This research informed the development of a pilot drama to encourage both male and female audiences to question existing practices and norms. As part of our response to the Syria crisis, we strengthened the capacity of Syrian media practitioners to question negative sexual violence norms, attitudes and behaviours and produce accurate and independent coverage of sexual violence related issues in Syria and countries hosting Syrian refugees.

## Creating inclusive spaces on public platforms

Where women are marginalised from public debate, both media and face-to-face communication outputs can create inclusive spaces to hear a diversity of female voices and increase the normality and visibility of women in leadership roles. This might involve, for instance, ensuring that female candidates are given an equal and fair platform in elections and the opportunity to speak on a variety of issues, not exclusively on “women’s issues” such as child health or domestic violence. Media can help men and women to influence power, enabling them to set agendas, demand change and challenge those in power. In Nepal, BBC Media Action’s flagship political debate programme aimed to create space for women and girls to participate and shape political discussion. Sajha Sawal (Common Questions) had the first female presenter on a political show in Nepal. It aimed to ensure that there was always a female panellist or expert and more than 40% of its live audience was female. All programmes analysed and encouraged reflection on how issues affect men and women differently. We produced a focused edition on dowry-related violence, including questioning police representatives about perceived impunity for such crimes. This was the first time that the issue had been covered on Nepali TV in such depth and with authorities answering public questions.



### Shifting discriminatory gender norms

Shifting norms is a complex, long-term and rarely linear process. However, the media's role in reaching across societies to highlight, shape and disrupt social norms is clear. We use media and communication platforms to engage whole communities, including men, boys and leaders, in discussion and reflection on gender norms and expectations around women's and men's roles, worth and status, as well as harmful notions of femininity or masculinity. In India, our ambitious AdhaFULL (Half Full) multimedia project challenged traditions which perpetuate gender stereotypes and inhibit discussion of sensitive issues affecting young people. It involved a TV drama, attracting over one million viewers per episode, plus a radio discussion show which aired on many community and FM radio stations and in more than 13,000 schools across Hindi-speaking states, together with a mobile game and a very successful 'girl gone bad' social media campaign. Results from a small randomised controlled trial found that young men who watched AdhaFULL were significantly more likely to reject traditional gender norms than those who watched a similar drama. The research revealed a more complex picture for girls, who struggled to see how they could, in reality, challenge gender expectations. This confirmed the need for long-term gender norms-focused interventions.



In Tanzania, BBC Media Action's national radio show Niambie ("Tell Me") and its accompanying social media content provides accurate, impartial and entertaining content on governance, health and livelihood topics. We have specifically sought to engage female audiences, by tackling issues that resonate strongly with women and girls. Our midline evaluation found the Niambe radio magazine programme reached 3.6 million people aged 15 and above. Regular listeners were found to be more supportive of young girls and women's rights to sexual and reproductive health and economic and political participation. Regression analysis also showed a positive significant association between regular exposure to the radio programme and ability to challenge discriminatory gender norms.

### Enhancing women's economic empowerment

In Somalia, BBC Media Action produced a weekly national radio magazine programme, Mawjaddaha Baraarugga (Making Waves), to address barriers to women's participation in the informal and formal business sector. We also supported local partner stations to produce their own localised versions of the programme. Listeners reported finding the programmes educational and appreciated the expert advice on ways to improve their business. Husbands, fathers and influential men also reported the content encouraged them to feel more confident in women's ability to succeed in business and this led some to support their wives/mothers in ways such as investing in their businesses.

In India, BBC Media Action delivered a three-year project to identify how technology can enhance pathways to empowerment in women's collectives, without worsening inequalities. The Digital Women's Economic Empowerment project collaborated with grassroots women's collectives in several Indian states to answer research questions establishing how technology can enhance empowerment, how private sector drivers might be leveraged to deliver digital solutions to these collectives at scale, and how we can apply learning from digital social movements and campaigns to women's collectives in low-resource settings. We have applied our research insights to co-create and test digital solutions with collectives in India.

## Developing more gender-balanced media organisations

BBC Media Action strengthens the capacity of women to play leadership roles within the media and communication sector, fulfilling their own ambitions and serving as inspirational community role models. Our capacity strengthening work includes training and mentoring on producing gender transformative programming and encouraging equal representation of women and men in content. We ensure women and men have equal access to training in a gender-sensitive environment. Until summer 2021, we worked in Afghanistan with local FM stations, supporting them to produce programmes giving women a public platform to tell their own stories, and to improve gender equality in the workplace. One female media practitioner reported that: “I feel happy that I can also make decisions together with men, and I am never scared of it, when we sit together, everyone can share their views, no one has the right to prevent you, our decision making is always collective”. We were also able to create safe spaces, off and online, for female journalists to discuss story ideas that tackled barriers to women’s and girls’ empowerment. In Ukraine, we have delivered training and mentoring with public interest media to improve the balance and participation of men and women, and ensure women’s voices, ideas and experiences are meaningfully represented – within the media organisations and in the content they produce – to properly reflect the audiences they serve.

### Key differentiators

#### Trust

BBC Media Action is closely linked to the BBC, a global broadcaster which is trusted by people across the globe, from the household and village level, through to heads of government.

#### Understanding people

We invest in building a strong understanding of people’s values, beliefs and influencers, which enables us to produce programming that sparks new ideas and increases people’s practical knowledge, confidence, motivation, skills and connectedness with others to take action. We pay close attention to understanding the role of social norms in this process.

#### Creativity and high production values

We work in often very competitive media markets. We harness the creative talent available from across the BBC, our other media partnerships and local creative industries to develop content that attracts, entertains and inspires people.

#### Reach and engagement

We reach millions with our programming, using varied formats and platforms to produce emotionally engaging programming that stimulates discussion on sensitive issues at scale, generates mass appeal, keeps people interested and inspires positive change.

#### Working in partnership to maximise impact

We work with local and national media organisations to reach our target audiences and improve the strength of independent and public service media. We partner with community-based organisations to extend reach of our content to those without media access and to facilitate face-to-face discussion. We work with technical experts and academics to support the quality of our programmes and the rigour of our research. Our work benefits from partnerships with the wider BBC, including BBC World Service.