

EVALUATION REPORT 2022

Executive summary

Africa

COVID-19 Response in Africa: Together for Reliable
Information

Background

When the COVID-19 outbreak began in early 2020, the European Commission asked media and development organizations to investigate the possibility of creating a consortium to provide emergency support to Africa for the anticipated needs stemming from the pandemic.

Funding in the amount of EUR 4.736.820 was awarded to a six-partner consortium, led by Free Press Unlimited, which included International Media Support, DW Akademie, Fondation Hirondelle, Reporters without Borders, and Article 19 as co-applicants. UNESCO was an affiliate partner. The 18-month project **COVID-19 Response in Africa: Together for Reliable Information** kicked off on 1 August 2020 and ended 31 January 2022 and was primarily implemented in 17 countries:

- Free Press Unlimited was active in six countries (plus one regional organization), with eleven partners: in Sudan (one partner), South Sudan (one), South Africa (two), Nigeria (two), Democratic Republic of the Congo (three), Ethiopia (one) and one West-African regional network of investigative journalists based out of Burkina Faso. In addition, a project with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Mozambique was started on 1 August 2021.
- International Media Support was involved in ten sub-grants via financial support to third parties (FSTP) in five countries: Mozambique (two partners), Tanzania (three), Zimbabwe (three), Ethiopia (one) and Somalia (one)
- DW Akademie engaged with five organizations in three countries: Kenya (two partners), Burkina Faso (one), Ghana (two).
- Fondation Hirondelle was involved in 10 sub-grants via financial support to third parties in four countries: Senegal (five partners), Guinea (two), Côte d'Ivoire (two), Benin (one).
- Reporters without Borders worked primarily with Africa Check in several countries.

- Article 19 worked primarily with Meedan in various countries.

- In addition, 12 countries and 29 partners were reached with small emergency grants.

DW Akademie was responsible for the implementation of financial support to third parties for five media organizations in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Kenya. The media organizations developed programs to inform populations in underserved rural areas about the COVID-19 pandemic and available preparedness measures. DW Akademie conducted ten media viability consultations in other project countries to strengthen the economic viability of media outlets affected by the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Jointly with other members of the consortium, participants from the project countries and beyond were provided with a moderated networking platform in the form of a virtual co-working space, where verified information on COVID-19 as well as documents and reports prepared during the project were posted. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development provided co-funding.

The project's overall objective was to contribute to better informed populations that were aware of how to protect themselves against COVID-19, to mitigate risk and limit the number of casualties.

The specific objective was to provide essential and timely support and materials to independent media and journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa so that they could both fulfill their role in providing quality and reliable information and overcome the risks faced during the crisis.

The project consisted of three components:

- Financial Support to third parties (FSTP) and emergency grants to media outlets and media workers
- Creation of an online co-working space, fact-checking workshops, viability support and community engagement and accountability

- Multi-tiered advocacy efforts

The evaluation was conducted during the final months of the project. It sought to gauge impact, measure learning and provide input for future projects as well as ensure accountability to the EU, the project's donor. The OECD/DAC criteria were considered together with gender equity and learning, cooperation and management throughout the evaluation. Data collection included a document review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and a survey.

This impact and results-oriented mixed methods evaluation was participatory and qualitative, and adopted an appreciative inquiry approach. The methods and tools included a literature review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions with representatives from consortium members, local partners, local communities and other stakeholders. A survey was developed and circulated to more than 70 local partners.

Project Evaluation Results

Relevance: Based on the OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance, this ambitious and complex intervention was a success. The project was timely and relevant and, combined with successful efforts at ensuring co-creation and pivoting, was able to address challenges posed by the pandemic such as misinformation. The project was designed not knowing how the pandemic would unfold on the continent, and while Europe suffered greatly, there was an assumption that the situation would be even worse in Africa. Instead, the impact of the pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa remains markedly lower than in much of the world. Despite this, local partners overwhelmingly spoke of the importance and relevance of the project.

The relevance criterion was “comprehensively fulfilled.” The project’s components and activities were all highly relevant to the context and to the needs expressed across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Effectiveness: The project was also effective in achieving its three intermediate outcomes: numerous media organizations and individuals were provided with support, which resulted in the production of a substantial amount of content; personal protective equipment was distributed to media workers in the target countries; media organizations received support to address the viability of their media organizations during the pandemic; media workers learned effective fact-checking and community engagement techniques and were thus able to ensure their communities had access to important, life-saving information. Finally, advocacy efforts, while seemingly modest, were successful and, in some cases, gained some traction with local officials.

The effectiveness criterion was rated as “overall fulfilled.” The project’s objectives and results were largely achieved and implemented with a consideration for local needs and with local input.

Impact: Considering the short (18 month) timeframe, this project was impactful and resulted in certain behavioral and attitude changes in communities across

the continent, as well as new skills, such as fact-checking, that are likely to be used going forward. In addition, numerous media houses were able to continue their operations thanks to the support offered by the project.

The three-pillar approach of financial support to third parties, learning and advocacy should go a long way to ensuring the future sustainability of local actors. In addition, consortium members stated that significant effort was expended on building local capacity, be it at the level of improving financial reporting (for local partners) or enhancing the journalistic skills that often require a significant time commitment, but also play a role in ensuring future sustainability.

The impact criterion is rated as “comprehensively fulfilled.” Clear, causal evidence for the impact of media projects such as this is always challenging; however, results show strong indications for medium and longer-term impact. For example, media houses were able to keep their doors open and journalists across the continent learned new skills that they can use in their reporting on issues ranging from elections to health.

Sustainability: The evaluator found that the project was particularly sustainable in two areas. The first was its contribution to the survival of several media organizations that otherwise might have closed. There may be some who view this as bridge funding, however, in an emergency setting such bridge funding is well justified. The second area was the promotion of fact-checking and its related skills – a skill that can be applied to numerous other areas, such as reporting and health coverage.

This project brought together organizations that normally would be in competition for funds; here, they successfully worked together. Consortium members all spoke highly of the coordination and communication between members. In several cases, this ensured coherence with other projects on the continent run by various members of the consortium. In many cases, consortium members were able to leverage their unique exper-

tise to the project. DW Akademie, for example, focused on media viability, while Reporters without Borders and Article 19 focused on advocacy.

The sustainability criterion is rated as “overall fulfilled.” The project’s results show preliminary evidence of sustainability, exemplified by media houses that were able to keep their doors open and journalists who acquired new skills that are transferable to stories beyond COVID-19.

Coherence: This was not a primary criterion for this project; however, the project design was coherent and any overlap with other projects was discussed within the consortium and addressed accordingly. The coherence criterion was rated as “overall fulfilled.”

Efficiency: Based on the global budget, the project was efficient, especially when considering that the project involved multiple consortium members, an affiliate partner, 17 focus countries and over 80 local partners. There was a substantial amount of output, and most activities were implemented in a timely fashion. Several local partners noted the significant amount of programming produced; one partner noted that “the small amount of money covered a huge amount of content.”

The efficiency criterion was rated as “overall fulfilled.” This was not a primary criterion for the evaluation; however, the available evidence suggests that the program was able to utilize resources in an efficient manner and produce results with a reasonable amount of economic and human resources.

Gender: This project did not have a specific focus on gender, nor did it have any specific activities focused on women. However, it is clear that the project ensured that the interests, needs and priorities of both men and women were taken into consideration. Anecdotal evidence from local partners suggests that efforts were made to reach women and that many of these were successful.

Informants noted a number of challenges associated with implementation in-

cluding Zoom fatigue, conducting virtual training, lack of electricity, internet access and/or adequate bandwidth, as well as the death and illness of staffers from COVID-19. Despite these challenges, however, as noted above, the project was a success.

The gender criterion is rated as “overall fulfilled.” Given that this was not a primary criterion, it came as a pleasant surprise that

there were significant successes in covering gender-related COVID issues.

Learning, Cooperation and Management: There is clear evidence of a strong and fruitful partnership that would likely not have been as successful without this project. The learning, cooperation and management criterion is rated as “comprehensively fulfilled.”

Lessons Learned

It is critical to continuously share information during the implementation of such a complex project.

Local expertise exists and can be utilized with excellent results.

Mobile-based platforms can be more effective than web-based platforms, particularly if there are connectivity or electricity issues.

Choosing target countries at the proposal stage can lead to a more dynamic start

to the overall project. This is particularly important in a project with a limited timeframe such as this one.

If the context does not materialize as expected, it may be prudent to request additional time to implement and/or adjust activities as needed.

Ensure use of local languages so that vulnerable and marginalized audiences can be more effectively reached.

Selected Recommendations

Ensure flexibility, particularly when the situation is fluid, and the project complex.

Be cognizant that the start-up phase, particularly when working with a large number of local partners, can take a significant amount of time and adjust the timeframe accordingly.

Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks that are suitable for emergency contexts; much of what was done in this project was done within a development framework.

Training can be more effective when done over a period of months as opposed to days, making virtual or hybrid training particularly attractive.

Do not be afraid to try something new. Emergency contexts often provide the opportunity to try, test and innovate. Much can be learned from such situations.

Text edited by DW Akademie.

DW Akademie

is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in more than 70 developing countries and emerging economies.

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