

Evaluation Report 2026 • Executive Summary

Digital Resilience and Dialogue in Asia

Strengthening young people to navigate digital
environments more safely and critically

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Background

Across Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar and Uzbekistan, citizens face growing barriers to reliable information and safe participation within the digital sphere amid rapidly evolving information ecosystems, on- and offline. Expanding Internet access and social media use have created new opportunities for communication and participation, but they have also increased exposure to misinformation, propaganda, online scams, and other forms of digital harm. These challenges are particularly pronounced where media systems are constrained, digital literacy is uneven, and public trust in information sources is limited.

The nature of these risks varies across countries. Cambodia is characterized by a media environment in which editorial independence is significantly constrained, and high reliance on social media for news. Kyrgyzstan faces increasing pressures on journalists and civil society alongside online polarization. Mongolia experiences

concentrated media ownership and disparities in access to reliable information between urban and rural areas. In Myanmar, the information space has been severely restricted following the 2021 military coup, while Uzbekistan continues to experience limited media independence and uneven access to trustworthy information, particularly among rural and marginalized populations.

In response to these challenges, DW Akademie implemented the Digital Resilience and Dialogue (DRD) program, a three-year regional program funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The program aims to strengthen the ability of young people, particularly women, to navigate digital environments safely and critically while contributing to more inclusive and resilient information ecosystems across the region. The project combines Media and Information Literacy (MIL) training, educator capacity development,

youth engagement activities and regional exchange mechanisms, supported by digital learning tools and cross-country collaboration.

This evaluation was commissioned to provide accountability to BMZ, assess progress in the final year of implementation, and generate learning to inform DW Akademie's future media literacy and digital resilience programming. The evaluation examines the program against the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

A mixed-methods approach was applied, combining document review with interviews and consultations with DW Akademie staff, implementing partners, educators and beneficiaries across the program countries. Comparative analysis across regions enabled identification of both common patterns and context-specific dynamics. The evaluation emphasizes contribution rather than attribution of change, recognizing the complexity of information ecosystems and the constraints associated with operating in politically sensitive or volatile environments.

Evaluation results

Relevance

The DRD program demonstrates strong relevance across all implementation contexts. Activities address pressing challenges related to misinformation, digital safety risks, and shrinking civic space, particularly among young people who rely heavily

on digital platforms for information. The program's focus on Media and Information Literacy aligns closely with the needs of beneficiaries, the priorities of implementing partners, and the strategic objectives of DW Akademie and BMZ.

Country-level activities were appropriately adapted to national contexts, addressing issues such as online scams and misinformation in Cambodia, information manipulation and digital safety risks in Myanmar, and access barriers to reliable information in Central Asia. Although some gaps remain in reaching rural communities and groups with limited digital literacy, these limitations do not undermine the program's overall strategic relevance. In summary, the project's relevance was rated as "comprehensively fulfilled."

Coherence

The program demonstrates strong internal coherence. Training activities, multiplier models, digital tools, and regional exchange mechanisms complement one another and collectively support the program's objectives. The regional design enabled cross-country learning and resource sharing, strengthening alignment across activities and partners.

External coherence was somewhat constrained by contextual factors. Limited institutional coordination in some countries and operational challenges affecting certain regional components, particularly digital platforms in Central Asia, moderated the program's ability to fully integrate with wider media development ecosystems. Nevertheless, DRD remains well positioned within the broader landscape of media literacy initiatives. The project's coherence was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Effectiveness

The evaluation finds that the program contributed to meaningful progress toward its intended outcomes. Participants reported increased awareness of misinformation and online risks, improved verification practices, and greater confidence navigating digital environments. Training-of-Trainers models enabled multiplier effects, allowing knowledge to spread through educators, youth networks, and community organizations.

In challenging contexts such as Myanmar, adaptive implementation approaches—including flexible delivery modalities and curriculum updates addressing emerging risks—supported continued program delivery despite significant operational constraints.

However, limitations in monitoring systems reduce the strength of available evidence on outcome-level

change. Monitoring primarily captures participation and activity outputs, while evidence of behavioral change relies largely on qualitative reporting. Consolidating existing monitoring data and introducing lightweight follow-up mechanisms could strengthen outcome measurement in future phases. Therefore, the project's effectiveness was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Efficiency

The program employed several cost-effective delivery approaches, including multiplier training models and flexible implementation modalities. These strategies enabled continued delivery despite limited resources and complex operating environments.

However, efficiency was moderated by administrative burden, coordination complexity, and contextual cost pressures. In some countries, partners reported heavy reporting requirements. Implementation delays affecting digital platform components in Central Asia further reduced operational efficiency.

Overall, while efficient practices were evident, there is scope to improve administrative processes and resource allocation to enhance operational efficiency. The project's efficiency was rated as "partially fulfilled."

Impact

The program demonstrates credible progress toward higher-level development outcomes through strengthened digital resilience among beneficiaries. Participants reported applying skills related to information verification, digital safety, and responsible online engagement in their personal and professional lives. Multiplier approaches also enabled broader dissemination of knowledge through educators and peer networks.

In Cambodia and Myanmar, the program contributed to improved digital

awareness and safer online practices among youth and educators. Given the structural constraints affecting media environments in these contexts, such behavioral and community-level changes represent meaningful progress toward strengthening resilience to misinformation and online harms.

Although ecosystem-level change remains difficult to measure due to contextual constraints, implementation delays affecting some digital components and limited longitudinal monitoring, the program nevertheless demonstrates significant contribution to improved digital literacy and safer online engagement across its target groups. The project's impact was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Sustainability

The program shows promising prospects for sustainability. Multiplier approaches have strengthened the capacity of partner organizations and educators, enabling continued dissemination of media literacy skills beyond the life of the project. Reusable learning materials and digital tools further support continuation of program outcomes.

In some contexts, early steps toward institutionalization have emerged, including integration of media literacy approaches into teacher practices and community education activities. However, sustainability remains influenced by structural factors, including dependence on external funding, uneven institutional integration, and contextual instability in certain countries. The project's sustainability was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Long-term sustainability will depend on continued investment in partnerships, predictable funding, and ongoing adaptation of learning materials to address emerging digital risks.

Selected lessons learned

1. The DRD program demonstrates that multiplier-based delivery models, particularly Training-of-Trainers and educator cascade approaches, are effective mechanisms for achieving scale and sustaining behavioral outcomes in resource-constrained and volatile environments.
2. Regional program design can strengthen cross-country learning, resource sharing and thematic coherence; however, contextual heterogeneity and administrative complexity may reduce operational efficiency, highlighting the importance of carefully calibrated geographic clustering.
3. Institutionalization within formal education systems significantly enhances sustainability, as demonstrated by emerging integration of media literacy materials into teacher practice and education structures in selected contexts.
4. In constrained civic and information environments, adaptive delivery modalities, including hybrid learning formats, community-based education and culturally embedded approaches, are essential to maintaining program relevance and reach.
5. Training approaches that combine conceptual media literacy content with practical media-production activities, such as filming, editing and storytelling, appear particularly effective in sustaining participant engagement and reinforcing learning. Across interviews, participants frequently highlighted hands-on exercises as the most memorable elements of the training and those most directly applicable to their own digital and social media practices.
6. Investment in scalable digital infrastructure, such as offline-enabled learning applications and multilingual tools, offers strong potential for expanding access and improving long-term cost-effectiveness, though governance clarity and timely rollout are critical to realizing impact.
7. Rapidly evolving digital risks, including AI-generated misinformation and online scam economies, require more agile responses than periodic curriculum updates alone. Media and information literacy programs benefit from structured processes that allow partners and educators to monitor emerging threats and adapt activities in real time.
8. Inclusion challenges persist across contexts, particularly in reaching rural populations, low-literacy youth and persons with disabilities, indicating that differentiated delivery strategies are essential for equitable impact.

Selected recommendations

1. Strengthen outcome-level monitoring through lightweight follow-up mechanisms and behavioral indicators to better capture program impact pathways.
2. Continue advancing institutionalization of Media and Information Literacy within education systems, particularly through collaboration with education authorities and integration into teacher training structures.
3. Streamline administrative and financial processes to reduce reporting burden on partners and improve implementation efficiency.
4. Accelerate rollout and governance clarification of digital platform components, including the app ecosystem and content library.
5. Expand inclusion strategies to better reach rural and ethnic communities, low-literacy youth, adults with low digital literacy levels, and persons with disabilities through adapted delivery approaches.
6. Strengthen alumni engagement and multiplier networks to sustain behavioral outcomes beyond the project lifecycle.
7. Reassess regional clustering and enhance thematic exchange mechanisms to balance cross-country learning with contextual coherence.

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 around 60 developing countries and emerging economies.

Contact

Sabine Harriehausen
Head of Project and Capacity
Development
✉ sabine.harriehausen@dw.com

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The objective of the external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results. It does not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of DW Akademie. Nevertheless, all findings were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.