



THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH INITIATIVE

2025 UPDATE

BBC
MEDIA
ACTION

In a media landscape increasingly distorted by disinformation, with rising attacks on journalists and shrinking press freedom, providing access to accurate, trusted information has rarely been more critical.

Yet in 2025, global public media faces unprecedented challenges. Over half of all international funding for independent journalism has been withdrawn, further undermining democratic values and human rights - especially in some of the world's most fragile and conflict-affected regions.¹

For 25 years, with the steadfast support of its partners and donors, BBC Media Action has championed impartial, credible journalism on the frontlines of conflict and crisis to empower communities, strengthen democracies and safeguard truth.

In September 2024, BBC Media Action announced a new initiative - the Pursuit of Truth - in which it pledged to mobilise \$20 million over three years to support the journalists of tomorrow and fight mis- and disinformation.²

Just one year on, the impact is already visible.

In the last year, we have:

- **Mobilised more than \$11 million in support of public interest media around the world**
- **Supported a network of more than 400 public interest media organisations**
- **Granted over \$4.8 million directly to media partners around the world to support their work**
- **Provided world-class training for more than 3,000 journalists and community storytellers in at least 17 countries – including over 400 from Ukraine 9 in 10 of those journalists who disclosed their age in surveys were under 35**
- **Enabled multinational research on the spread of disinformation, with a focus on elections, climate change and gender**

Cover photo by
BBC Media Action Nepal

¹ <https://ejc.net/news/the-2025-funding-reset-why-the-role-of-intermediaries-matter>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/media-development/pursuit-of-truth-initiative>

Empowering trusted media: support for partner organisations

Over the past year, BBC Media Action has supported **411 partner organisations** in some of the most challenging contexts in the world, creating a critical infrastructure for truth-telling and social cohesion in the modern world. We support peer-to-peer networks to help protect the information ecosystem, while also providing tailored, responsive business, operational, management, editorial and technical support.

This support includes capital investment in equipment, newsroom transformation and study trips and exchanges to meet with senior news leaders at the BBC and other public service broadcasters. BBC Media Action works with media partners to identify their organisational and operational vulnerabilities and address them through highly customised programmes, to help them become more resilient and continue to provide a free flow of trusted public interest content.

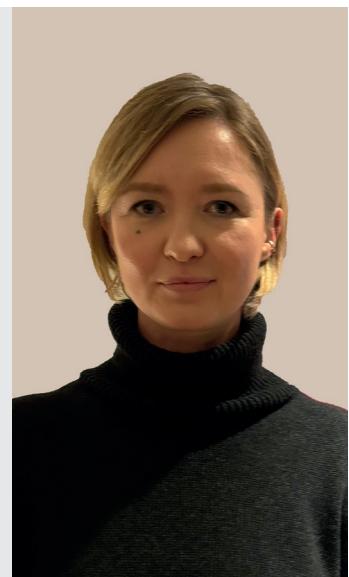
Direct financial support

BBC Media Action has provided **\$4.8 million** of direct financial support to media organisations, enabling them to continue their work distributing vital information to local communities. Despite operating within a particularly challenging landscape, BBC Media Action reached 90 million people across 30 countries and in 50 languages, including over 10 million through partner-produced programmes in highly contested Eastern European media contexts such as Ukraine.

Partnering with the International Fund for Public Interest Media and the UK Government, BBC Media Action has also supported the awarding of grants to 14 independent media houses as the inaugural beneficiaries of the National Fund for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM) in Sierra Leone.

“ This partnership and this work matters. And it matters not only for us, as a public broadcaster, it matters for public interest journalism because in crisis, it's crystal clear why you should be doing public interest journalism. It's so important for our audience. For our listeners from occupied Bucha, occupied Kherson, who reached out to us and told us that when the electricity was out, when the internet was down, the only way for them to hear that Ukraine still exists was on the radio ... And we were there for them, to support them even when the Russians were entering Ukrainian towns, when they were shutting everything down, telling people on the streets from their cars that Ukraine has fallen, that Kyiv is down, Odesa is down, Kyiv doesn't exist as a Ukrainian city. But Ukrainians could hear the news and could hear the truth through their radios.”

Angelina Kariakina, former Head of News and now Board Advisor for Ukraine's public broadcaster, Suspilne.



Cultivating a new generation of world-class journalists

Over 3,000 journalists, including over 400 from Ukraine, have been trained in areas such as fact-checking, investigative and solutions-based journalism, production skills and impartiality, giving them the tools and knowledge needed to gather, interrogate and deliver accurate information to people who need it across the world. Developing the journalists of the future is a key aim for the Pursuit of Truth initiative, with **90% of trainees who disclosed their age being 35 or under**.

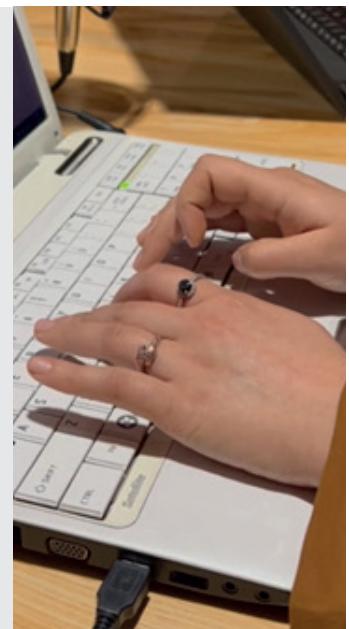
Modules covering the opportunities, limitations and ethical use of newer and emerging technologies, such as AI and open-source intelligence for newsgathering and verification, are especially important for today's journalists.

By exploring these tools, learners gain the necessary skills to ensure responsible usage of these technologies. They are taught to consider ethical issues including adhering to laws and guidelines related to protecting privacy and managing sensitive data, evaluating public interest and ensuring secure communication to minimise risks.

Moving forward, more courses will be available via BBC Media Action's adaptable online learning platform, iLearn, with more modules aimed at journalism students and early-career professionals available in six languages.

“In Afghanistan, women's voices are often ignored, and this fear remains ever present. I fear that my efforts will be in vain, and my voice will be lost amidst the noise of society and laws. As a female journalist active in the media, my recommendation is that women's presence in the media should be prominent as it once was. ... The presence of female journalists in media not only highlights women's challenges but also serves as a motivating force for women's progress and advancement.”

'Mursal' (not her real name), a journalist in Balkh Province, Afghanistan, supported by our training. In Afghanistan our former USAID project supported 52 local radio stations, including 12 either led by or focused on women. This project's funding ended abruptly in February 2025 and we have been able to continue some support to this network through other funders. In total, our partner radio stations in Afghanistan reach 90% of radio listeners and our partner TV stations reach 76% of the TV audience in six provinces.³ Photo by BBC Media Action Afghanistan.



³ Our research has found the total radio-watching audience is 39% of the population aged 15 and over in six provinces. Combined with our content aired on the BBC World Service Dari and Pashto language services, we reach 98% of all radio listeners in the six provinces. The TV-watching audience is 50% of the 15+ population across six provinces.



“ Press freedom is the backbone of any democracy; it allows journalists to hold leaders accountable and shed light on human rights abuses... [Through this training], I learned a lot, from writing creative briefs for programmes, audio and video editing, multi-tracking, script writing and how to organise town hall meetings.”

Amina Ahmed, a trainee journalist at Alheri Radio in Kaduna, Nigeria, received training and mentoring as part of a project focused on raising awareness of sexual and reproductive health rights among adolescent girls and young women with disabilities in Kaduna and Borno states. Photo courtesy of Amina Ahmed.

Public service media for climate

Projects in **Kenya, Bangladesh and Nepal** comprise BBC Media Action's flagship climate and resilience project, BRIDGES. The initiative aims to build stronger weather information services, supporting collaboration between scientists and climate experts, civil society, journalists and content producers to provide trusted, timely and relevant content.

Under BRIDGES, this year, BBC Media Action worked with 14 Nepalese local radio stations, conducting training and supporting the broadcast of 96 radio episodes and accompanying social media content focusing on more effective weather and climate communication.

“ It was during this dark time that BBC Media Action entered my life like a light in the darkness ... Their mentors and trainers not only equipped me with the skills necessary to cover stories that directly impacted lives but also restored my sense of purpose. They reminded me why I became a journalist in the first place - to be a voice for my community, especially during its most challenging times.

The training I received from BBC Media Action was life-changing. They taught me how to tell stories in a way that touched people's hearts and minds. I learned how to make complex issues, like climate change, simple and relatable for everyone. The trainers showed us how to use real-life examples and local stories to connect with our audience. This approach made a huge difference in how I reported stories.”

Wambaz Oleman Learat, a 26-year-old Kenyan radio presenter who began working with BBC Media Action through our climate-focused projects after cattle rustlers stole all of his herd – a huge blow to his livelihood and community standing. Through our projects in Kenya, we have supported our partners to reach 5 million people weekly with climate programming. Photo courtesy of Wambaz Oleman Learat.



Airwaves and ambition: building rural radio for local impact

In **Tanzania**, BBC Media Action's Rural Radio Project works to deliver public interest media programming that informs and empowers communities.

Local radio plays an important role in people's lives across Tanzania, particularly for those in rural areas. Internet access is far lower in rural Tanzania than in urban areas and this digital divide disproportionately affects women and people from lower income households. Local radio provides a connection to information and discussion about important issues.

Despite its vital role, broadcasters in rural locations have few options for raising revenue, meaning stations often struggle to pay staff consistently, cover their running costs and invest in the equipment needed to deliver high quality public interest content that meets their audiences' needs.

The Rural Radio Project responded by working with 12 radio stations in Tanzania to improve their production capacity by enhancing editorial and production skills; build their understanding of audience needs through surveys and focus groups; increase their income by building the commercial skills of staff; and instigate sustainable approaches to their work, such as creating systems for staff development.

Following the rollout of this initiative, the combined audience of the rural radio stations grew from 4.1 million to 5.1 million people. Almost 9 out of 10 listeners reported that the quality had improved, primarily due to more balanced content, a broader and more credible range of sources, more creative presenters and greater diversity in topics - all core elements of the BBC Media Action training and mentorship.

“ It was my dream to be a journalist and after seeing other female journalists doing well, I got inspired and here I am today! ... The focus on editorial values helps me stay grounded in the basics when doing my work, so that I can produce quality content. At the end of the day, the community gets what it needs without any bias.”

Jane Mjinja, journalist and assistant radio manager, Green FM, Southern Highlands, Tanzania. Photo by BBC Media Action Tanzania.



Research and resilience against mis- and disinformation

False or misleading information has the potential to destabilise societies, threaten democracy and affect our health and wellbeing. Addressing disinformation threats through local partners is a key focus of the Pursuit of Truth initiative. Over the past year, BBC Media Action has sought to better understand mis/disinformation actors, narratives and threats, as well as the digital media literacy of audiences, in order to develop effective, targeted solutions.

- In **Indonesia** and **Nepal**, BBC Media Action has conducted a thorough mapping of the countries' information ecosystems, including in-depth social listening and semantic mapping of social media posts, nationally representative audience surveys and monitoring of key media channels. This work has identified risks in the information ecosystems and helped to highlight characteristics of various audience segments – for instance, the habits of those who share quickly, rather than check for accuracy. Media can support audiences to build media literacy skills and make them less vulnerable to information disorder and key disinformation narratives circulating online. As a result of these findings, BBC Media Action is now investigating funding for tailored interventions to address these issues.
- In **Libya**, BBC Media Action has tested 'pre-bunking' techniques and a randomised controlled trial has demonstrated modest but statistically positive results – contributing to an evidence base beyond high-income countries, demonstrating that sustained investment in local research, design, and delivery can successfully help prepare audiences to recognise and slow the spread of mis- and disinformation.
- In **Bangladesh, Kenya** and **Nepal**, BBC Media Action researchers have surveyed audiences about their perception and understanding of disinformation around climate issues to spot and address trends.
- In **Indonesia**, social listening helps identify the types of climate falsehoods that circulate online, and highlights the most widespread claims. That insight then informs content for the Aksi Kita social media page, which debunks false claims and helps to increase audiences' digital and media literacy.
- In **Somalia**, BBC Media Action is working to understand how much audiences have learned about climate change and gender mis/disinformation from its radio programming, to inform its strategy and programming.

Media for building stronger, more resilient democracies

Following the global election ‘super year’ of 2024, and as numerous nations gear up for elections in coming months, BBC Media Action has been exploring how political disinformation spreads and how it can be tackled.

In preparation for elections in Moldova, focus group discussions with audience members from two of Media Action’s media partners provided insight into the impact of the programmes which the charity supports. One of these programmes identifies, discusses and debunks false narratives, such as those which purposefully use disinformation to create division and discord around people’s views on the EU.

In Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia, regular social listening, observation, audience surveys and interviews with media practitioners are being used to inform journalist training and mentorship programmes ahead of elections. The study aims to understand how people navigate political information around elections, the impact it has on how people vote and, ultimately, what media outlets need to do to address the issues and protect the democratic electoral process.

The road ahead

A recent study⁴ released by three consortia of leading media development organisations led by BBC Media Action, Internews Europe and Free Press Unlimited this year revealed that nearly \$150 million US was lost from global media support following the closure of USAID.

The impacts of this sharp drop in media support from multiple institutional donors have been instant and real, further eroding democracy and human rights in some of the most fragile and conflict-affected countries in the world such as Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine.

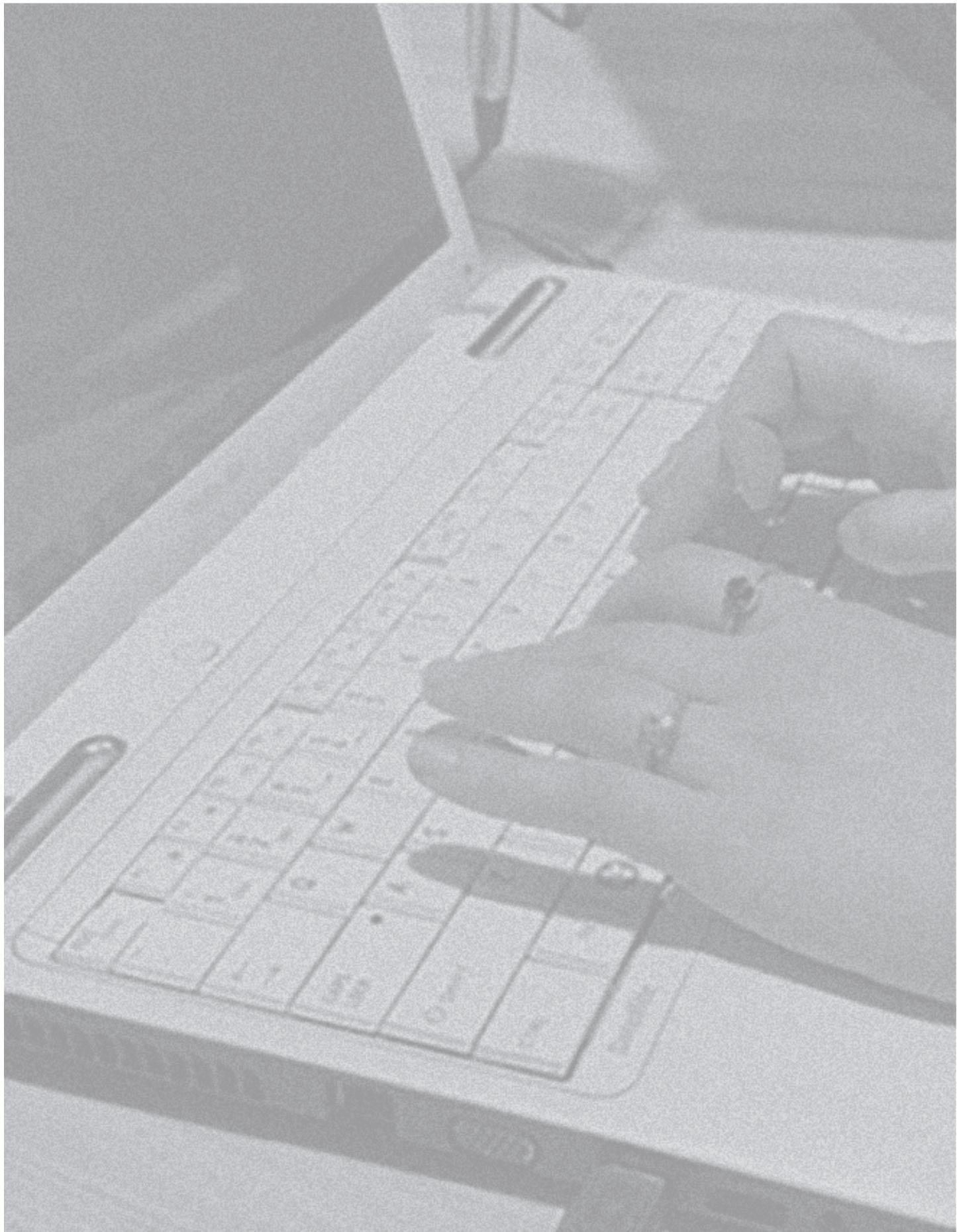
Sadly, many trusted partners and peer organisations have ceased to operate. Many more are on a knife’s edge.

Against this bleak context, our mission is more critical than ever. Our pledge to support the public interest media and young journalists of tomorrow is unwavering.

In an increasingly dark and complicated world, our partner organisations are beacons of light – eyes and ears in some of the most difficult situations on Earth, holding power to account as best they can.

We cannot do this alone. Join us in this fight.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/press-release/journalism-in-crisis-report>



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