



The impact of local radio on young Zambians' participation in civic life

RESEARCH BRIEFING | SEPTEMBER 2024

This research briefing focuses on the media consumption habits and political attitudes and behaviour of young Zambians aged 14–34 years. It also explores research findings on the reach and impact of the BBC Media Action Radio Waves project on this age group¹ and older listeners. Operational since 2014, the project's third phase ran from September 2020 to August 2023, and was designed to increase citizen participation in political processes, governance and accountability among 16–55-year-olds by prompting dialogue and discussion with local leaders.

¹ The total sample size for this age group was 1,250.

Introduction

Project context

Zambians, particularly those who are marginalised, notably young people, women and people with disabilities, have limited access to balanced and comprehensive information that enables them to advocate for their right to basic services and freedoms.² There are limited spaces for people, particularly women and people in rural areas, to engage with their leaders and hold the government and its service providers to account.³ This heavily affects the quality of service delivery, especially in rural areas and for marginalised groups.

Compared to previous elections, the August 2021 elections saw a relatively high voter turnout of 71% compared to 56% in the 2016 elections.⁴ The challenge is how to maintain the spaces for meaningful civic participation and political engagement beyond voting.

The most consumed form of media in Zambia is radio.⁵ Particularly for the poorest sections of society who cannot afford TV and do not have access to newspapers, radio is the most important (and sometimes only) source of news and information.⁶ Community radio stations in Zambia occupy a unique space, reaching areas that are underserved by the national broadcaster and commercial stations. As such, community radio stations have the potential to play a significant role in enabling citizens to hold decision-makers to account, while providing audience members with the information they need to make informed decisions about how best to engage and participate in governance issues of importance to them.

To this end, BBC Media Action has supported both community and commercial local radio stations in Zambia to cover local governance issues and improve local service delivery accountability since 2011. Most recently, it has done so through the projects Radio Waves (since 2014) funded by The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Zambia Speaks! (since 2016) funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the British Council.

² US Department of State (2022) *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Zambia*.

³ BTI (2024) *Zambia Country Report*.

⁴ International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2021) *Election Guide: Zambia*. Available at: <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/239/>

⁵ Afrobarometer (2018). Radio remains the most-used source of news in many African countries.

⁶ UNESCO (2022) *Celebrating Radio and Trust in Zambia*.



Project approach

The third phase of Radio Waves, a three-year initiative from 2020–2023, aimed to increase citizen participation in political processes and governance via community and national dialogue and discussion with local leaders to hold them accountable. The project supported a total of 12 direct partners including community radio stations in rural areas, to produce regular content across radio (principally), TV and online platforms.

To achieve this, Radio Waves bolstered the credibility of local media platforms, allowing them to better facilitate citizen participation in politics, governance and holding power-holders to account. The project aimed to improve the editorial, journalistic and production skills of producers, editors and reporters at the partner media outlets. By providing training and moderate production resources, the project empowered producers and reporters to produce more interesting, more responsive and more balanced media content that accurately reflected public needs and concerns. Additionally, this initiative fostered collaboration among producers, encouraging them to share best practices and innovative storytelling techniques to improve media content and audience engagement.

The project identified a particular need to engage young people in political processes. Around 65% of the population in Zambia is below the age of 25⁷ yet young people's participation in governance processes including elections is very low in a country where age is venerated. BBC Media Action also wanted to engage young people to develop the next generation of political leadership. This involved creating youth-oriented media content and platforms that encouraged active participation and engagement.

⁷ Population Council and UNFPA, 2019. State of the Youth in Zambia: Education, Unemployment, and Poverty Reduction. Policy Brief, Lusaka: Population Council and UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). <https://zambia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Brief-Policy-Youth-Zambia-FINAL%20%283%29.pdf>.

Research study

Methodology

This third phase of the Radio Waves project was evaluated using a large-scale quantitative household survey conducted with 14–55 year-olds in eight provinces where BBC Media Action supported community and commercial radio stations broadcast. Survey respondents were a nationally representative sample of 1,741 individuals (including 1,250 aged 14–34) selected through random sampling.⁸

This briefing presents findings for two age groups: 16–55-year-olds and young Zambians aged 14–34 years.

The sample was representative of the adult (aged 14 and above) population in the sampled provinces (Central, Copperbelt, Eastern, Luapula, Northern, North-Western, Southern and Western). The data was subsequently weighted against the latest Zambian national census figures (2022) by age, gender, urban/rural location and province.

Research aims

The project evaluation aimed to understand how capacity strengthening enabled local radio partners to improve political participation and accountability, and help create social change in their area at two levels:

Institutions: The ability of local community and commercial radio stations to produce governance-focused programming

People: The effectiveness of radio programmes to foster political participation among audience members and contribute to greater accountability

Initial descriptive analysis was conducted to analyse responses to key questions across the whole sample, and to compare results among people who were regularly reached⁹ by the programmes against non-listeners. Chi Squared tests were used to examine whether these differences were significant.

Further regression analysis was conducted on key questions to establish the association between regular exposure to the programmes (compared to non-listeners) and key intended outcomes, while controlling for various environmental, social and demographic factors that might have affected results.¹⁰

This briefing refers to respondents who listened to BBC Media Action supported governance programmes at least twice a month as “regular listeners”, and people who did not listen to the programmes as “not reached” or “non-listeners”.

The research team also conducted content analysis comparing governance programmes produced by some of the BBC Media Action supported stations. Fieldwork took place between September and October 2023.

⁸ Weighted.

⁹ Regular reach for the weekly longer format radio programmes was defined as listening every other week, or at least twice a month.

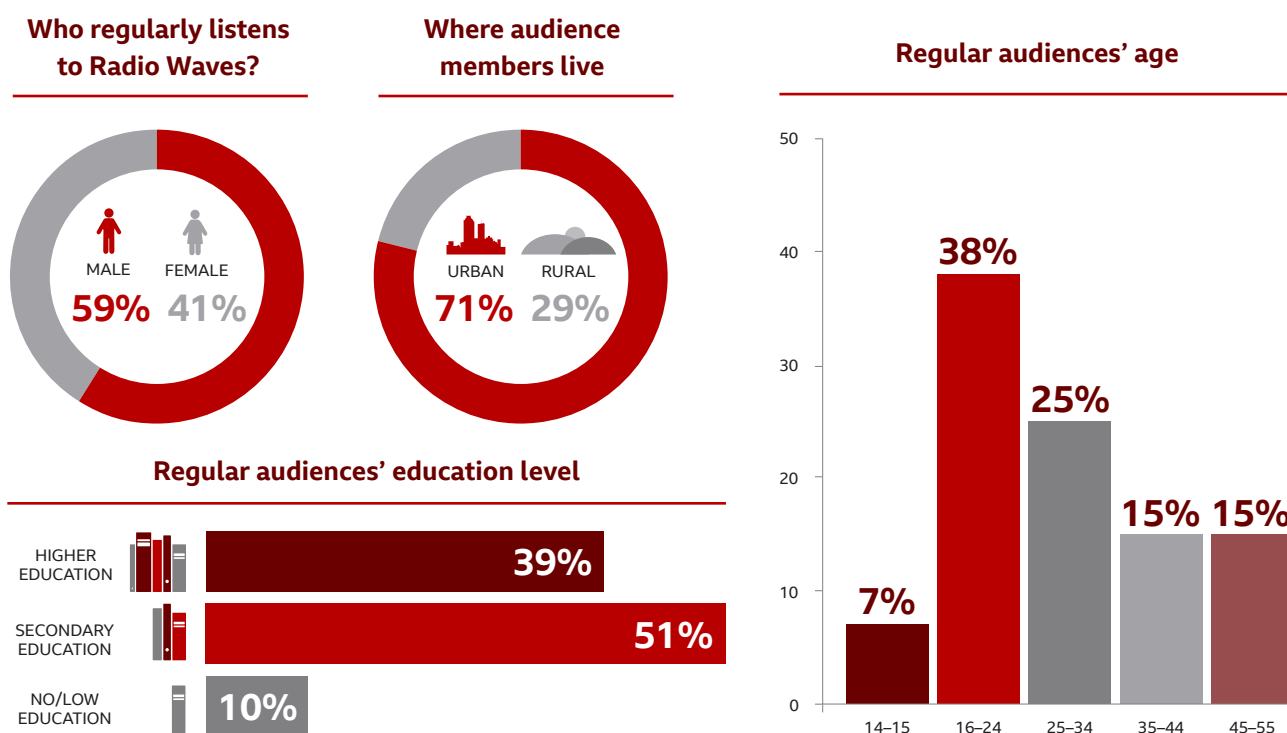
¹⁰ The regression analysis controlled for the following factors: gender; age; location (urban/rural); province; level of education; income level; and interest in politics.

Part 1: Key findings – Project reach and young Zambia's concerns

Overall, the programmes supported by the Radio Waves project reached one-third of the Zambian population aged 14+ across the focal provinces (**approximately 1.6 million people**). The people reached by the programmes were fairly reflective of the age profile of adults in the focal provinces, especially for those under 35 years (73% reached compared to 72% of the general population aged 14–34). Across the focal provinces, **approximately 1.1 million young people aged 14–34** were reached by the programmes. As well as reaching young people, the programmes engaged them – around 260,840 young people (23% of those aged 14–34 in the broadcast areas) listened to the programmes at least twice a month.

Across all age groups, men were over-represented among regular listeners – accounting for 59% of the regular audience compared to 49% in the general population aged 16–55. The programmes reached 49% of women aged 16–55 in the focal provinces.

Figure 1. Radio Waves programmes: Young audience reach and profile



Reach profile

- Within the total survey sample, one-third of young people aged 14–34 were reached by any of the Radio Waves governance programmes
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of those reached by any of the programmes were aged 14–34

Regular reach profile

- A clear majority (69%) of the young people reached by any of the programmes were regularly reached, listening to any of the programmes at least twice a month
- Young Zambia's aged 14–34 years who were reached or regularly reached by any of the programmes were more likely to be male and rural

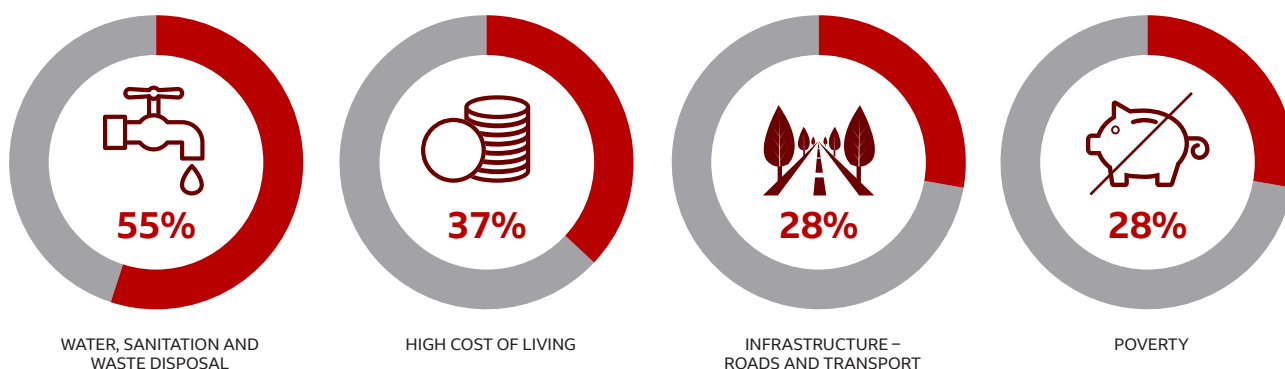
N=407, people regularly reached 14–55

Young people's most pressing needs in Zambia

Respondents were asked about the most pressing needs affecting their community. Among respondents of all ages, the four top responses were a lack of water/sanitation/proper waste disposal, the high cost of living, poor infrastructure and poverty.

Similarly, **lack of water, poor sanitation and poor waste disposal are the most pressing issues affecting 55% of young people aged 14–34**. This is followed by the high cost of living (mentioned by 37% of young people). Poor infrastructure and poverty were mentioned by 28% of young people, respectively.

Figure 2. Young Zambians' most pressing needs



Young Zambians' interest in politics

While 31% of young Zambians aged 14–34 follow politics closely, over half (56%) of young Zambians are not really interested in politics. Some 13% follow politics “about half of the time”, 35% do so “once in a while” and 21% “never” follow politics (see Table 1). Young Zambians who regularly listened to Radio Waves content are notably more politically engaged than their peers. And those who were not reached by the project’s media content were more likely to never follow politics.

Table 1. How often young Zambians follow politics

	All the time	Most of the time	About half of the time	Once in a while	Never
Total	17%	14%	13%	35%	21%
Regularly reached	24%*	15%	14%	33%	14%
Unreached	14%	13%	12%	37%	24%*

*Significant at the 0.05 level; N=1,250 people aged 14–34

Rural residents, people aged 16–34 and those regularly exposed to the programmes are more likely to follow politics:

- Rural residents are more likely than urban to follow politics all/most/half of the time (45% versus 39%, respectively)
- People aged 16–24 and 25–34 (42% and 48%, respectively) are more likely to follow politics all/most/half of the time compared to those aged 14–15 (30%)
- People in the Northern province (57%) are more likely to follow politics all/most/half of the time than those in Copperbelt, Eastern or Southern provinces (40%, 32% and 38%, respectively)
- Regular listeners are more likely than non-listeners to follow politics all/most/half of the time (53% versus 39%, respectively)

Young Zambians' sources of information on politics and governance

Radio is the primary source of information on politics and governance for two-thirds young Zambian respondents, followed by TV (cited by 43%). Radio is highly trusted – 80% of the young people who use it to access information on governance and politics indicated that they trust this information.

Two in 10 young Zambians use Facebook as a source for information on politics and governance, and over half of those trust that kind of information on the platform.

Table 2. Young Zambians' preferred and most trusted sources of information on politics and governance

Source of information	First choice source (% of respondents)	Most trusted source (% of respondents)
Radio	67%	80%
TV	43%	83%
Friends	32%	52%
Political officials	29%	59%
Family	27%	65%
Facebook	21%	58%
Online news sites	8%	55%

N=1,250 people aged 14–34

Community elders (14%), religious leaders (8%) and local chiefs/villagers (11%) are also sources of information on politics and governance for young people.

Part 1: Key findings – The impact of the radio programmes

The Radio Waves radio programmes aimed to contribute to Zambians' knowledge of their political rights and processes, to help them (particularly young people) feel empowered to engage in political processes. This section examines the programmes' contribution to audience members' levels of political knowledge, how often they discuss political issues with people around them, how confident they feel able to engage in political processes (political efficacy), and whether they participate in various forms of political participation, including voting. Non-listeners and regular listeners are compared to see if there are any differences in levels of knowledge, discussion and efficacy between both groups.

Political knowledge

Political knowledge is regarded as one of the key prerequisites of a functioning democracy.¹¹ The Radio Waves project aimed to improve listeners' knowledge of political rights and processes by improving their access to reliable, accurate information through governance programmes produced by the media organisations which participated in the capacity strengthening activities.

These programmes provided in-depth, locally-driven information on issues of importance to audience members to improve their understanding of their rights. Viewers and listeners appreciated receiving information on issues through moderated discussions – 87% of listeners aged 16–55 agreed that the governance programmes provided a platform for meaningful dialogue on issues of local importance. A similar percentage of young listeners aged 14–34 (88%) felt the same. A large majority (81%) of young listeners also agreed that the programmes covered topics that were relevant to their everyday lives.

Key findings relating to political knowledge:

- Overall, the study found low awareness of rights among Zambians, with just 24% of respondents demonstrating knowledge of at least four of their rights
- People regularly reached by any of the programmes had slightly stronger levels of political knowledge. Nearly one-third (32%) of 16–55-year-olds regularly reached by any of the programmes could mention at least four of their rights
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of survey respondents aged 14–34 were able to identify at least four of their rights. Among young regular listeners of the governance programmes, 29% could mention at least four of their rights
- The most frequently cited rights by survey respondents aged between 14 – 34 were the right to education (mentioned by 49% of respondents), the right to freedom of expression (47%), the right to life (41%) and the right to freedom of movement (40%). The right to own property and the right to fair hearing were the least identified rights each mentioned by 6% of young people
- A quarter of young respondents (25%) mentioned the right to vote and be voted for

Radio Waves results

Regression analysis (controlling for other factors such as age, gender, educational level and interest in politics), young regular listeners of the programmes were 0.18 times more likely to know their rights than non-listeners.

¹¹ Delli Carpini, MX (1999) *In Search of the Informed Citizen: What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. Paper presented at 'The Transformation of Civic Life' conference at Middle Tennessee State University, 12–13 November 1999. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/51691532/In-Search-of-the-Informed-Citizen>.

Political discussion

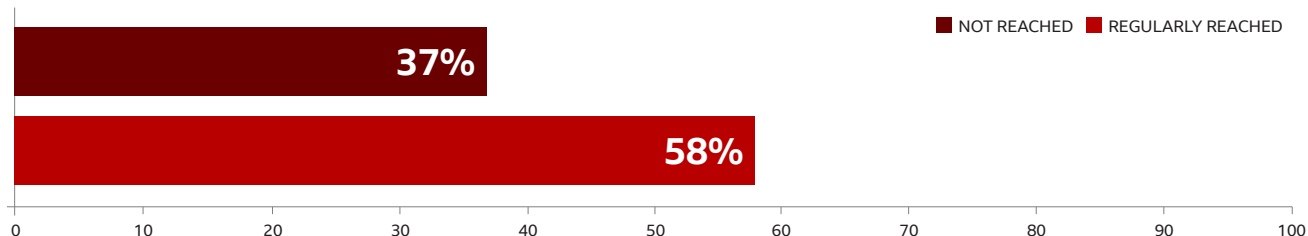
The Radio Waves project aimed to motivate young people in particular to discuss and debate political issues with others. Media programmes developed through the project featured expert guests who could equip audience members with information to help them feel confident in political discussions, and the project used Facebook to create spaces for youth discussions. Listening groups organised through a network of community journalists helped to identify topics of interest and identify suitable guest experts. The radio stations also invited audience feedback, which encouraged audience participation and engagement in the programmes.

Generally, Zambians surveyed for this research said they discussed local development and governance issues with others, including their families and friends. Across all age groups, 48% of respondents reported discussing these issues with relatives and 43% reported doing so with friends. Regular listeners to any of the programmes discussed these issues more with others. Among this group, 61% said they discussed these issues with their family while 55% did so with friends.

Among young Zambians who took part in the survey, 72% said they felt motivated to participate in discussions about local issues of importance to them. However, a smaller percentage (60%) said they actually did this.

When asked if they had discussed issues of local or national importance with family, friends or others, 42% of young Zambians had done so. Young regular listeners were more likely to have done this than non-listeners (58% versus 37%, respectively, see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of young Zambians who discuss issues of local or national importance



*Significant at the 0.05 level; N=1,250 people aged 14–34

Radio Waves results

Regression analysis (controlling for other factors such as age, gender, educational level and interest in politics) showed that young regular listeners were on average 2.3 times as likely than non-listeners to discuss issues of local or national importance with others.

Political participation

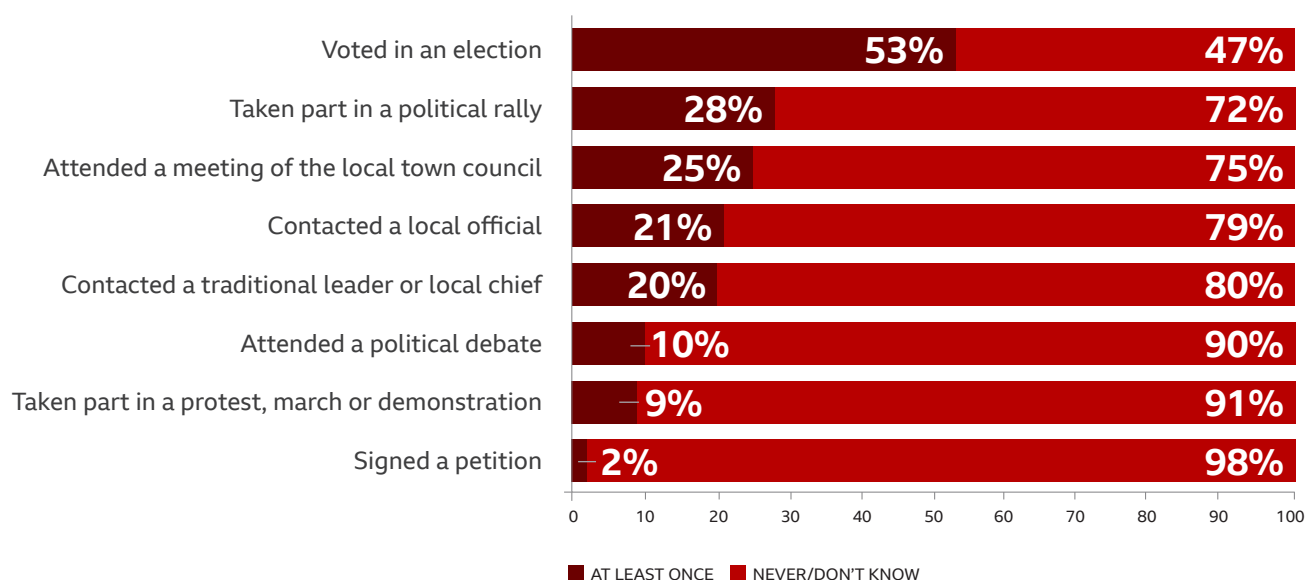
Political participation is seen as a key component of a functioning democracy.¹² Radio Waves supported media programmes that aimed to engage audience members in political processes – encouraging Zambians, in particular young people, to play an active and constructive role in decision-making processes that affect their lives. While 85% of 16–55-year-old listeners agreed that the programmes provided a useful platform to become engaged with local governance issues and political processes, a slightly higher percentage of young listeners aged 14–34 (87%) felt the same.

¹² Prats, M. & Meunier, A. Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/political-efficacy-and-participation_4548cad8-en.

One of the most common ways that Zambian adults participate in civic life is by exercising their voting rights during elections. Among all survey respondents, 60% of Zambians felt confident to explain how the voting process works to a friend or family member and 62% had voted previously. These results were stronger for regular listeners of any of the Radio Waves programmes. Three-quarters (75%) of regular listeners aged 16–55 felt able to explain how the voting process works to others, and 71% of regular listeners had voted in a previous election.

Around half (55%) of young Zambian survey respondents aged 14–34 were confident in their ability to explain how the voting process works and a similar percentage (53%) reported having voted in a previous election. However, youth participation in other traditional forms of civic life, such as attending a political meeting, is low. As shown in Figure 4, the top three types of civic participation that young Zambians reported having engaged in were voting in an election, taking part in a political rally (cited by 28%) and attending a local town council meeting (25%).

Figure 4. Civic participation among young Zambians aged 14–34



Profile of young Zambians who have voted/are likely to vote in elections

Young Zambians aged 14–34 who have voted in a previous election are significantly more likely to:

- Follow politics all/most/half of the time
- Be educated to university level
- Be aged 25–34
- Know that it is their right to vote and be voted for
- Be confident in explaining how the voting process works

Among the young Zambians surveyed, 46% “strongly agreed” that they would vote in the next election while one-third “agreed”.

These future voters are significantly more likely to be:

- Rural residents
- Aged 16–34 rather than 14–15
- Interested in politics
- Confident in their ability to explain how the voting process works
- Regular listeners to any of the Radio Waves programmes

Radio Waves results

Listeners to any of the Radio Waves programmes are more likely to take positive actions to influence local governance issues.

Radio Waves audiences are more politically active than non-listeners. A higher proportion of Radio Waves audiences had engaged in any given political action, including attending a meeting of the town council, or contacting a local chief or traditional leader. For example, 17% of regular listeners said they had contacted a local chief or traditional leader at least once in the past year, compared to 7% of non-listeners.

Young people who were regularly exposed to any of the Radio Waves programmes were significantly more likely to say they had participated in the following activities than non-listeners:

- Attended a local town council/ward development meeting/meeting with government officials
- Taken part in a protest, march or demonstration
- Contacted a local chief or traditional leader
- Attended a political debate

There were no significant differences by exposure for other political activities raised in the survey. Even when controlling for other factors such as age, gender, educational level and interest in politics, regression analysis showed that young people who regularly listened to any of the programmes supported by Radio Waves project were 1.5 times as likely to have been politically active, compared to young non-listeners.

The Radio Waves project created youth-oriented media content that encouraged active participation and engagement by giving young people a platform to voice their opinions and concerns, empowering them to contribute to governance and decision-making processes. One of the ways this was done was by creating safe spaces for citizens to interact with those in positions of power and hold them accountable via audience-led debates. Ward development committees and school councils also gave young people access to their leaders.

What prevents young Zambians from participating in politics/civic life?

Several main perceptions prevent young Zambians from participating in civic life:

- Difficulty accessing those in positions of power (cited by 54%)
- Elected leaders only listen to those in same party (53%)
- Fear of intimidation or violence (46%)
- Young people should not question those in positions of power (39%)

These results suggest that it may not only be a lack of interest, but a lack of access that prevents a significant number of youth from engaging in political life and further demonstrates the importance of governance content and outreach for young people to show how they can engage with people in power.

Political efficacy

Political efficacy, one of the key drivers of political participation in the literature, is defined as “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process”.¹³ Higher levels of self-efficacy among individuals reflects a belief that their efforts (e.g. contacting an elected official or voting) are more likely to affect local governance issues that affect their lives. Previous research across

¹³ Campbell, A, Gurin, G and Miller, WE (1954) *The Voter Decides*. Evanston: Harper and Row.

BBC Media Action's governance programmes also demonstrates that self-efficacy is the final link between exposure to these programmes and political participation.¹⁴

Overall, 62% of survey respondents felt that they are the sort of person who can question government officials on their decisions or actions. Among regular listeners aged 16–55, 74% reported having the self-efficacy to question government officials. Among young Zambians, these percentages were somewhat lower (see bullets). Levels of self-efficacy appear to grow with age – people aged 25–34 were significantly more likely than those aged 14–24 to have higher levels of self-efficacy in asking government officials questions about their decisions and actions.

Ward development committees and school councils

Survey results showed that two in 10 young people across two focal districts (i.e. Central and Copperbelt) had participated in ward development committees, school councils or other community fora.

School councils provided an avenue for students to interact with their school administrators through their schools. The young people raised a number of issues, including poor sanitation at Kabundi ablution block. The school administrators responded and the school now resolved the issue.

Through the ward development committees, young people reported a problem with the sewer pipeline in Sharmz community, prompting a response from the mayor and resolution of the problem.

Almost all (87%) of young regular listeners surveyed agreed that the governance programmes made government officials react to citizens' needs.

Key findings relating to political efficacy among young Zambians aged 14–34:

- 58% agreed that they are the sort of person who can question government officials on their decisions and actions
- 56% agreed that they are the sort of person who can get people together to demand for change
- 64% felt that they can participate in discussion and debate about local issues that are important to them

Table 3. Self-efficacy among young regular Radio Waves listeners and non-listeners

	Regular listeners to any of the Radio Waves programmes	Non-listeners
I am the sort of sort of person who can question government officials on their decisions and actions	69%*	55%
I am the sort of person that can get people together to demand for change	70%*	52%

*Significant at the 0.05 level; N=1,250 people aged 14–34

¹⁴ BBC Media Action. (2017). *Endline Research Report*. Internal report. Unpublished.

Radio Waves results

Compared to young non-listeners, young regular listeners to Radio Waves programmes demonstrated significantly higher levels of political efficacy. Some 69% of young regular listeners felt able to demand answers from leaders, compared to 55% of young non-listeners.

Regression analysis (controlling for other factors such as age, gender, and educational level) showed that young regular listeners were on average:

- 1.8 times as likely as non-listeners to have self-efficacy
- Twice as likely as non-listeners to feel able to get people together to demand for change
- 1.9 times as likely as non-listeners to feel able to discuss local issues of importance to them with others

One way in which the Radio Waves programmes nurtured political self-efficacy among listeners was by facilitating audience participation through phone-in programmes, which gave listeners a platform to share their thoughts and contribute to the dialogue. Nine in 10 young listeners agreed that the programmes gave people like them the opportunity to question government officials. The project also engaged young people through sessions on youth engagement, governance, democracy, active citizenship and Constituency Development Fund procedures. These interactions led to increased demand for accountability, leading to notable achievements such as the construction of a maternity wing to improve maternal services. Additionally, young people in Musenge ward successfully lobbied for a new police post to address rising crime and safety concerns in the community.



Part 2: The media habits of young Zambians

The media platforms most commonly used by young Zambians

Radio is the most accessed media platform for young Zambians aged 14–34. Two-thirds (67%) of young people in this study reported having accessed the radio within the previous week, and 40% of them did so every day.

Young Zambians also spend a lot of time on the internet – 54% of them reported using it every day. Mobile phones are also popular – 56% of those aged 14–34 said they used them daily.

Table 4. Young Zambians' media use

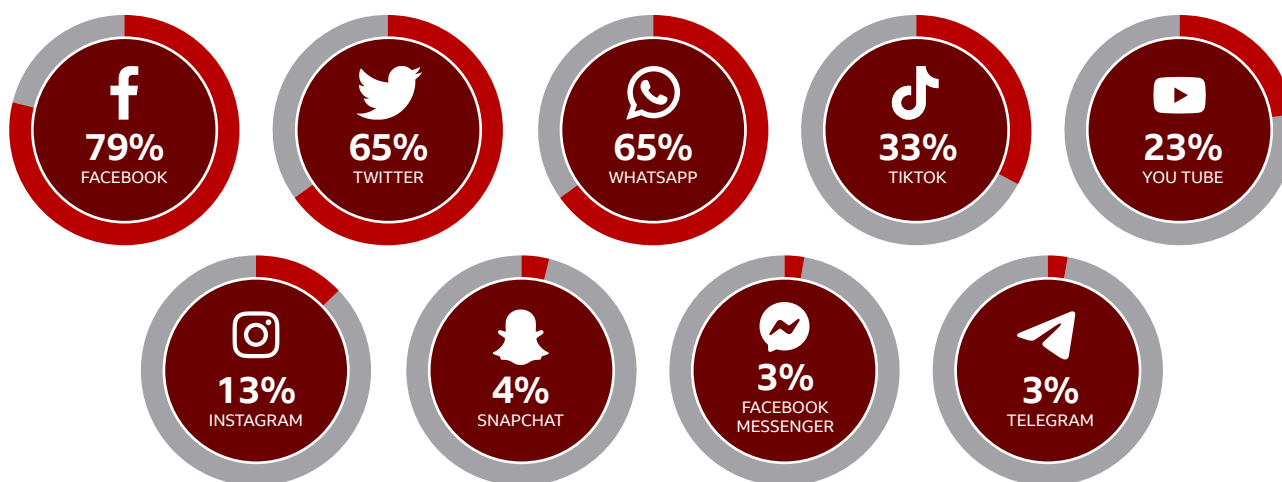
Type of media	Respondents who accessed this type of media within the previous week	Respondents who access this type of media every day
TV	67%	51%
Radio	86%	40%
Internet	42%	54%
Mobile phone	90%	56%
Newspaper	9%	16%
Facebook (of those who access the internet)	n/a	59%

N=943 young people aged 14–34 who access media

The online platforms most trusted by young Zambians

Among the 636 young Zambians aged 14–34 with internet access, visiting social media platforms was common. The most popular social media platform was Facebook (used by 79% of these young internet users) while WhatsApp was the most popular messaging app (used by 65%). Only around one-third of young Zambian internet users reported using TikTok, while two in 10 reported using YouTube.

Figure 5. The main social media and messaging platforms that young Zambians use



N=636 internet users aged 14–34

What young Zambians use social media for

Young Zambians aged 14–34 who use social media do so for several reasons:

- 69% use social media to share content that others have shared
- 64% use social media to watch video content daily
- 61% use social media to keep up-to-date with friends and family daily
- 56% use social media to keep updated with news and information daily

The vast majority of young Zambians (84%) appreciate the fact that social media offers opportunities to experience different opinions and viewpoints. More than one-quarter of young Zambians (26%) have used this opportunity to create their own social media content and make their voices heard.

Among the young Zambians who share social media content, 16% do so without reading it first. These 199 people are more likely to be:

- Lower educated/have received no education
- Female
- Not interested in politics

Young Zambians' attitudes to online mis- and disinformation

UNESCO defines misinformation as information that is false, but not spread with the intention of causing harm and disinformation as information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country. Many young Zambians are concerned about the negative impact of social media, particularly the hate they see on social media and the amount of false information circulating in Zambia. However, their behaviour in trusting and sharing potentially inaccurate or misleading information online shows that more could be done to tackle mis- and disinformation online (see bullets).

Among 14–34-year-old Zambians:

- 71% were concerned about amount of false information in Zambia
- 66% were concerned about the level of false and misleading information on social media
- 28% have unintentionally shared misleading information, either occasionally or frequently
- 20% believed that sharing misleading information is harmless
- 38% trusted information sent to them from friends and family
- 18% believed that it is more important to share information quickly than to check it for accuracy first

Part 3. Impact of capacity strengthening and mentoring support

The capacity strengthening support provided

BBC Media Action's approach during phase three of the Radio Waves project focused on strengthening the capacity of 12 local radio station partners to produce quality governance programmes covering local accountability issues.

This support addressed editorial, production and technical skills. It also focused on organisational sustainability issues, such as weak or unclear governance structures, poor management and human resources, ineffective finance and administrative systems, limited income generation and marketing capacity, and a lack of networking and learning between radio stations.

This capacity strengthening was delivered by mentors, and local and international consultants, who provided ongoing support to the radio stations. Participatory and practical training was conducted, based on common needs and priorities shared across the stations. Applying the BBC's 50:50 approach, the project ensured equal gender representation in all production groups, listening groups, discussion panels on programmes, and audience member selection.

“ BBC Media Action's mentoring has been pivotal in equipping the station with essential skills, with most programmes improving post-training. The hands-on approach has been particularly effective, and there's a clear appetite for continued support. ”

Programme Producer, Bangwela Radio

How the Radio Waves programmes achieved audience engagement

Evaluation findings suggest that the high level of audience engagement with the Radio Waves programmes was linked to the project approach, particularly the elements outlined below.

Increased engagement between partner radio stations and their local communities

Radio stations involved in the Radio Waves project adopted an audience-led approach to inform their programme content. Listening groups organised through an existing network of community journalists helped producers to identify suitable topics and guests or experts for their programmes.

Project mentors worked with the radio stations to interact with their local communities, for example by holding radio station open days, outdoor debates and roadshows. The radio stations also invited direct contact with their listeners through call-ins to programmes, SMS messages, letters and interactions with the radio stations' social media platforms. Producers endeavoured to make their programmes youth-centric and explain any technical language to be more accessible and inclusive.

These mechanisms were very positively regarded both by audience members and radio station staff, and contributed to programmes incorporating more audience members' voices and concerns.

The use of community journalists

The project used journalists from the local community to conduct research and facilitate listening groups, to convey community needs to local radio stations' production teams.



As a result, the programme content was highly relevant to the young target audience:

- 81% of young listeners thought that the programmes were relevant to them
- 36% of young listeners reported learning about issues affecting their local communities from the programmes

Improved production and technical skills

Training and mentoring in research, news writing, scripting and presentation led to programmes with clearer structures. Producers cited notable improvements in their ability to write compelling creative briefs, ensuring that they produced engaging and accurate content. Additionally, station managers pointed to a reduced turnover among employees, highlighting greater commitment and dedication among their staff as a direct result of the mentoring.

“The trainings have improved our ability to write creative briefs and phrase topics in an engaging way, enhancing the quality of our content.”

Programme producer, Kabangabanga Radio

“I can now edit audio content for our programme, such as vox pops and packages. I had no prior experience with audio editing software. I am now able to produce some of the most effective follow-up stories and packages that have aired on the programme, including the news programmes, and I believe this is what earned me a place at a three-day training in Stockholm, Sweden on internet and ICTs during conflict, crises, and disaster.”

Thelma Katati, community journalist, Kokoliko

Improved editorial skills

The project supported partner radio stations to develop a set of editorial guidelines. Station staff demonstrated awareness of these guidelines, and management and audience feedback alike reflected the fact that production quality improved as a result.

Content analysis found that the radio stations became better at holding guests to account, focusing on the discussion topic and including more diverse audience voices in their programmes. These improvements helped to create trusted platforms for dialogue between leaders and listeners, and improved the questioning of powerholders among young listeners, helping to hold leaders to account.

Among young regular listeners aged 14-34:

- 88% thought the programmes provided a platform for dialogue
- 88% thought the programmes provided a platform for accountability
- 87% said the programmes were responsive to citizens' needs

Radio station staff also spoke with a sense of pride about the programmes they produced through the Radio Waves project, and noted an increased demand for such programmes among their community.

BBC Media Action's comprehensive training also led to a more embedded editorial culture of fact-checking sources and stories. The editorial guidelines developed through the project now underpin most station activities and help staff to ensure greater accuracy and accountability in both their on- and off-air operations.

Fact-checking is becoming common practice for some of the partner stations' reporters and newsrooms. The impact of this is evident in some of the partner stations' dedication to tackling misinformation and disinformation through extensive research and verification.

“ Thanks to BBC Media Action's training, our station is slowly transforming. We now adhere to editorial guidelines in all our work, and fact-checking is second nature. These practices are integral to our daily operations. ”

Station Manager, KNC Radio

Conclusion

Evidence from this evaluation demonstrates that BBC Media Action's long-term capacity strengthening of local radio stations in Zambia through the Radio Waves project has helped to improve local accountability for community members in focal provinces, specifically the target youth demographic.

The media programmes supported through this project have provided young audience members aged 14–34 with access to relevant information on local governance issues, increased their knowledge of these issues, stimulated discussion about them, and enabled people to interact directly with power-holders to hold them to account and effect positive change.

Young people who listened regularly to the programmes were significantly more likely to know more about their rights, and had greater confidence and ability to participate in politics. Young listeners participated more in politics than non-listeners, even after controlling for other factors (such as age, gender, location, educational level and interest in politics). This impact was also observed among listeners who are typically less likely to participate in governance processes, including women and rural audiences.

These results were achieved at scale. Approximately 1.6 million people (33% of people aged 14+) across the focal provinces were reached by Radio Waves supported programmes. Over 1.1 million people aged 14–34 in the broadcast areas listened to the programmes, while 260,840 people (23% of people aged 14–34 in the broadcast areas) listened to them at least twice a month.

Key elements that drove this high level of engagement included:

- Increasing engagement between partner stations and their local community, including through the use of community journalists
- Improving the production, technical and editorial skills of partner radio stations and their staff
- Ensuring that partner radio station staff were better skilled at fact-checking sources and stories

These factors helped to drive audience members' interest and trust in the programmes, as they stood out as being high quality and relevant to people's lives.

While radio still remains the primary source of information for young Zambians on matters of politics and governance, social media – particularly Facebook – is increasingly used and trusted by many young people, and around 20% have created their own social media content. While 71% of young people expressed high levels of concern about the amount of false information circulating on social media, two in 10 believed that sharing false information that they come across is harmless. This shows the need for BBC Media Action's training and mentoring around fact-checking. It also shows that there remains a need to improve the digital literacy of young Zambians and strengthen their awareness of, and resistance to, misinformation and disinformation.

The capacity-strengthening element of the Radio Waves project also helped to address some of the key challenges that local radio stations face in relation to organisational sustainability.

Some radio stations also improved their ability to effectively manage resources. However, there are clearly still significant challenges to making this type of public interest broadcasting financially sustainable in the Zambian media environment. Further work in this area is needed, for example to support radio stations in marketing and attracting advertisers, and testing other financial models.

This project clearly shows the tangible difference that long-term capacity strengthening can make to enabling local media outlets to provide audience members with reliable, relevant and informative information about local governance issues, and provide a platform for citizens, including young people, to hold local leaders to account. This approach, and the key factors that enhanced audience engagement, are worth noting for future media development initiatives both within Zambia and beyond.

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