

Project document:

UNESCO global initiative for excellence in journalism education - Africa

1. Project information

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Geographical scope/benefitting country(ies)	N°	Region
	1	Africa (All five sub-regions)
Duration in months	18 months	
Donor/funding Source	Google	

2. Summary description

Using networks of journalism schools, UNESCO with support from Google News Initiative, is initiating a collaborative programme to result a sponsored update of journalism education and training programmes run by 10 leading journalism schools on the African continent, enabling these bodies to better respond to the major changes in the communication environment. At the same time, an estimated 100 schools will be exposed to new thinking and networking about what “excellence” means for journalism schools in Africa today. In these ways, the project aims to improve the strength and sustainability of the journalism ecosystem in African countries, by working with African journalism schools as a significant component within the whole.

The programme will have five steps, and will run from 2022 through 2023.

3. Implementation Strategy

3.1 Sustainable Development Goals

This project advances the achievement of SDG 16, Target 16.10 by improving the sustainability of the journalism ecosystem in African countries; enabling these bodies to better respond to the major changes in the communication environment in recent times.



3.2 Overall purpose and relevance (including needs, issues and baselines)

Background

Journalism schools worldwide face, in varying degrees, the challenge of adjusting to fast-changing conditions in the communications environment. These apply to technological production, analytical and research skills, specialized subject knowledge in relatively new areas (eg. artificial intelligence, migration, climate change), media economics and entrepreneurship, negotiating with power, and dealing with issues such as safety and disinformation. The long-running pandemic is also disrupting pedagogy that relies on engagement in physical space, which requires new teaching skills for remote learning and assessment.

In much of Africa, conditions are complicated by a low density of media institutions, most with shaky economic foundations which are under even greater stress due to Covid's economic impact. There are also many contexts of media capture and control, precarity for journalists, extensive linguistic fragmentation, as well as longstanding challenges for education and training that must be addressed to better serve rural and poor audiences with professional media content. Audiences struggle with high data costs plus shutdowns of electricity and even of the internet, and many are still frequently dependent on broadcast that in turn is subject to politically controlled licensing.

On the other hand, African journalism educators have succeeded over the years to operate programmes at large scale, producing trainees who have successfully gone on to populate media and communication industries in their countries, and who – often at risk – are in a position to supply local audiences, as well as the world, important African stories that would otherwise be untold.

UNESCO's involvement

Starting in 2007, UNESCO through its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) developed a worldwide model curriculum for journalism education, which was adapted and translated into some 20 languages. On the basis of this, a special programme was developed to support journalism schools in Africa, in line with UNESCO's Global Priority: Africa. A total of 96 institutions in Africa were mapped, and a round of consultations led to the definition of a set of criteria for what "excellence" should mean in the continent's context.

The result was a model covering 3 axes – Internal, External and Future-footing:

- **Criterion A:** Curriculum and institutional capacity.
- **Criterion B:** Professional and public service, external links and recognition.
- **Criterion C:** Development plan, strategy and potential.

Each criterion covered a number of bases. This provided a research frame to assess how institutions measured up.

For example, under Criterion A, survey questions were as follows:

- Describe your curriculum's balance between theory, practical application and reflection i.e. praxis as regards the teaching of journalism as such.
- How and where do you teach students about the links between media and democracy (eg. values and laws of free speech, ethics, economics, the historical role of media, investigative journalism, critique of bad journalistic practices)? Are there special courses? Mainstreamed/ integrated?
- How do you ensure the development of linguistic and multi-linguistic skills of learners?
- How and where do you teach how to report on key issues (eg. health, HIV, gender issues, Pan Africanism, development concerns, rural-urban issues and community media)?

After surveying 30 institutions (in 36 of the 54 countries in Africa) and conducting site visits, UNESCO found that a top tier of 12 African journalism institutions could be seen as potential Centres of Excellence, with a second tier of 8 schools deemed to have potential as Centres of Reference. Subsequently, UNESCO mobilized financial resources to help to close some of the assessed gaps to contribute to realising the potential of the schools to move toward excellence (or towards becoming potential Centres of Excellence). A survey of these schools in 2013 showed real improvements in some cases. In other cases, the support provided did not lend itself to empirical assessment of impact – which was a weakness of the experience that informs this current proposal.

Over the past five years, UNESCO has continued to contribute to excellence in journalism education on a more global basis, through involving journalism educators from developing countries in global networking and knowledge exchange and publishing a series of cutting-edge curricula. The latter cover topics such as safety of journalists, the coverage of disinformation, reporting on climate change, telling informed stories on migration and refugees, and journalism about violence against women and girls.

The Organisation is currently conducting a promotion of these curricula in developing countries, as well as supporting the World Journalism Education Conference to promote their Paris Declaration on the Freedom of Journalism Education.

The Covid-19 watershed

Current times call out for a shift to a higher gear, in the light of accelerated and dramatic changes brought about by the pandemic. As in many areas of life, the Covid has accelerated and intensified trends. In the case of journalism education, remote pedagogy even in African countries has become more normalized, raising a host of issues – not least what it means to imagine “excellence” in tele-learning of journalism. The practice of journalism itself is impacted – on the one hand, reducing “shoe-leather” based journalism further, on the other, placing a premium on journalism to add value beyond the proliferation of alternative content in circulation online. Prior economic problems in the news media industry have exacerbated, with significance to issues like internships and capacities for newsrooms to engage with the academy.

Reinventing journalism education in these conditions will require serious stock taking in relation to the relevance of this function, given both the new limits and the new possibilities on hand. This in turn calls for grounded knowledge as well as creative insight, followed by evidence-based evaluation and support for measurable change.

Timing is important. African countries, with young populations and economies hard hit by fall-out from the global situation, are in need of support. Media institutions and its journalists have a key part to play. Strengthening the underlying institutional infrastructure for African journalism, through a concentrated focus on journalism is a contribution to preparedness and sustainability, of benefit to African publics and resilience going ahead.

Project activities

A critical modality is the bottom-up and creative participation of African journalism educators. This is essential to develop the conceptualization of “excellence” and the engagement to propose forward-looking initiatives that are tailored to each journalism school’s local needs and possibilities.

Further, the project will keep a sense of geographic equity, so that beneficiaries of the small grants are spread across different African countries, with the general principle of one grant per country.

Building on the earlier UNESCO model, a structured process will be rolled out to address a fragmented and reactive situation, catalyzing African journalism educators as agents benefiting from collective knowledge and momentum. A series of consultations across Africa will help build the capacity of African journalism educators by establishing, defining, and implementing the local definition of excellence in their institutions journalism by following the steps below.

- Step 1: engaging the educators in a series of structured discussions and input responses to documentation, about what would best define “excellence” in their role both today and tomorrow in the conditions of their countries.
- Step 2: aggregating insights of these consultations into an overarching schema that can be used as a shared aspiration for African journalism schools.
- Step 3: encouraging journalism schools to use using this schema as a means for institutions to self-assess their potential – and their gaps – in terms of achieving such “excellence”.
- Step 4: inviting proposals to address gaps identified in a given school through an institutional self-assessment, in relation to “excellence”, for ten small grants of 16K USD each, and grants given to the top ones with due regard to regional and linguistic diversity across the African region.
- Step 5: assessing impact reports from the 10 grantees as to what has worked from the grants, in terms of measurable and sustainable change in their journalism schools and impact on students and/or working journalists.

In line with UNESCO's Global Priority: Gender Equality, gender mainstreaming will be ensured through the implementation of all of the project activities.

Outcomes:

Goal: This project expects to make a target of 100 journalism institutions aware of the project; with 30 of them then actively engaging in the development of contemporary criteria for excellence in African journalism education; and with 10 of them meriting small grants as a result of proposing evidence-based initiatives which enable them to move closer to "excellence" in their journalism educational role. The community of journalism schools will be able to access all of the resources created in the project at no cost.

3.3 Stakeholders: Beneficiaries and partners

Stakeholders: Journalism educators and their institutions in Africa.

Beneficiaries: 100 journalism institutions in Africa aware of the project.

Direct beneficiaries/Target group: 30 journalism institutions in Africa actively engaging in the development of contemporary criteria for excellence in African journalism education; and with 10 of them meriting small grants as a result of proposing evidence-based initiatives which enable them to move closer to "excellence" in their journalism educational role.

3.4 Impact

Stretch goal: the project can stimulate a pan-African "community of practice" amongst journalism educators and their institutions. Such a network, even informal, would enhance sharing of materials, knowledge, training, conferencing and research at scale. It would also provide a basis for journalism educators outside Africa to better engage with counterparts on the continent.

UNESCO's record and prestige, along with its networks, offers high probability of positive impact. Rather than an individualized approach, the initiative outlined above envisages institutional capacity building. The exercise as a whole will lift awareness, create ownership and momentum, and provide incentives that convert insight and aspiration into trackable results.

This project not only has merit in its own right; it could also serve as a pilot for other regions.

3.5 Project timeline

The duration of the project is 18 months.

The timeline of the project per key activity is provided in ANNEX A.

4. Project Management

4.1 Project management and implementation

UNESCO will have overall responsibility for the implementation and management of the project. Through an open call, UNESCO will identify, and conclude an Implementation Partners Agreement with, a suitable entity which can implement this project with the Organization.

4.2 Metrics for monitoring and evaluation

The beneficiaries will be primarily entry-level graduates from the journalism schools. Where schools also serve mid-career journalists, for example, through short courses, this cohort would also be impacted, though in advance it would be hard to propose metrics. The chain of impact is medium term, and subject to various influences.

1. How many schools respond and engage actively in the elaboration of excellence for these institutions?
2. How many journalism students these schools have, who could be impacted by this discussion and institutional strengthening?
3. How many schools submit actual proposals for the 10 small grants towards them moving close to the criteria for excellence?
4. How many students and/or working journalists are directly impacted by grant winners in terms of improved learning, such as in digital skills, within the time period of the project?

The anticipated proposals (and the 10 winners) are likely to cover diverse issues (eg. curriculum reform, educator training, relations with media industry, improved management, etc). While these do not easily lend themselves to quantitative metrics, they will be evaluated through surveys and interviews. (And the number of students impacted indirectly by the new materials)

While the projects proposals should emerge from “the grassroots”, UNESCO will also seek to ensure that there are no more than three projects focusing on any single topic, through early discussions with the institutions that intend to compete for the award.

5. Visibility: Numbers of news articles, downloads of the final document on “excellence in African journalism education”, and social media shares.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Timeline by key activity, including Evaluation(s) plan

Annex A: Timeline by key activity including Evaluation plan

Key Activities	2021	2022				2023		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
<i>Call for proposals</i>								
<i>Partner agreed and Implementation Partner Agreement signed (December 2021 – January 2022)</i>								
<i>Project preparations Consultations and production of the new conceptualisation of “excellence” in African journalism education (February 2022 – May 2022)</i>								
<i>Project proposals prepared by journalism schools (June – July 2022)</i>								
<i>Proposals considered and 10 awards allocated (August – October 2022)</i>								
<i>Initial implementation and reporting of the funded initiatives (November 2022 – March 2023)</i>								
<i>Full implementation and reporting by the awardees (April – June 2023)</i>								
<i>Evaluation by UNESCO of impact (July 2023).</i>								