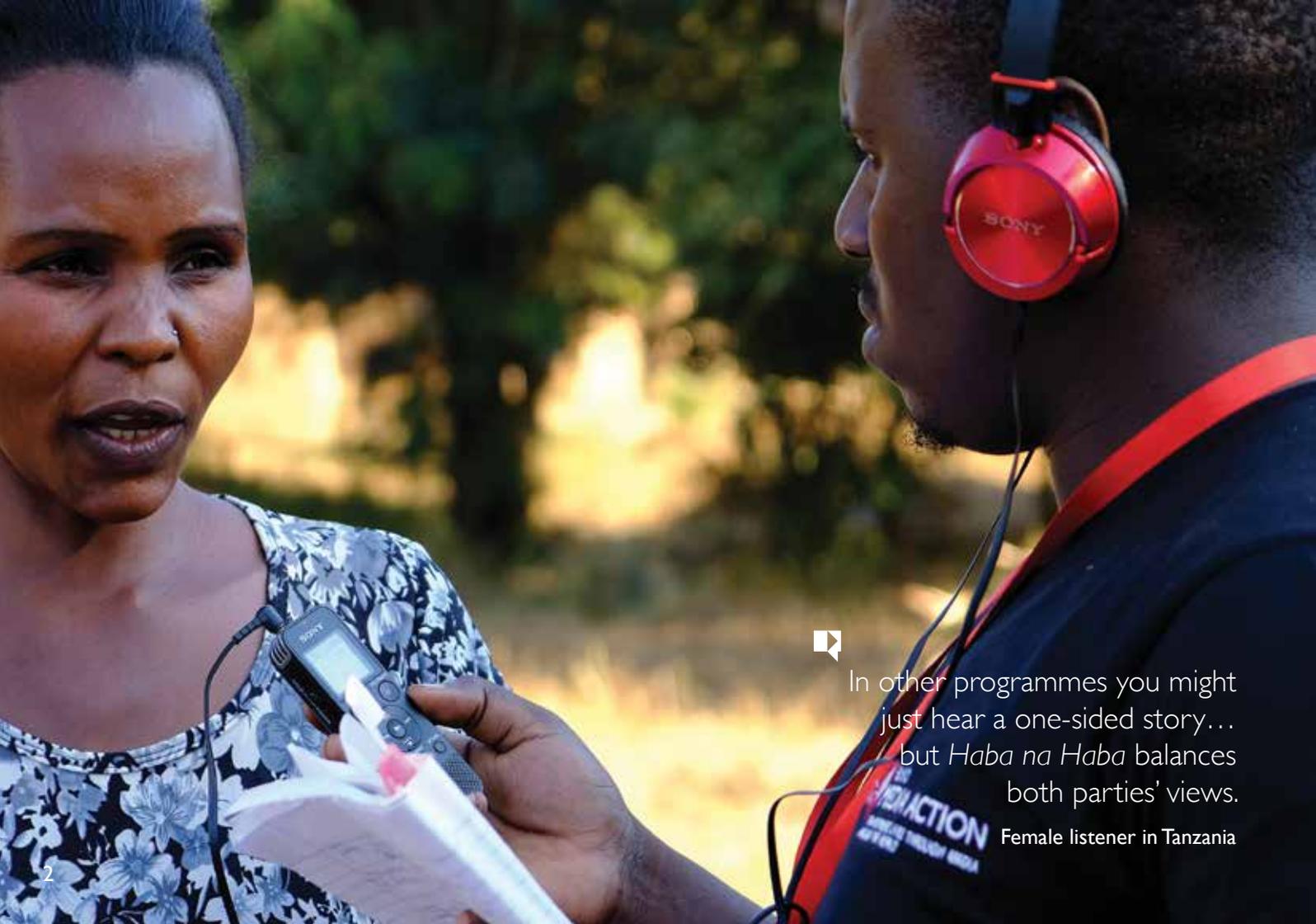


Media freedom and support to independent media





In other programmes you might just hear a one-sided story... but *Haba na Haba* balances both parties' views.

Female listener in Tanzania

Independent, editorially robust and trusted media are at the core of effective democracies and inclusive, peaceful societies – playing a crucial role in creating an informed citizenry and holding those in power to account. For 20 years, BBC Media Action has been supporting media freedom and strengthening the ability of media in developing and transitional countries to produce free, independent journalism that meets public needs and provides space for constructive public debate. Since 2013, we've supported independent media to enable informed public debate around more than ten elections, reaching over 124 million people.

Media face many challenges to their essential function as the 'fourth estate' in societies – ranging from the political and regulatory to the economic, technological, institutional and societal. Around the world, the monopolisation of media markets threatens truly independent media. So, too, does aggression against, and repression of, quality, fact-based journalism. And misinformation and disinformation increasingly undermine the effective functioning of democratic politics and public debate.

We believe that **multi-levelled change** is needed to achieve sustained improvements in media systems and to support media freedom around the world:

- ▶ Media practitioners need the **skills** to produce independent public interest journalism on multiple platforms and to facilitate constructive public dialogue;
- ▶ Media outlets require appropriate **management structures** to support a balanced, financially viable editorial proposition and to adapt to changing audience demands and media consumption habits;
- ▶ Strengthened **financial models** (whether commercial, community or public) must be embedded across media systems, enabling and ensuring editorial independence;
- ▶ **Dynamic networks and vocal champions** should provide protection to journalists and bring together a range of stakeholders to advocate for media within a good governance system;
- ▶ **More enabling legal, regulatory and self-regulatory environments** for independent media must be developed;
- ▶ **Policy-makers and donors** should be supported to build greater understanding of how, where and when their support would be most effectively channelled and;
- ▶ **Audience demand** for high quality public interest journalism must be nurtured and responded to, as a pivotal element of the media system.



A smartphone set up to document
a protest in Dhaka, Bangladesh
GETTY IMAGES

Our expertise and areas of focus

BBC Media Action has built field-leading expertise in support of independent media, spanning key components of media systems:

- ▶ financial sustainability;
- ▶ creative, editorial, and production models;
- ▶ governance, regulatory and self-regulatory environments;
- ▶ building coalitions and networks to support media's resilience to political pressures.

We are committed to generating robust evidence and learning to inform the design, scale, impact and sustainability of media development interventions. We are also actively engaged in policy-level research and debates about the future funding of public interest media around the world.



Building the resilience of free and independent media

In **Zambia**, we have provided wide-ranging capacity strengthening for local independent radio stations since 2011, which has improved their sustainability and ability to impact on local governance issues. We've supported production of weekly governance radio programmes and outdoor debates that engage audiences on important local issues and create opportunities for citizens to interact with those in power at a local level. Recent quantitative research showed that these programmes had tangible impact on governance outcomes – for instance, regular listeners were 1.5 times as likely to feel confident

that they could explain to a friend or family member how the voting process worked and to think that they could positively influence politics and governance issues that affect members of their community, compared to those who did not listen regularly.



People are able to hold their leaders accountable on this platform. It's a good programme because it has created an audience and visibility for us and I can tell you that people would hold us accountable if we failed to produce this programme.

Station Manager, Kasempa Radio,
– one of BBC Media Action's partner radio stations in Zambia.

In **Tanzania**, *Haba na Haba* (Slowly But Surely) is the nation's most widely broadcast radio show. We co-produce this national, accountability-focused programme with local broadcast partners, who in turn make their own sister shows known as Local Good Governance Programmes (LGGPs). These LGGPs have their own brands and social media presence, add around 500,000 listeners to the overall reach of *Haba na Haba* (5 million people), and are now largely financially self-sustaining. Our team of mentors and producers is supporting these partners in preparation for ultimately handing over the large

national show. On average, 50% of each *Haba na Haba* episode is now content-produced by our partners. In addition to building production skills, we are also working with partners on their commercial viability – with our support leading to increased advertising revenues for all our partners, in some cases by over 90%.





We have significant experience of ensuring that co-productions successfully transition to local ownership. In **Nepal**, we developed long-term training and mentorship relationships with ten local radio stations and one TV station, centred around co-production of local level discussion programmes to complement our national debate show, *Sajha Sawal* (Common Questions). The popularity of the local discussion programmes motivated almost all of the local radio stations to extend programme production post-partnership. Whilst a lack of resources compelled some to change the format (such as collecting questions from local communities prior to the programme or receiving questions over the phone instead of inviting audiences into the studio), at least 292 local discussion programmes have been produced so far across the 10 partner stations after our support ended.



Radio *Al Mirbad* is southern **Iraq's** steadfast public service broadcaster, which we set up remotely in 2005 through distance mentoring. Fourteen years later, it is a fully independent local entity and an influential force in Iraq's new civil society. *Al Mirbad* is one of the very few unbiased media outlets in Iraq and has established itself as a vital multimedia information provider playing an important role in political participation and government accountability. Some 81% of its weekly users agree that *Al Mirbad* follows up and monitors the work of government, and 86% agree that it gives citizens a voice/speaks for Iraqi citizens. Since 2016, the broadcaster has been producing a series of satirical videos designed

to comment on current events, tackle misinformation and build social cohesion through the common ground of comedy. They have become hugely popular, with their dedicated YouTube channel counting more than four million subscribers and 850 million lifetime views. We continue to provide *Al Mirbad* with production and editorial advice to ensure the organisation can continue to operate in a challenging funding environment.



You need to do a good job, otherwise you'll never hear the end of it from *Al Mirbad*.

Jabar Amin, former chairman of the provincial council of Basra, addressing officials before his departure.

Work to engage and influence policy makers and donors

BBC Media Action has been an adviser to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Governance Network on media and governance issues for a decade. In this capacity we have supported the convening of several donor meetings and DAC publications on how to improve media support.

We have also provided strategic policy advice and dialogue to the UK government – both to the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) – for over a decade,

including through a substantial policy relationship enabled by a global grant (2011-2017) and an earlier DFID-funded Information and Communication and Development Programme (2008-2011).

More recently, we have proposed that the severity of the crisis facing public interest media in resource-poor settings is so great, and the consequences for governance so severe, that a Global Fund for Public Interest Media should be considered. The fund would enhance the prioritisation and coordination of media support,

as well as mobilise substantial new resources. We have begun a feasibility study, funded by Luminate, investigating the viability of this concept, through which we are engaging high-level policy actors, senior academics and economists among others.

In addition, we are actively involved in discussion with partners and donors around the establishment of a Media Development Lab designed to substantially accelerate learning about what works and what doesn't in achieving political and economic resilience of independent public interest media.



Sanglap audience asking
questions in Bangladesh
BBC MEDIA ACTION

About us

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international development charity, founded in 1998. We believe in the power of media and communication to help reduce poverty and support people in understanding their rights. We inform, connect and empower people around the world.

We reach more than 200 million people a year, helping them make sense of events, engage in dialogue and take action to improve their lives. We are currently delivering media and communication projects in 18 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

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Debate programme *Sajha Sawal* recording in Nepal
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