

# Are capacity-strengthening activities producing impartial and engaging online news content in Libya?

*A recent evaluation of El Kul (For Everyone) – a training project that aims to produce appealing, impartial, accurate and timely news for young Libyans via Facebook – found a high level of audience trust in El Kul’s output and revealed that its diverse content encouraged discussion, appealed to women and enabled users to learn about the cultures of people across Libya. The project’s capacity-strengthening efforts were also found to have increased trainees’ soft and job-specific skills and their employment in the media sector.*

## **The project**

BBC Media Action launched *El Kul* in February 2015 as a means of continuing its training and development work with Libyan media practitioners in the absence of a trusted broadcast partner within the country.

*El Kul* is aimed at Libyan youth who want to gain media skills and provide balanced, fair reporting on events and stories of interest to Libyans everywhere. Trainees are recruited directly in Libya, through advertising on Facebook and other networks such as universities’ media departments and Libyan media outlets. In total, BBC Media Action trained 67 trainees during 2016-2017, of which 37 (55%) were women.

As part of the implementation of the project, *El Kul* provides daily news on a dedicated Facebook page that aims to offer Libyans an accurate, timely and impartial source of information on key issues (e.g. the ongoing peace talks) at a crucial juncture in the country’s political transition. In addition, *El Kul* seeks to produce content that appeals to young audiences – such as sport, entertainment, arts and music.

## **Research approach**

To evaluate the impact of the project’s capacity-strengthening element on trainees’ abilities, BBC Media Action commissioned an independent media consultant to assess trainees’ outputs before and after training. To further assess change in trainees’ skills, trainees completed self-assessment forms before and after training, scoring their job-specific and soft skills. In addition, 55 trainees who had finished training three or more months ago completed a follow-up survey. The consultant also interviewed: two trainees, three trainers, the *El Kul* social media manager and BBC Media Action’s Libya country director.

BBC Media Action used a number of research methods to evaluate audiences’ perceptions of *El Kul*’s effectiveness. This included: an online survey of 195 users, in-depth telephone surveys of 30 users, and a female panel who were sent content once a month for four months.

## Key findings

### Audience engagement

- *El Kul* is engaged a large number of users, with an average of 97,000 engaged users a week
- Research participants had a high level of trust in *El Kul*'s output: 84% of online survey respondents reported that they trust the page as a source of credible and impartial information, and the majority of telephone interviewees stated that they would recommend *El Kul* to a friend
- *El Kul* compared favourably to other media, with users describing it as “trustworthy”, “unique” and “impartial”
- Users viewed *El Kul*'s content positively, reporting that *El Kul* was willing to address topics overlooked by other news sources and covered a variety of topics from across the country. Audiences felt that this diversity and broad geographical spread encouraged discussion and enabled users to learn about those from other areas in Libya
- Female panel members were particularly positive about the content they were shown, describing it as “good”, “interesting” and “new”

*“I see a major difference between El Kul and other media. El Kul has its own style, such as its use of graphics. News presented in videos is fluid and interesting.”*

*(Male El Kul user, Misrata, 2017)*

### Capacity strengthening

- The capacity-strengthening activities were found to have increased trainees' self-reported scores across a number of soft and job-specific skills. One of the greatest changes related to their use of newsroom technology. The independent evaluator attributed this skill change to the scenarios BBC Media Action used in its training, which were believed to be similar to the newsroom in practice
- The follow-up survey revealed that the training had been effective as it had contributed to an increase in employment in the media sector

*“El Kul is a school I graduated from. The training is a green card to work in other media organizations”*

*(Female trainee, Benghazi, 2017)*

### Implications

The following recommendations arose from the research:

- Consider increasing the length of training; the project team has already taken up this recommendation
- Publish more materials, including more reports produced inside Libya; the project team hopes that the implementation of the alumni network (which includes a small team in Libya) will increase production and reporting