Research at BBC Media Action

Putting our audience first
We are independent from the BBC, but share the BBC’s fundamental values and have partnerships with the BBC World Service and national broadcasters that reach millions of people in developing countries. In addition, we train journalists and reach audiences with local broadcast partners. Research is embedded across our project life cycle. Findings inform our work, bridging theory and practice to provide an evidence base both for our own programmes and for anyone working in media and development worldwide.

**Speaking to our audience**

Audiences are at the heart of everything we do: this key BBC value is also vital for creating effective communication for development. To reach the people who most need our programmes, we have to know who they are — how they live, what they believe, what they think of as their problems and strengths.

Research is our path to getting this information, which we use to underpin, develop, monitor and evaluate our work. The data and insight we generate from research allow us to tailor our programmes to our listening or watching audience — people who want and need to improve their governance, health and resilience.

**A snapshot of our research**

- We have a team of up to 100 researchers
- We work to understand audiences in 24 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe
- We do large-scale quantitative research, in-depth qualitative research, multi-method research and studies across several countries
- We do research to inform our programmes, to evaluate our impact, and to contribute to knowledge in the media for development sector.

**Audience surveys help us assess the impact of live debate programmes**

We have delivered professional qualitative and quantitative research in 42 languages across 37 countries and now work in:

1. Afghanistan  
2. Algeria  
3. Bangladesh  
4. Burma  
5. Cambodia  
6. China  
7. Egypt  
8. Ethiopia  
9. India  
10. Indonesia  
11. Iraq  
12. Kenya  
13. Libya  
14. Nepal  
15. Nigeria  
16. Pakistan  
17. Serbia  
18. Sierra Leone  
19. Somalia  
20. South Sudan  
21. Tanzania  
22. Tunisia  
23. Vietnam  
24. Zambia
Research informs

Information can make the difference between life and death in South Sudan, where families face some of the highest maternal and infant death rates in the world. The fact that people speak over 60 languages and are recovering from decades of war adds further challenges.

To help frame health information to suit people’s needs and ensure that it uses familiar language and concepts, we interviewed families in a formative research project. The results provided fascinating insights: for instance people in parts of South Sudan may measure time by cropping cycles, or by how long calves stay with their mothers, rather than by clocks or calendars.

This and other findings now inform and shape our new radio programme to support healthy mothers and babies, Our Tukul (Our House). Suggesting in broadcasts that women breastfeed for two cropping cycles – equivalent to the recommended six months – is just one example of how this works.

Similar research in other countries helps shape other projects on women’s health, such as Mobile Kunji (which means “guide” or “key” in Hindi) – our innovative mobile health project in Bihar, India. Mobile Kunji uses pre-recorded messages on important issues around pregnancy, childbirth and infant health to support mothers and babies.

Research poses questions

Working across seven countries and through research with 33,000 people, Climate Asia – our largest research project – investigates people’s everyday experiences of climate change. While climate statistics can tell us that the weather in Asia is changing, policy makers and practitioners had little systematic data about how people live with climate change today. Our research fills this gap by exploring people’s experiences with farming, livelihoods, health, media, governments, access to food and water, views on the future, fundamental values and much more.

All data taken from surveys, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and community assessments is being shared in a custom-built online data portal that allows full analysis and planning. Together this will provide a rich source of current information to help anyone designing policy and programmes to support climate change adaptation.

My eldest son… asked me where he should continue his education after finishing elementary school, but how can I send him to school when I have to work so hard even to feed my family each day?

A new mother in South Sudan

Jamaludin, 50, a fisherman in south-east Sulawesi, Indonesia

If you know the benefits of breastfeeding your baby for six months, you will not act according to another person’s view, but just continue with your breastfeeding.

A new mother in South Sudan

Research informs and shapes our projects on women’s health.
Research explores impact

Research evaluates

How best can the media provide the information people need to make informed choices? In 2010 BBC Media Action started to answer this question through an ambitious project producing radio discussion programmes across Sierra Leone, Angola and Tanzania – “A National Conversation”. Funded by the UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID), it increases government transparency, accountability and public participation through broadcast media.

In Sierra Leone, we produce the national talk show Fo Rod (Crossroads) and the national debate programme Tok Bot Salone (Talk About Sierra Leone), which reach 37% of adults in areas where they are broadcast.

We all have questions for our government but may find them difficult to act on or even to ask. In Nepal, BBC Media Action’s political debate programme Sajha Sawa (Common Questions) gives people the opportunity to ask questions of political leaders and government officials in weekly live radio broadcasts. To test the programme’s effectiveness, we investigated the changes that can be shown to result directly from such political debate programmes and, more specifically, from Sajha Sawa.

To research Sajha Sawa’s impact, we ran qualitative focus groups and a quantitative survey with 4,000 audience members, and interviewed partner radio station staff and public figures. We then analysed this robust data mathematically, which yielded statistically strong evidence that listening to Sajha Sawa is associated with higher levels of political participation, knowledge and efficacy. This provides evidence for the impact of Sajha Sawa that can also be used for developing new communication programmes.

Research provides evidence

When I see ordinary people talk in the programme I feel motivated and it gives me confidence that I can also speak in public.

A rural woman listener from Surkhet, Nepal

The 100 Duvidas radio programme raises social issues and hears both parties: those who govern and those who are governed.

Director General, Radio Ecclesia, Angola

Evaluation helps us discover whether programmes offer audiences something new, such as here in Sierra Leone
Gathering evidence to inform our projects

Formative research

BBC Media Action’s research informs every stage of our work, from design and inception through to development, monitoring and evaluation. It starts with formative research, which informs and shapes a project’s development.

Our use of mixed qualitative (asking why and how) and quantitative research methods (asking how many) gives us a very broad understanding of our audiences. To achieve this mix we often use some of the following elements.

Focus group discussions – a facilitator guides these structured talks between small groups of people with similar backgrounds or experiences. Participants express opinions and ideas, providing insight into shared and individual beliefs and practices, as well as survey findings. Speaking to different people who have and have not watched a programme helps us understand project impact.

In-depth interviews – researchers use a list of open-ended questions to hold discussions with one to three people at a time. This allows for deeper investigation of issues and policies while staying focused on the research topic, resulting in valuable background information.

Baseline survey – a quantitative measure that assesses prevalence and attitudes and tells us where things stand before a project starts. It also acts as our benchmark for later midline or end-line surveys to test a project’s impact.

Pre-testing – getting audience feedback on a programme’s scripts, story lines, characters, logo, theme tune and other elements. Its final stage is often to get opinions on a pilot.

Population of interest – tightly defined target groups that the programme wants to reach. This can range from new mothers and mothers-in-law for a maternal health project, to adults between 15 and 45 for a governance programme, for example.
Understanding audience priorities

Research has value in providing an evidence base for our own and other projects, which supports learning, policy making and impact. We use some of the following tools to provide this.

Large-scale quantitative surveys – used at the beginning, middle and end of projects, such surveys measure programmes’ reach and audiences’ attitudes and behaviour. We often work with in-country research agencies on these, and may also use questions in pre-existing nationally representative surveys known as tracker surveys.

Representative sample – a group of people chosen to participate in a survey because they represent a broader population, making our findings statistically valid.

Innovative research techniques – to add to the evidence base for effective media communication, we have started to use a range of innovative approaches. These include different kinds of statistical analysis to ensure that our findings reflect the issue we are investigating as accurately as possible. Much of this work is done in partnership with academic institutions, think tanks and government and non-governmental agencies.

Triangulation – a technique in which two or more qualitative or quantitative research methods are used in a study to double or triple check results and ensure that we don’t miss any important findings. We use it to help confirm accuracy and ensure we have the full picture.

Regression and propensity score matching – statistical approaches that enable researchers to remove differences between those who view a media broadcast and those who don’t from analysis of trends. This allows a robust comparison of these groups and shows that any differences found are due to exposure to the broadcast.
Global reach

A worldwide team

BBC Media Action has an integrated team of up to 100 specialist qualitative and quantitative researchers based both in the UK and our country offices. We have delivered professional qualitative and quantitative research in 42 languages across 37 countries and in a single year we surveyed over 60,000 people to inform our health, governance and resilience projects.

We now work in:

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Bangladesh
- Burma
- Cambodia
- China
- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- India
- Indonesia
- Iraq
- Kenya
- Libya
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Serbia
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Tanzania
- Tunisia
- Vietnam
- Zambia

Our supporters

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