

EVALUATION REPORT 2023

Executive summary

Freedom of Expression and Media Development (MuM)

Strengthening innovation in the sector: A global project

Background

This is the executive summary of the final report of an independent evaluation, carried out between December 2022 and April 2023, of DW Akademie's project "Freedom of Expression and Media Development" (the MuM – or Meinungsfreiheit und Medienentwicklung – project). The MuM project was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is being implemented from January 2021 to December 2023 by DW Akademie's Policy and Learning Department (POLL).

The MuM project was designed to strengthen media development actors at a time when independent media outlets are facing major economic and political crises. During the project period, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has led to job losses and the closure of media outlets in many countries. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 not only created a challenging situation for independent media in the region, but also led to a global rise in inflation that affected the costs of doing journalism and the ability to maintain revenues. Governments are increasingly seeking to capture or control the media by using regressive laws to stem the flow of misinformation. In recent years, governments have also begun to seek ways to hold big tech platforms more accountable, particularly through regulation, partly in response to their impact on the media landscape. While the long-term precarity of independent journalism is increasingly recognized as a threat to freedom of expression and democracy, there is also evidence for the

emergence of a new wave of independent media organizations – adapting, innovating, collaborating, using new technologies and new business models to produce quality, factual journalism in the digital age.

During the project period, the BMZ scaled up its funding to POLL, which required the team to adapt its plans and to manage the additional money. The MuM project was designed to achieve the following overarching outcome: "Relevant actors in the freedom of expression and media development sector are strengthened in their performance and power to innovate in times of great challenges."

The project sought to achieve these results through the following outputs which targeted three groups of stakeholders:

- the BMZ was provided with needs-based advice on the development of the freedom of expression and media development sector
- DW Akademie's fields of action were consolidated in cooperation with the POLL and Media Development (MDEV) departments
- innovative approaches were made available to the media development community and wider specialist communities

The evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which POLL has delivered on the expected results, to capture lessons

learned and to provide recommendations for the design of the next MuM project. The scope of the evaluation included activities and services delivered within the MuM project as well as POLL's research and development, technical consulting services, irrespective of the source of funding, including projects funded as part of the Global Crisis Initiative.

The evaluation methods included a desk review of project documents, observations, and qualitative interviews with 39 key informants selected from the project's stakeholder groups, DW Akademie – including POLL, MDEV and other departments – and external partners and media development actors. The evaluation used standard OECD/DAC criteria to design research questions and analyze the data gathered, with greater emphasis placed on evaluating results in relation to relevance, coherence and effectiveness than other criteria.

Project evaluation results

Relevance: The MuM project objective – to consolidate the five fields of action – is aligned with the priorities of target stakeholders (BMZ, MDEV teams and partners, and international media development actors). In addition, POLL plays an essential role within DW Akademie in the creation of theoretical frameworks and methodologies that practitioners find relevant. In summary, the project's relevance was rated as "comprehensively fulfilled."

Coherence: The MuM project is streamlined with other POLL activities and the project's framework was able to absorb new activities in a coherent way. The development of future service packages, a key project methodology, could be better aligned with MDEV objectives at all stages of the design, development and implementation process. In summary, the project's coherence was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Effectiveness: The project outputs will be delivered by the end of the project and are likely to lead to the planned outcome; the logic of the results framework is sound. Internal and external stakeholders found POLL's products and services to be of high quality in all five fields of action. Plans to co-develop service packages with MDEV teams are delayed, leading to a discussion about how to build the most effective collaboration models with MDEV in future. External stakeholders say POLL's work has

raised the visibility and influence of DW Akademie. In summary, the project's effectiveness was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Efficiency: Overall, the MuM project is delivering results efficiently and has adapted activities to remote and hybrid working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Certain issues were raised related to increased workload and the need to reduce the quantity of concurrent activities. The MuM project's monitoring system is well-designed and able to track the delivery of POLL-produced products and services within each output; it could be enhanced to collect data that tracks their

use. In summary, the project's efficiency was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Impact: There are indications that, by the end of the project, outputs are likely to lead to the MuM project's expected outcome of strengthening its target stakeholders and the media development sector. This in turn is likely to have an indirect impact on strengthening media actors in focus countries. In summary, the project's impact was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Sustainability: Sustainability is built into the design of key methodologies. POLL's support to MDEV partners in using 'sprint'

methodologies were highlighted as likely to lead to long-term changes in the capacity of partners, although future MuM projects could collect more data to demonstrate the sustainability of its results. In summary, the project's sustainability was rated as "overall fulfilled."

Selected lessons learned

- The MuM project relied on co-developing service packages with DWA's regional teams (MDEV) as a key part of delivering results. Because of external factors and new priorities, it was hard to engage MDEV colleagues during this project cycle. It would have therefore been better to include a wider range of methodologies to achieve the objective of consolidating the five fields of action.
- The evaluation found a certain lack of clarity about how POLL should balance its objective to strengthen and provide services to MDEV against the need to set its own agenda. It is important that the MuM project continues to provide resources that enable POLL to utilize its expertise and connections with the field to create new concepts and tools or to experiment with new partners. POLL

needs to be connected to 'over the horizon' trends and challenges, where there is a large degree of anticipated change; not everything that emerges will be solid, but the ability to do research and development in this context is vital to nourishing the organization.

- Developing a theory of change for each field of action was a positive collaborative experience for POLL and MDEV, and establishing clear shared goals and a participatory global process was an important factor in the overall project's success.
- The five fields of action have established a clear framework for DW Akademie, and new concepts and tools were created within each field as service packages and innovative approaches and topics.

There could be a better balance, however, between creating new materials and ensuring the take-up of existing ones, including investing resources in collecting data about their use.

Selected recommendations

- Intensify efforts to widen adoption, adaptation and testing of DW Akademie's media viability tools and approaches within DW Akademie and by other media development actors, given the extreme and acute viability crisis facing independent media, and the need for the media development sector to work together at scale.
- Appoint a full-time lead coordinator for each of the five fields of action, to drive internal and external leadership, and to raise DW Akademie's visibility and influence in these fields.
- Continue to explore effective ways to consolidate the five fields of action through collaboration between MDEV and POLL.
- Improve the future design of the MuM results framework and monitoring practices by creating a full project theory of change for each output and introducing more systematic data-gathering about product and service uptake and usage directly from project stakeholders.
- Develop a gender strategy as a 'golden thread' throughout POLL's work and across the five fields of action, by allocating resources, building in-house expertise, and auditing how POLL's work contributes to gender equality and gender-transformative results.
- Continue strengthening POLL's policy and advocacy capacity so it can continue to fulfill its mission-critical role in providing input to the BMZ in an increasingly complex policy environment.

DW Akademie


is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in more than 70 developing countries and emerging economies.

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The objective of the external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results. It does not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of DW Akademie. Nevertheless, all findings were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.