



Thomson Foundation

Annual review 2020



A year we shall never forget.

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#TFPANDEMIC





It was a year that will be long remembered for a pandemic which cost countless lives, disrupted international travel and trade and dominated news agendas worldwide.

So, I am pleased to report that during 2020 the Thomson Foundation, and its partner organisation in Germany, Thomson Media, were able to help journalists across the globe cover this momentous story responsibly and safely. At the same time, we were able to honour commitments to deliver all our contracted programmes. The key to this was innovation, building on our expertise to deliver training to every corner of the globe through existing, and new, digital channels. An initial calculation shows that 87 per cent of our activity was delivered virtually, overcoming the restrictions on international travel caused by Covid-19.

In this review you will read how we have been at the cutting edge of digital training by developing engaging, multimedia programmes delivered on the WhatsApp and Telegram messaging apps – quickly and easily viewed, and digested, in countries with restricted bandwidth (see pages 14-16). This, of course, was underpinned by adapting online training modules, which we developed at the start of the pandemic, to advise journalists how to cover the story engagingly, but safely and accurately, avoiding misinformation.

It has also enabled us to accelerate development of our business model so we provide content which is directly relevant to local audiences.

During the year we delivered digital courses in 14 languages, with localised content. The pandemic also brought us closer to local

partners, blending our international expertise with their local knowledge and skills to provide training programmes with impact for their local media. Nowhere was that more apparent than in the Western Balkans (pages 28-31) where we ran an intensive mentoring programme for 59 independent media outlets from six countries to help make their businesses sustainable.

A cohort of 29 mentors from the region provided the support and, with our help, have formed a local self-help community to ensure independent media thrives in challenging conditions.

This review is not an exhaustive account of all our activity but reflects the scope and scale of our major programmes. May I take this opportunity to thank all our funders for their support and wish our beneficiaries and alumni a safe emergence from the pandemic.

I also want to pay tribute to, and wholeheartedly thank, our teams in London and Berlin for their exceptional commitment and work throughout such a challenging year and to extend the same thanks to the many contracted, and freelance, consultants who helped us deliver our programmes, many of whose lives were even more disrupted by the pandemic.

Finally, I should note with sadness the deaths of Patsy Robertson, a long-standing trustee until 2013, and of Bettina Peters, our development director from 2012 until illness forced her to step down in 2015; the success and standing of the foundation owe a huge amount to both.

Lord Tom Chandos
Chairman, Thomson Foundation

“We helped journalists across the globe cover this momentous story both responsibly and safely”

W I S H I N
G Y O U A L
L A S A F E
E M E R G E
N C E F R O
M T H E P A
N D E M I C

2020 vision

The pandemic has accelerated the development of a global training ecosystem by the foundation – reaching clients and beneficiaries with more localised and sustainable models of support.



Español



Македонски

A lasting ecosystem



Français

Shqiptare



The outbreak has brought wider acceptance of digital learning in low-income countries and emerging economies. From Pakistan to the Balkans and from Sudan to Tajikistan, it has enabled us to combine the best of local and international training and mentoring – underpinned by our online resources.

Arabic, BCMS (Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian), English, French, Hungarian, Macedonian, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Tajik, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu – leading to greater impact, with higher take-up and completion rates than providing learning materials only in English.

The long-term aim is giving learners the best of both worlds – “blended learning” where they get training and feedback in person but have access to long-term support from digital resources.



Deborah Kelly, Thomson Foundation’s director of training and communications, said providing a more localised experience, however, was about more than just local language.

“The aim is to make learning materials as relevant as possible to the audience. All our learning modules now aim to contain local examples and case studies so learners can feel comfortable about how the new skills can be put into action.”



Српски

In a world of restricted travel, we typically worked with in-country training partners and supported them by producing online materials in the local language, with both local experts and the foundation’s international consultants providing workshops through video or messaging apps.

By the end of 2020, we had provided online training modules in 14 languages – Albanian,

localised online learning materials can be used repeatedly, reaching far more people,” according to Deborah.

“Then we can help our local partners update the material when necessary. It’s a cost-effective way of supporting a global ecosystem of local training networks who benefit from our international network and the latest digital learning skills and technology.”

Being part of our ecosystem means partner organisations or individual journalists and media managers can constantly refresh their skills with the latest long-form interactive modules or “bite-sized” short updates on our Journalism Now e-learning platform.

The pandemic has helped to create greater training opportunities for many journalists globally – particularly those who suffered from a “digital deficit” in low-income countries.

The opportunity is best summed up by Derek Ivens, the foundation’s long-standing trainer for our Sudan programme.

“Gathering smart people in a room to share ideas and being able to spend one-on-one time with them is very effective, but we’ve learned new ways to communicate.

“I think 2020 has shown that pandemics, power cuts and vast distances will never be able to stop people wanting to learn and make their world a better place.”

By the end of 2020, we had provided online training modules in 14 languages



اردو

Română



Magyar

ไทย

Тоҷикӣ



русский



Українською



**Safety
first**

Helping journalists around the world report the Covid-19 pandemic



D

igital learning was used by the Thomson Foundation as the fastest way to help thousands of journalists report the pandemic accurately.

Working with a series of international partner organisations, we produced three, core, online modules – which became the building blocks of a digital campaign across languages and platforms to explain the challenges facing reporters globally. The three modules were:

SAFETY: how to plan coverage while reducing the risk of infection to journalists and interviewees, as well as dealing with the emotional consequences of seeing first-hand the lethal consequences of a global pandemic.

VERIFICATION: how to identify misinformation and disinformation about the virus, using the right open-source tools to weed out fake facts on social media.

CONTENT CREATION: producing ethical and balanced content with the right language and referencing to avoid stigmatisation and stereotyping.

Each module took up to four hours to study and had input and video contributions from a total of 20 international trainers and experts, with a 2021 course planned on reporting vaccination issues.

While originally created in English, the course material was localised and translated into multiple languages across the foundation's network of international programmes.

Versions in Arabic, French, Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian were quickly made available on our Journalism Now e-learning platform.

The basic course material provided the framework for the later version delivered on WhatsApp to journalists in Sudan (see page 14).



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare

Production of the core modules was overseen by Deborah Kelly, the foundation's director of training and communications.

"As soon as it became clear we were facing a global pandemic, we knew this would present new challenges for thousands of journalists who rely on us for help with their skills," said Deborah.

"It was also a clear demonstration of how, through digital learning, you can quickly reach journalists across the world with different versions of a training programme which can be targeted to local concerns and local language."

The five partner organisations which contributed to the courses were the International Federation of Journalists, Dart Centre Europe, First Draft, the Ethical Journalism Network, as well as Free Press Unlimited.

"As soon as it became clear we were facing a pandemic, we knew this would present new challenges for thousands of journalists"

—Deborah Kelly

Remote control

Leonor Suárez, Spain

Ask Spanish television reporter Leonor Suárez what role mobile journalism played during the first wave of the pandemic and she barely pauses for thought. “Mojo was the key to staying on air,” she says. “It’s now an essential tool that adds to traditional gear.”

Leonor is both a reporter and a producer on a weekly current affairs programme, Asturias Semanal, for RTPA, a public television network in northern Spain.

In 2016 she was a joint winner of a Thomson Foundation competition to find the world’s most creative mobile journalists who use smartphones to create multimedia content.

When a first lockdown was imposed across the region in March, Leonor and her team immediately grasped the gravity of the situation. It was vital, they knew, to keep on top of a rapidly evolving story, to verify and disseminate information.

“It was not just about storytelling,” she says. “We had to be both innovative and imaginative. In the end, everything was done remotely.”

During lockdown none of the team spent any time at the television studios. And yet they were still able to produce high-quality long form stories and documentaries that explored the medical, economic, social and educational impact of Covid-19 on their local audience.

Information was gathered using a mixture of mobile phones, GoPro cameras and, where possible, traditional video equipment. The stories were recorded, edited from home using iPads and laptops, and sent to the station to be aired. The show itself was ‘anchored’ from home, using a smartphone and a green screen.

Among others, there were stories from inside a temporary hospital, an intensive care unit, and a care home for the elderly.



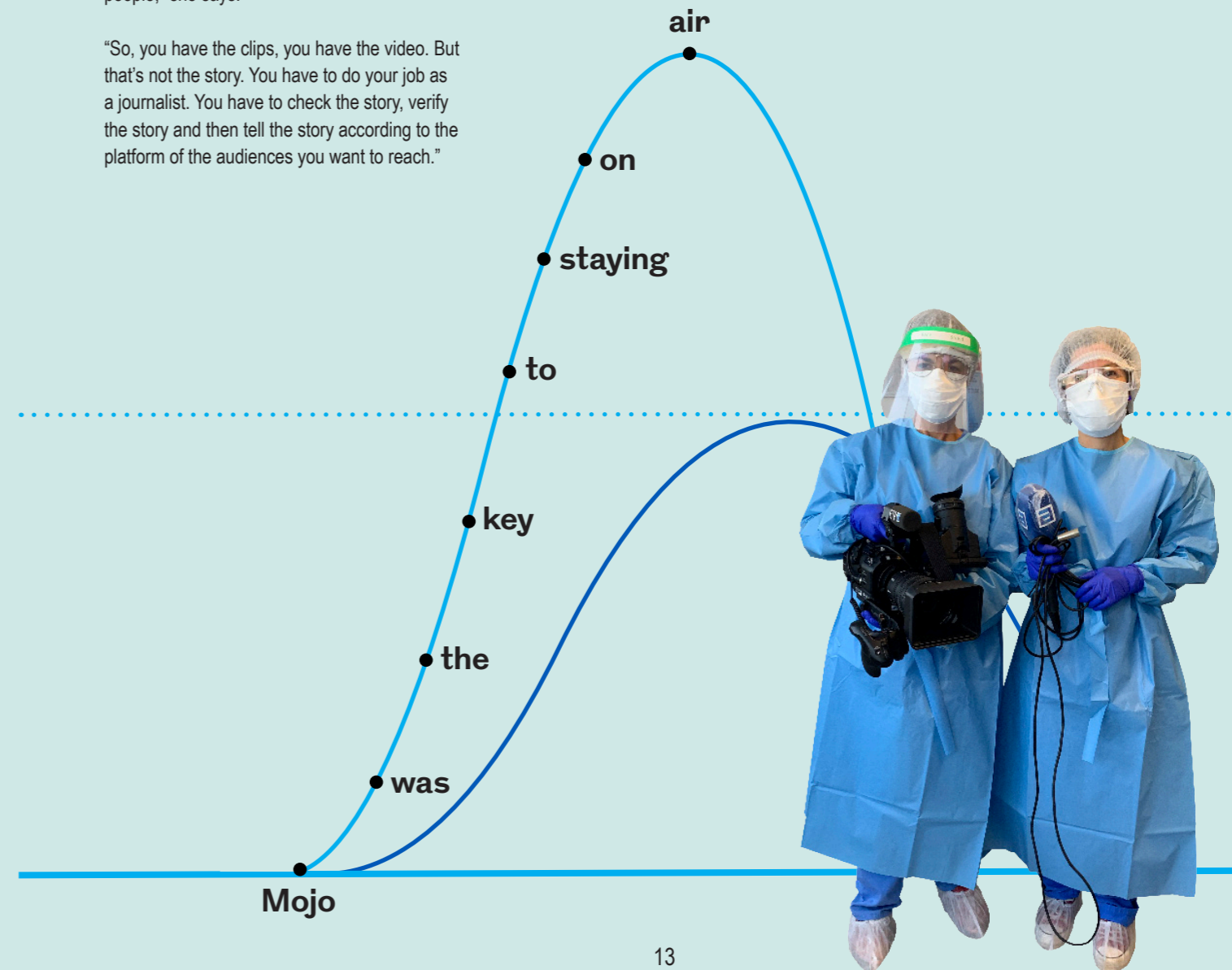
At times, with access denied on health grounds, Leonor called on hospital staff to film behind the scenes, using either a smartphone or a GoPro. A short tutorial was usually enough to guarantee the required quality.

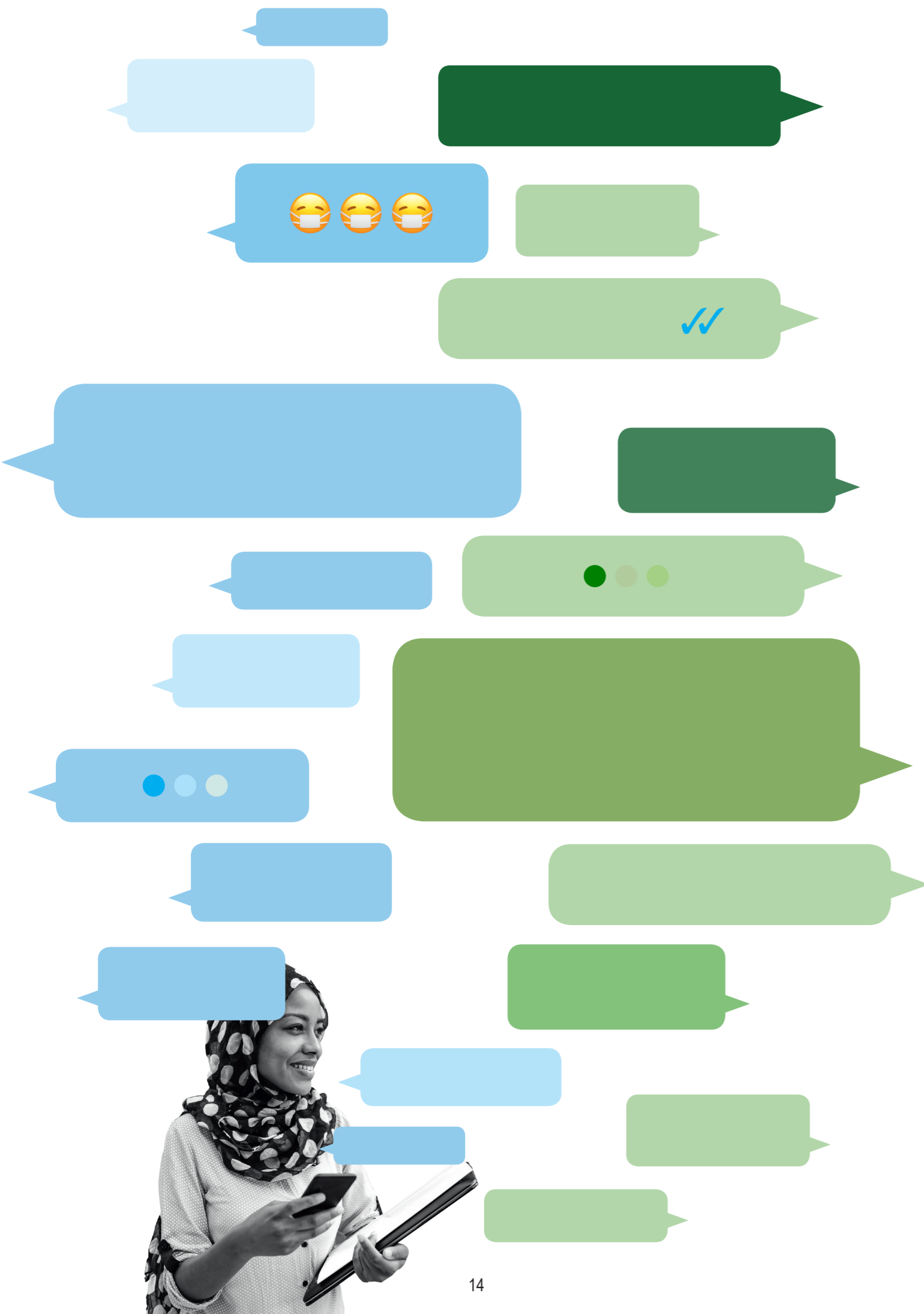
When it came to interviews, the subjects – whether the general public or experts in their field – were taught how best to record themselves. The footage from all sources would then be woven into one, all-encompassing piece.

Innovation was being driven by need, but underlying everything was a strong commitment to journalistic values. These, Leonor insists, were non-negotiable.

“The fact that you are able to ask someone to film him or herself and send us the video is good because it allows you to reach many more people,” she says.

“So, you have the clips, you have the video. But that’s not the story. You have to do your job as a journalist. You have to check the story, verify the story and then tell the story according to the platform of the audiences you want to reach.”





W

When the pandemic took hold in Sudan in 2020, in-country workshops and face-to-face training and mentoring were suddenly no longer an option.

Thomson Foundation had been working in Sudan since 2012, but now we had to find a way of bringing e-learning to a country where broadband was virtually non-existent.

The answer lay in delivering it via the most popular messaging platform in Sudan – WhatsApp. It's a technique we have since used in other countries, also using the Telegram app.

In Sudan, there was an urgent need for reliable and essential information about coronavirus and we were asked if we could provide additional training to help the media cover Covid-19 safely and responsibly.

Hosam El Nagar, Thomson Foundation's director of innovation and learning, who provided the technical expertise, said they avoided the immediate temptation to use messages just to link to content on websites.

"We opted instead to concentrate on the messages, but not as a passive experience. The course was a conversation in which users discovered what they knew and what they needed to know interactively through question and answer."

In total there were 162 Q&A "mini courses", with each scenario taking a page.

The impact was immediate. We had predicted between 100-200 participants in total and reached that number on the first day. Within 10 days we had reached nearly 2,000 journalists, alongside government health and communications teams, and the programme had a completion rate of around 70 per cent.

"The take-up exceeded all our expectations," enthused Helen Scott, the director of the Sudan programme.

Sudan gets the message



"The answer lay in delivering a course via WhatsApp"

"The course was innovative, new, easy to use and engaging. Equally important, it didn't cost participants anything. We didn't have links to videos that eat data. We kept it simple."

The course was written by Derek Ivens, who has trained journalists in Sudan since 2013. It was divided into five chapters and tackled challenges such as countering misinformation, staying safe and new ideas on working from home, office or studio.

One of those completing the new WhatsApp course was Abdelwahab Gumaa, who works as an economics editor for *Alwifaq* newspaper as well as online.

"Taking the course was like rubbing Aladdin's lamp," he says. "Each time a genie would come out and I would get something new. I was able to not only take the course, but be assessed and receive a signed Thomson Foundation certificate in less than an hour!"

The course has been delivered by Thomson Foundation in partnership with British Council Sudan, funded by UK Aid and backed by Sudan's Ministry of Information and Culture.

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A page at a time

Telegram claimed 500 million users worldwide by the end of 2020.

Thomson Foundation has invested in developing bite-sized training programmes on the secure Telegram app favoured by journalists.

In 2020 we piloted training modules on Telegram using bots – the platform’s automated software programmes – to provide interactive, message-based modules covering storytelling skills and mobile journalism. The courses achieved high completion rates ranging from 61 per cent to 89 per cent – compared with around five per cent for many public open courses, or MOOCS.

The development work was headed by Hosam El Nagar, the foundation’s director of innovation and learning, who said the key to the success of messaging apps in training was accessibility.

“People can do the courses in one go, or a page at a time whenever they look at their phone. They can fit learning into their daily routine whenever they have a moment.”

Messaging apps are ideal to support journalists needing rapid support and advice to deal with emergencies ranging from pandemics to safety issues.

Connecting...

Thomson Foundation has had a presence in Sudan since 2012, working to improve media. Throughout 2020, we were able to maintain our main programme – to improve reporting and understanding of economic issues during the transition to democracy.

Derek Ivens, one of our trainers, gives a first-hand account of the inventiveness needed to maintain the programme during a pandemic.

One day, I was in a room in Sudan working with some of the country’s brightest young journalists. Twenty-four hours later I waved a socially distanced farewell and rushed to catch the last plane out of Khartoum before Covid-19 paralysed the world.

I thought it was the end for an innovative project which was trying to improve coverage of economics and money matters for people in a country where poverty and debt have meant misery for millions. But I was wrong.



A few weeks later I’m all set for a series of seminars with the same trainees. Most are still in Khartoum, the difference is that I’m back in the UK, hoping the Wi-Fi will keep working so I can talk to the group – with voice calls via the messaging system, WhatsApp.

Sudan’s IT infrastructure is so weak that meeting on Zoom or Skype is impossible, leaving WhatsApp as a low-bandwidth alternative. One by one we link up with Anas, Rania, Mayada and the rest of the group to hear updates on their work. Dialling the numbers is Entisar Omer, a fellow trainer and colleague who translates and adds huge value to our group discussions.

It’s not as simple as it sounds. Connections fail then return. Sometimes Entisar’s signal crashes. There are mysterious noises on the line – is Nadir in a factory? Have thousands of angry sparrows invaded Mohamed’s house?

I’m humbled by the ingenuity and can-do attitude of this Sudanese generation. Many of the group face long daily power cuts, so again and again they borrow phones from friends when their own run out of charge. Others go into the heat of the streets to find a one-bar signal – because otherwise they will miss out on a chance to learn.

If nothing else 2020 has shown that pandemics, power cuts and vast distances will never be able to stop people wanting to learn and make their world a better place.

“Pandemics, power cuts and vast distances will never be able to stop people wanting to learn”



Giving Sudanese a voice in rebuilding their economy

Rebuilding Sudan's shattered economy after the 2019 uprising requires the country's journalists to understand and explain the key economic issues to their audiences.

To provide local media with the relevant skills, the foundation delivered a 15-month programme to 24 journalists in 2020 – initially in Khartoum but then via WhatsApp after Covid-19 struck.

Two journalists who set the standard were the prize winners in a competition showcasing how participants put into practice what they learned.

Hanady Alnour (above), economics editor at *Al-Intibaha*, wrote her winning piece after travelling into the field to investigate farming projects where the harvest had failed through lack of water.

Aya Alsabbagh (opposite page), from Omdurman National Radio, topped her group with a broadcast aimed at proposing co-operative societies and collaboration by buyers and sellers as a way to reduce inflation.

24



Aya, a broadcaster for 10 years, said she learned that “the economy is the backbone of life. It is the machinery that moves everyday life, politically and socially. The economy is responsible for the stability and security of livelihoods and it is the compass that steers countries and societies.”

Hanady, who has worked in print journalism for 12 years, said her investigation aimed “to reflect the real suffering of citizens” and to ensure the authorities got the message about irrigation projects needing to work.

She described the course as an “exceptional training opportunity” that taught her the importance of field work, how to select and question officials to tell economic stories and how to convey issues in a language understood by a wide audience.

The training was funded by the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and delivered in partnership with the British Council, Sudan and lead by consultants James Gavin and Derek Ivens.

“The economy is the backbone of life. It is the machinery that moves everyday life, politically and socially”



Raised voices

A unique research project in a remote district of north-west Pakistan has helped to empower women and give them a voice in local media.

Thomson was approached by Tribal News Network (TNN) – a pioneering radio station based in Peshawar – to help it discover which news and information was of interest to women.

In a region with a patriarchal and conservative outlook, literacy levels for women are low with radio often their main source of news – but no-one had previously asked them which topics they wanted to hear about.

The results of the research were then used to inform the training of 12 women journalists (pictured right).

TNN was set up to bring independent, relevant information to the population in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. The station bucks the trend by recruiting and promoting women at reporter and management levels in a region where societal pressure, and vulnerability to sexual harassment in the workplace, discourage women from working in the media.

The seven-month project, called Valley Voices, was developed between Thomson Media GmbH in Berlin and Said Nazir, co-founder of TNN. First, a number of female researchers were recruited and given security training to operate in KP's Mardan district – a relatively hostile area with a population of 2.3 million.

During the pandemic, a Thomson expert worked online with TNN staff and the researchers to advise them on survey techniques which led to 386 women being questioned.

The results were evaluated by local Pakistani and international experts and translated into recommendations from which the editorial training programme was devised.

All but two of the 12 participants on the training course had studied journalism at university, and two were experienced TNN journalists.

Editorial training was done remotely by Andrew North, a former international BBC correspondent familiar with reporting from south Asia. He provided a series of live, online training sessions with participants also taking two Thomson online training courses in Urdu covering editorial ethics and mobile journalism.

Maryam Anam, a political science graduate, was one of the trainees. “In a conservative Pashtun society, where women are barred from participating in public life, we need to have women journalists to highlight women’s voices,” she says.

Once in the field, the journalists set about their tasks with zeal and provided an array of thought-provoking stories for Women’s Voices, a weekly magazine programme developed as a result of the research.

Among the subjects covered were:

- Child marriage
- Sexual harassment
- Female literacy and education
- Health and dental care
- Sport and recreation for women
- Working from home
- Women’s inheritance rights

As a result of more gender-inclusive programming, TNN increased its revenue by 24 per cent, helping it toward sustainability.

The topics created debate from all sides of the gender divides, with the audience encouraged to comment through text messages, telephone calls and social media. More than 500 listeners responded, with 90 per cent giving positive feedback on the content, programmes, producers, presenters and reporters.

“We hope that women will feel empowered to pursue careers in media which will inspire young women to follow in their footsteps”

– Said Nazir, TNN co-founder

This project was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office through IFA (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations) as part of the Zivik funding programme. It was administered from Berlin by Thomson Media GmbH.

Breaking stereotypes

“I salute these brave women journalists who are breaking the stereotypes and bringing social change” – Sofia Khan*



Success stories

Women's Voices

A regular 50-minute slot on Watan Radio Mardan, the programme is a mix of pre-recorded reports and stories on topics related to women's issues and includes live discussion between presenters and audience.

Women's World

An hour-long weekly phone-in show hosted by a female presenter with all topics related to issues of particular concern to a predominantly female audience.

Sehat Nama

A one-hour weekly show discussing women's health issues and includes a live phone-in discussion.



K

halida Niaz (pictured below), one of two senior TNN women journalists to take part in Thomson Media's Valley Voices project, assesses the outcomes.

Our survey showed that women wanted to hear about such things as health, education and religious topics relating to them. They also suggested that women's issues should be higher (in priority) in radio stations, with women running shows and programmes.

It was important that women's voices should be heard. They have problems, they have concerns, they want their rights. And media should give space to their voices as well.

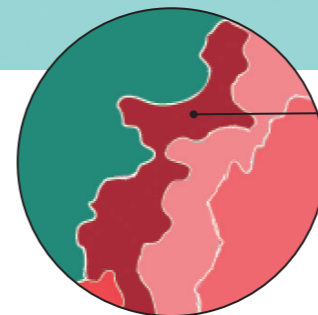
We trained 12 female journalists from Mardan and then went on to produce the programmes with them. It was all by the women, for the women, to the women.

The purpose of this was to get stories of women that are hidden; to spread some stories among men that women are also human beings. And what they need.

A number of our trainee reporters are really active now and are reporting on a daily basis. Because of this project, women are now talking and we are getting feedback.

PREVIOUS PAGE:
FIRST ROW (left to right): Hina Gul, Mahnoor Shakeel, Fatma Durrani;
SECOND ROW: Maryam Anam, Sidra Ayan, Amna Istimraj;
THIRD ROW: Hina Wajid, Sana Gul, Sheeba Faris;
FOURTH ROW: Sidra Khan, Kainat Ali, Huma Hashim

**Sofia Khan of Tehsil Mardan of District Mardan was one of 500 people interviewed in the post-project evaluation*



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

In May 2018, the Pakistan government merged the tribal areas with the neighbouring Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



“The public comes to us precisely because we are truthful”



Truth always wins

Martín Leandro Camacho, Peru

For Martín Leandro Camacho, 2020 will represent a milestone in what is expected to be an influential and fulfilling career. It was the year the Peruvian became the eighth winner of the Thomson Foundation Young Journalist Award from among almost 200 entries spanning four continents.

“The year was exceptional because of Covid-19 and its effects on communities worldwide,” says the foundation’s chief executive, Nigel Baker. “For the first time, it provided a common theme across entries, with a stark reminder of how the pandemic has upset normal life in so many different ways across the world.”

Martin’s award came for an outstanding and varied portfolio of work, including: the disproportionate effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the poor; the fears and anger of parents of children suffering from lead poisoning at a mining centre in the high Andes; and police brutality inflicted on members of a fishing community protesting against the exploitation of heavy crude oil off its coastline.

Towards the end of the year, he was covering civil unrest as thousands of Peruvians took to the streets to protest against the ousting of President Martín Vizcarra. Most impressive is that, at 27, he was producing high quality journalism as an independent operator, outside the mainstream.

Martin, who had been employed as a journalist with a leading newspaper, decided to go it alone because he felt the publication was not adequately serving its audience. He set up Nube Roja (Red Cloud), a news website that gave him the independence he needed to hold power to account and to seek the truth.

“It is essential to maintain balance because without that there is no credibility,” he says. “The public comes to us precisely because we are truthful. We take our time to put together a story because we try to contrast and verify each point we make.”

As with all independent media outlets the hardest part, Martín admits, is making it financially viable. The key, he says, is to build an audience and grow from there. All the website’s content is promoted on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

“It’s very difficult, income is low and each report is self-financed,” Martín explains. “Despite this, we have invested in equipment, we have a decent website, we do impact reports and we have printed a magazine.”

“Now, with the Thomson Foundation award, many people have started to look at us more. We have launched a subscription programme and want to make a living from this, to grow Red Cloud no matter how long it takes.”



MAR 1

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9 10 11 12 **13** 14 15

16 17 18 19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29

30 31



“On this day, Kenya had its first Covid-19 case. The government announced measures to contain the spread. Some measures proved deadlier than the virus itself”

—Cops and Corpses, 2020

Maurice Oniang'o, Kenya

Maurice Oniang'o won the foundation's Young Journalist Award in 2014 with a portfolio of stories which included a film on child soldiers in Kenya.

Seven years on, Maurice is firmly established in his field and making long-form films and documentaries that hold power to account. His mission is to give a voice to those who can't be heard and a platform to those who can't be seen.

“I wouldn't call myself a campaigning journalist,” he says. “I am a journalist who is interested in social and environmental justice.”

His latest film, *Cops & Corpses – Victims' Cry for Justice*, won the Spotlight Gold Award as one of the best independent films of 2020. The subject matter – the escalation of police brutality on people living in informal settlements in Kenya during the Covid-19 pandemic – came to his attention through social media.

“Citizen journalists played a key role in letting people know there was a pandemic,” he says. “There was also the issue of an escalation of police brutality. I learned through social media – tweets and videos – that people were being injured, and in some cases killed, because of the breaking of a curfew. It was especially the case in the informal settlements with the police enforcing coronavirus restrictions.”

Much of Maurice's film covers street protests. He uses *mojo* (mobile journalism) extensively and combines it with photo stills and mobile phone footage from citizen journalists, together with victim interviews filmed on a video camera.

“This was my first protest film, so I needed guidance as to what to do. I spoke to different mentors and did online learning for mobile journalism. This taught me how to use my mobile phone for good quality video and to have something that is presentable.”

Covering civil unrest in the midst of a pandemic also brought its own issues, with personal safety a key factor.

Maurice stresses the importance of balance and accuracy in storytelling in order to have credibility with the audience. It is important, he says, to try to get both sides of an unfolding story. “You have to love doing research. The only way you are going to get accurate and verifiable information is by doing in-depth investigation. You must also listen to the experts, your peers, your mentors.

“When the authorities refuse to speak to you as a journalist, it's either that they are hiding something or they don't want to face the media and speak about

an issue that many people know exists. I tried to get their side of the story, but no one responded. All my emails and phone calls went unanswered.”

Maurice is not in the job to win awards, although such recognition helps to highlight his areas of particular concern. “Winning the award means that someone is noticing what you are doing,” he says.

They most certainly are.”



When Covid-19 struck, Thomson Foundation was fleet of foot, adapting its courses and mentoring at very short notice.

“All mentoring sessions, all workshops, all interaction in the Western Balkans were organised online”

– Davor Marko, Balkans programme manager

Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare



A

An intensive programme to promote sustainability of independent media in the six countries of the Western Balkans got underway in 2020 – with the foundation supporting 59 media organisations.

A team of 29 mentors spent three months helping the media outlets draft business plans to create stable operating models and two-way engagement with their audiences. The next stage of the programme is to help the outlets implement their plans as part of a longer, three-year programme.

Prior to the foundation's involvement in the region, the mindset of most independent local media was shaped round long-term donor support in the form of grants for areas such as content production and training. This proved unsustainable. As soon as one grant ended, another was requested.

"In 2017 we came back into the region with the aim of seeing how we could change the approach and the mindset of the media. A grant was now to be seen as an investment in a business, not as a prop," says Davor Marko, the Balkans programme manager.

When Covid-19 struck in 2020, the Thomson Foundation was fleet of foot, adapting its courses and mentoring at very short notice delivering it all remotely.

"All mentoring sessions, all workshops, all interaction were organised online," Davor explains. "We adapted as a team and tried to build a work flow that reflected an actual physical work flow. There were regular meetings and a regular overview of our activities. None of the 59 media gave up. At the end, all of them submitted business plans. We would like them all to survive."

The project has been run by local experts supported by the Thomson Foundation, with the remit to think local. "It's crucial, the key to any success," says Davor. "Balkan problems, Balkan solutions. This means bottom up."

The right skills already existed around the region. The aim was to create a structure to organise this knowledge and combine it with Thomson's expertise and experience of global programmes.



Away from the capital cities and large centres of population, start-ups in the IT and tech sector were targeted, as were small and medium enterprises. Five crucial fields of intervention were then offered:

- Media management
- Media production
- Media operation and business
- Community engagement
- Audience and performance data measurement



"The programme took us out of our daily routines and made us rethink our roles, our direction. It's like when an experienced football player steps on the ball and looks around, planning his next steps"

Dinko Gruhonjić, VOICE (Serbia)

"Work with the mentors was extraordinary. The combination of local and international experience proved to be the winning combination"

Mamer Fusha, TV Besa Prizreni (Kosovo)

A broad range of media – print, video, digital platforms, podcasts, local and regional television stations – benefitted first hand from the programmes, as did some NGOs, CSOs and public service media.

"Previously, we had been doing everything other than what we had learned throughout this three-month mentoring programme," explains Admir Gjoni, from Ulcinj info based in Montenegro. "Being part of it, and working with our mentor, opened our eyes and helped us design a feasible business plan."

In 2020, countries of the Western Balkans ranked among the lowest of all European countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom

Index. Of the 180 countries listed, Bosnia and Herzegovina was in 58th place, followed by Kosovo (70), Albania (84), North Macedonia (92), Serbia (93) and Montenegro (105).

By supporting the media at local level, government resistance to the Thomson Foundation's programmes has been minimal. "In the pandemic we found that local audiences were looking for more contextualised and local stories about Covid-19," says Davor.

"Supporting Greater Media Independence in the Western Balkans" is a three-year programme funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

"Balkan problems, Balkan solutions. This means bottom up"

Open Media Hub

Strengthening journalism
across 17 countries

Ammar Abd Rabbo/Daraj Media



Open Media Hub – a five-year project to support independent media in 17 countries bordering the European Union – came to a close in 2020.

Thomson Foundation led a consortium of organisations which offered support to 13,709 participants across North Africa, the Levant and the European Union’s “Eastern Partnership” countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Dominique Thierry, leader of the team delivering the training, said the programme worked with a nucleus of nearly 3,000 people – with the aim of supporting them to stay in journalism. Thousands more followed our training online.

“They have improved their skills and understand that they need to write not for themselves but for their audiences. They also needed to understand how to monetise their work in order to maintain editorial independence.”

That meant making the business of journalism a key plank of the project, demonstrated by case studies from across the territory.

Lebanon: Emergency support

Journalists were offered “rapid reaction” financing to help them understand the cause of a devastating explosion at the port of Beirut in August, 2020, which killed more than 200 and injured thousands.

Among the outlets supported was the investigative unit of Daraj – a digital publisher known for reporting on corruption and where the Open Media Hub (OMH) has previously helped to train staff. Others included the Maharat Foundation, which promotes free expression and wanted to set up an investigative team to bring those responsible to account. The Hub also supported Megaphone – originally a student blog which has become an outspoken independent voice in the Arab world. It reported possible links of the storage of the explosive ammonium nitrate in the Beirut warehouse to the Syrian regime for use in the making of barrel bombs.

Libya: New connections

A 100-strong cohort of Libyan journalists applied to follow the OMH courses in a country with few functioning media outlets. OMH offered production support, face-to-face training, mentoring and networking opportunities with colleagues from across the region as well as EU countries. In 2020, we had a cohort of nearly 20 journalists working for international agencies and producing good-quality documentary material.

Journalists were encouraged to sell stories locally and also place them internationally. When more than 70 migrants drowned in a shipwreck off the Libyan coast in November 2020, the first stories were published by journalists from the OMH. The coverage was picked up by Associated Press and circulated worldwide, with more than 120 countries using the images.

The Hub also helped to fund the Libyan TV channel, Alwataniya TV, in developing the story of schoolchildren suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of war.

Palestine: Improving business models

The Palestine News Network (PNN) was one of many media organisations given advice on improving their business models – as well as receiving training and mentoring. PNN was originally financed by foreign donors after being set up in 2002, but OMH helped a management buy-out team to raise funds locally. The aim was for PNN’s journalists to continue serving the local community – through radio, television and a multi-lingual website – by providing “quick, accurate, credible and objective news” from the region. They have been successful and are now breaking even.

Ukraine: Monetising content

The Hub advised investigative magazine *Novoye Vremya* (The New Times) on setting up a limited paywall for its popular digital editions. It was the first project of its kind in Ukraine and hopefully will guarantee the future and independence of the publication in a media landscape dominated by a small number of oligarchs. The digital edition is internationally-oriented and published in Ukrainian and Russian.

“Sustainable, independent and local. The key words for success”

By David Quin, managing director, Thomson Media

In the first four years of Open Media Hub, the region had to cope with war in Syria, a change of regime in Egypt, and a subsequent clampdown on media freedoms, civil war in Libya, and Russia’s occupation of Crimea. Then, in the final year of implementation, we had a global pandemic to contend with.

Such challenges required innovative thinking. We had already translated the network into a robust e-learning platform when Covid-19 struck. It meant that when we were unable to get access to certain places, we didn’t automatically lose contact with our participants. We also built a management architecture that was very local, with in-country consultants managing relationships with independent media outlets and journalists.

A key purpose of the Hub was to help make journalism across the region sustainable, independent and essentially local in its outlook.

It was also hoped to grab the attention of audiences and power brokers within the EU itself. Some of the best content found global audiences when it was re-aired through France 24 and France Info, the public service television and radio networks. The big picture was about building robust media businesses and fostering media pluralism as a result.

At the other end, there were individual reporters doing individually tough work; significant stories that may not change the media landscape but might still have an impact in themselves.

Treating everything as local is in the cultural DNA of the Thomson Foundation. In essence, if you

can’t explain the story to your neighbour, then you are failing. What, for instance, does Covid-19 mean to your neighbour?

And what do the seismic political changes that have taken place in the Western Balkans over the past 20 years really mean to a farmer in Prilep, Macedonia? He wants to know about access to markets in Greece. He wants to know if his child can go to university in Thessaloniki. He wants to know whether or not the rule of law is going to mean anything.

These are the nuts and bolts that people care about and what drives audiences. You might not grow your revenue immediately, but you’re never going to grow it if your audience isn’t there.

The Open Media Hub project was funded by the European Union.



Ammar Abd Rabbo/Daraj Media

Facts and figures

13,709

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (ONLINE AND FACE TO FACE)

1,998

NUMBER OF STORIES PUBLISHED

NUMBER OF TIMES STORIES PUBLISHED/BROADCAST ON DIFFERENT MEDIA

19,678



17 COUNTRIES BORDERING THE EU

- ALGERIA
- ARMENIA
- AZERBAIJAN
- BELARUS
- EGYPT
- GEORGIA
- ISRAEL
- JORDAN
- LEBANON
- LIBYA
- MOLDOVA
- MOROCCO
- PALESTINE
- RUSSIA
- SYRIA
- TUNISIA
- UKRAINE

MOST POPULAR COURSES ONLINE

1,050

Innovation in storytelling

919

Digital media: audience engagement

854

How the EU works

732

Professional production checklist

TOP FIVE USERS ONLINE

- UKRAINE (588)
- MOROCCO (562)
- EGYPT (474)
- NIGERIA (366)
- RUSSIA (340)

2,597

LIVE VIEWERS



PANDEMIC WEBINARS ON ZOOM



Tajikistan is a landlocked mountainous country in Central Asia which borders Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. It has a population of around 9.5 million, one third of which is under 15, with two-thirds under 30.

“This training has contributed well to my personal and professional development in terms of work and interaction with NGOs and civic activists”

Abdullo Gurbati, journalist, Dushanbe



two-year programme to promote human rights by bringing together independent journalism and civil society was launched in Tajikistan.

The first phase comprised of two self-paced, online courses in both Tajik and Russian focusing on how to access government information through legitimate means and the importance of fact checking.

The courses offered Thomson’s signature e-learning approach, using text narrative and tips, explanatory infographics, relevant case studies

and contributions from leading Tajik journalists.

The training then moved to two centres – Dushanbe and Khujand – where Thomson trained 28 participants made up of 15 journalists and 13 CSO workers during two, three-day courses, with more planned for 2021.

Travel restrictions caused by the pandemic meant our international trainer, Ian MacWilliam, had to join the workshops remotely. They were overseen by a trainer from our local partner, the National Association of Independent Mass Media in Tajikistan (NANSMIT).

The emphasis was on trustworthy, inclusive journalism gathered from multiple sources, including official information gained through a Right to Information (RTI) request.

With fact checking essential in identifying and debunking fake news, participants learned methods for verifying facts, photos and videos.

Practical exercises were focused on getting participants to assess materials in terms of sources, credibility and balance, as well as understanding where CSO and journalists’ roles overlap and diverge.

Working in pairs, the participants were tasked with producing a piece of work on selected topics of greatest concern in their own communities. They could be completed in any medium: online, video, TV, radio or print. Those successfully completing and publishing their projects were eligible for possible financial support to produce further media content.

A wide range of subjects was covered including: the effects of Covid-19 on migrant workers wishing to return home to Russia; increased domestic violence and its connection to the pandemic; the plight of disabled children living

in poverty; environmental issues caused by factory pollution; drug use among the young; the potential of tourism as a source of jobs; the help available to impoverished women as well as the social effects of rising divorce rates among young families.

The two-year programme – delivered by Thomson Media gGmbH in partnership with NANSMIT – is funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.



Change at the top

Nigel Baker retires as Thomson Foundation CEO after 10 years in the role

Thomson Foundation is unique: the place where the cut and thrust of the news industry meets the more strategic international media development sector.

Every year the foundation blends the two cultures to help thousands of journalists and scores of media organisations. Being the latest custodian of the organisation has been both a challenge and a privilege.

The media development sector is funded mainly by governments of industrialised nations aiming to strengthen the media of developing countries and emerging economies to ensure ordinary citizens have a voice. Separately, news organisations in those countries regularly hire our services directly to provide the training and consultancy to give them the necessary skills to sustain their businesses.

It's unusual for those two approaches to sit in one organisation – but gives us a great advantage in understanding the contemporary needs of the news industry globally.

In the past decade, keeping pace with those rapidly-changing needs has been the equivalent of running a marathon: not just helping journalists navigate a maze of developments such as mobile journalism, but helping them to identify and eradicate fake news, and find new business models so they can survive and thrive.

Of course, all of those skills are meaningless without the most important requirement for any news organisation: the ability to engage an audience with compelling stories based on honest and credible journalism.

That core skill endures and remains at the heart of our offer to the profession, whether it be in a country where you'd struggle to find an outlet for independent journalism or in a competitive landscape where it is difficult to get it noticed.

I am proud that in the past decade I have been able to take the foundation into the digital age, with an arsenal of online tools to train thousands of journalists each year across many languages.

The foundation also has a more international structure, with main offices in London and Berlin as well as a wider range of global partners taking us closer to understanding the needs of those we seek to support.

The greatest reward has been helping to progress the careers of countless journalists – and to make the foundation fighting fit to help thousands more in years to come.



LOST WORLD

Yen Duong, Vietnam

It may be a well-worn adage, but to a photojournalist a picture is worth every one of a beautifully-crafted thousand words. And in a digital age where that picture can be moved from one side of the world to the other in a matter of seconds, the impact can be immense.

The power of the lens can capture raw human emotion: fear, anger, love, desperation and sorrow. It can also capture the urgency and poignancy of a situation, one that may require an immediate response from the international community. International news made local.

In the age of Covid-19 and a worsening climate change crisis, the role of photojournalists is proving essential. One of those on the front line is Yen Duong – shortlisted for the Thomson Foundation Young Journalist Award in 2018 – who spent time in 2020 covering the aftermath of unprecedented flooding and landslides in the central region of Vietnam.

According to a report by the International Panel on Climate Change, Vietnam is among the

world's most vulnerable nations. Its diverse geography means it is hit by typhoons, landslides, flooding and droughts, weather events expected to worsen in coming years. These threaten food security, livelihoods and lives for millions of Vietnamese. It is a state of affairs being replicated worldwide.

Yen, who originally trained and worked as a news reporter, is sympathetic to the plight of those whose lives she documents – in this case for the IFRC (the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) – and has a strong ethical mindset. To this end, she recommends the Thomson Foundation's Journalism Now course: Awareness, Authenticity, Accuracy – for photojournalists wanting to explore the ethics of their practice.

“It is not easy to photograph people in distress”



Climate change

The deepening climate change crisis will be at the centre of global attention in 2021 when world leaders, experts and campaigners meet at the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland in November, 2021.

Countries such as Vietnam are most affected by the climate emergency. Yen Duong, has been documenting the impact of global warming in her home country since 2018. We are proud that she will be involved in our work as part of our commitment to the climate crisis debate.

Cop26 2021

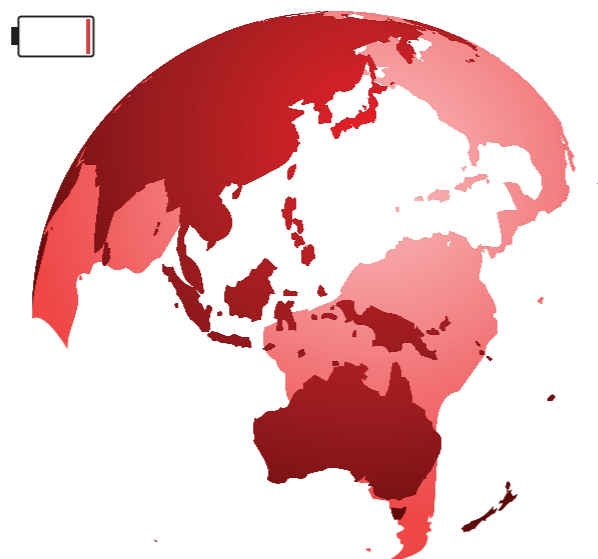
Learn about our involvement here: [thomsonfoundation.org](https://www.thomsonfoundation.org)

"I see photographs as a medium to storytelling," Yen says. "It helps that originally I was an investigative journalist because I had a lot of story ideas and knew how to interview people. I could then come up with my own visual stories."

"It is not easy to photograph people in distress. It is best if you can hear their stories first before you take the pictures. It is important to build their trust. A lot of times, I depend on my own instincts and past experiences to assess whether I should be talking to a person if they're in a traumatised

state. You don't want to put them in situations where they are being exploited. What I always try to do as a photojournalist is to inform the people I talk to carefully about how the stories are going to be used, where they are going to appear and that they don't have to share anything with me."

"There's a certain power relation at play there. Very often, these people actually feel obliged to answer to your interview. I try to inform people about my intentions and let them decide if they want to speak to me or not."



"You can certainly fabricate a story through images. Start with the storytellers. Educate them from the very beginning."



Yen is also acutely aware of personal safety when covering natural disasters and has five tips for fellow photojournalists:

- Have a checklist of vital supplies before setting off on any assignment
- Keep in close contact with either your editor or supervisor
- Try to avoid travelling at night time or in risky areas during heavy rainfall
- Be respectful of interviewees, many of whom are likely to be traumatised
- Always trust your instincts

As with news reporting, Yen feels it is important to be balanced, fair and accurate in coverage: "Most of us rely on visual media these days," she says. "A lot of media is now putting photography or photojournalism as a priority."

"You can certainly fabricate a story through your images, which is why it is important to start with the storytellers and to educate them from the very beginning."



Remembering Bettina

1963-2020



A training and mentoring programme to promote the careers of women in African media will be launched in Kenya in 2021 in memory of Bettina Peters – former director of development at Thomson Foundation.

The aim is to expand the programme into Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia in future years.

Bettina was a leader in journalism training and media development policy who devoted her life to empowering women in the media. She joined the foundation in 2012 from the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) which she led for many years.

She stood down from her role in 2015 because of a serious illness and died in London on September 10th, 2020.

The programme, which will bear her name, will have the prime objective of helping women achieve senior positions in media organisations. All trainers will be women and ideally Africa based or country specialists.

The programme will be divided into two key elements: management-oriented mentoring and one-on-one mentoring on specific women's issues.

"Not only was she a thoroughly nice person, she was an exceptional person with impressive determination and energy. Her passing is a great loss to the team and the foundation," said Mark Knight, deputy chairman of the Thomson Foundation.

A mentoring programme for women in Africa, in memory of Bettina Peters

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