



Africa Check

Sorting fact from fiction

FOSTERING THE PRACTICE OF FACT-CHECKING IN AFRICA

An evaluation of the
Africa Facts network



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Executive summary

Widespread mis- and disinformation is a global problem, increasingly challenging the way we share information and perceive the world around us. It has real effects on our society, politics, and public health. Fact-checking as a practice is a powerful defence against this threat. It helps stem the circulation of unverified or misleading information, and raises the public's awareness of how to identify this information and help stop its spread.

Since November 2017, Africa Check – the continent's first independent fact-checking organisation – has led the Africa Facts network of African fact-checkers, which helps organisations share knowledge and collaborate to fight the spread of false information. The network is currently made up of 20 organisations from across the continent (see the full list in Appendix A).

The increasing need for robust and reliable fact-checking in Africa is reflected in the number of new initiatives begun since the network's launch. To build and strengthen this community, Africa Check provides an annual in-person gathering, regular newsletters, online meetings and more, and offers support and guidance based on the needs fact-checking organisations have identified.

The network recently surveyed and interviewed its members. This research found that African fact-checking organisations considered the following elements as key to their success:

- Fact-checking organisations work hard to communicate their nonpartisanship and independence, both intellectual and financial, to build their audiences' trust.
- They develop good relationships with authoritative, trustworthy sources who can help verify claims.
- Digital access is highly uneven in African countries, so it's important to use a wide range of platforms and languages to ensure as wide a reach as possible.
- Ongoing training helps teams keep up to date with new developments and trends related to false information and its spread.
- Connecting with colleagues in other countries and continents is important for staying current with innovations, and provides valuable opportunities to share tools and best practice.

According to the survey and interviews, the most valued ways the Africa Facts network supports the growth and development of members' fact-checking initiatives are:

1. The network has helped to bring together fact-checking organisations across the continent, building a community of like-minded colleagues for sharing of knowledge and best practice relevant to Africa.
2. A valued benefit of the network for members has been establishing contacts and sources for transnational fact-checking.
3. With topics that cut across borders, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the network has allowed some member organisations to collaborate and so work more efficiently. Drawing on the work of others reduces duplication and helps organisations reinforce the credibility and impact of their fact-checks.



4. Most fact-checking organisations are lean operations, with a small team of staff often supported by volunteers and consultants. All the organisations interviewed said ongoing training was important, but added that there was limited time and internal capacity for it, and that training often took place on the job. The Africa Facts network's skills development and training provides valued opportunities for members to build expertise and capacity within their teams.
5. The network also provided essential guidance for members on how they should position themselves to secure funding for their fact-checking work, including how to navigate working with funders while maintaining independence and neutrality.

The full report describes these elements in greater detail. It also gives these recommendations for fact-checking organisations and those thinking of setting up a fact-checking organisation:

- Establish a fact-checking organisation in every country on the continent (where it is possible to do so)
- Cultivate collaborations and partnerships with other media organisations
- Identify gaps in public interest reporting
- Work towards becoming signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)
- Continue to experiment with different platforms to reach as wide an audience as possible
- Explore strategies to engage young people

In addition, recommendations for Africa Check as the lead organisation in the network are:

- Support Africa Facts members towards achieving the recommendations
- Explore more ways to connect organisations for knowledge exchange
- Consider how to support members in countries where media freedom is restricted
- Continue to highlight and share members' work



Key findings on one page

Activities and milestones since the establishment of the Africa Facts network



20 organisations joined the Africa Facts network since November 2017

2

in-person **Africa Facts network gatherings** in South Africa (2017 and 2019)



13 online Africa Facts network meetings since 5 June 2018

5

Africa Check fellowships since 2018



three at our Dakar office



two in Johannesburg

Key drivers for success



Ensure a **non-partisan, even-handed approach** to build public trust in your fact-checking work



Remember that **not everyone is online** – make sure you reach people via a diverse range of media channels, platforms and languages



Establish good relationships with authoritative, trustworthy sources you can approach to help verify claims



Build a team with the necessary capacity and keep up to date with new developments and trends in relation to false information



Connect with colleagues in other countries and continents to share tools and content and **learn from each other's experience**

Key ways in which the Africa Facts network supports fact-checkers across the continent



Building a community for **knowledge-sharing**



Establishing contacts and sources for transnational fact-checking



Delivering opportunities for **skills development** and training, enabling members to **collaborate** in order to work more efficiently



Providing **guidance** to help ensure members' sustainability



1 Introduction

Background and structure of the report

Africa Check is Africa's first independent fact-checking organisation, set up in 2012 to promote accuracy in public debate and the media on the continent. Since November 2017, Africa Check has run the Africa Facts network to support and connect other African fact-checking organisations, share knowledge and skills and collaborate to fight the spread of false information.

The network is an informal group of like-minded organisations, currently made up of 20 nonpartisan fact-checking and media organisations across the continent (see Appendix A for the full list). Africa Check builds and strengthens this community with an annual in-person gathering, regular newsletters and online meetings, and organisational support based on the needs member organisations.

In January 2021 Africa Check commissioned a researcher to review the Africa Facts network's impact so far. The research included a survey distributed to all members and interviews with a sample of members representing different regions. The survey questions and discussion guide are in Appendix B of this report. The research objectives were to evaluate Africa Facts network's progress so far in fostering the practice of fact-checking across the continent, and to identify initiatives that would support fact-checking networks and help ensure their success.

The report draws out key themes and lessons of particular relevance to the continent. We find that there are several elements African fact-checking organisations consider important to their success, which new fact-checkers could find helpful:

- Ensure a nonpartisan and even-handed approach to increase (and rebuild) public trust in your facts
- Establish good relationships with authoritative, trustworthy sources you can approach to help verify claims
- Remember that not everyone is online – make sure your fact-checks reach people via a range of media, platforms and languages
- Keep training and building your team's capacity – creators of false information are constantly finding new ways to spread misinformation
- Connect with colleagues in other countries and continents to share experiences, tools and content
- Ensure your organisation is legally registered to protect you and your journalists

Members said the Africa Facts network was an essential source of support and guidance for fact-checkers, particularly by:

- Building a community of like-minded colleagues where knowledge, experience and best practice relevant to the continent could be shared
- Establishing contacts and sources for transnational fact-checking
- Delivering opportunities for skills development, training and capacity building, including fellowships and workshops
- Enabling members to collaborate, thereby improving efficiency and reaching a wider audience
- Helping ensure members' sustainability with guidance on how they should position themselves to get funding for their fact-checking work



Approach

The research was conducted from January to March 2021. A survey was shared with network members in February. In March, in-depth interviews were held with individuals from a sample of fact-checking organisations representing different African regions, as well as with Peter Cunliffe-Jones, the founder and former executive director of Africa Check. The people interviewed were:

Peter Cunliffe-Jones	Africa Check (founder)
Rodriguez Katsuva	Congo Check (co-founder)
Rabiu Alhassan	GhanaFact (founder)
Opeyemi Kehinde	International Centre for Investigative Reporting / FactCheckHub (deputy editor)
Eric Mugendi	PesaCheck (former managing editor)
Cris Chinaka	ZimFact (editor)



2 Fact-checking in Africa: key drivers of success

Public trust in the media as a reliable source of information has declined sharply, worldwide. The causes include the proliferation and mediation of news sources in the internet age, politicised criticism of the media as biased, and the rise of mis- and disinformation.¹ The increasing prevalence, rapid dissemination and exploitation of unverified claims, particularly on the internet, has had real consequences for our societies.

In Africa, as across the world, many fact-checking initiatives trace their beginnings to election years in their countries. They are a response to dangerous trends where politicians attempt to manipulate information to influence the population's behaviour, and recognise that giving people access to accurate information during elections is crucial. The Covid-19 pandemic has again highlighted the danger of disinformation, reminiscent of the way false rumours hindered responses to Ebola, polio, HIV/Aids and other public health crises. As one interviewee told us: "We know that reliable information can save lives. Misinformation has killed many people in our country." (*Participant 5*)

Africa's fact-checking community is still relatively young. Africa Check, the continent's first independent initiative, was launched in 2012. In 2017, Africa Check founded the Africa Facts network, which currently connects 20 fact-checking organisations and supports them with shared learning, experiences and tools. Members are also encouraged to apply to become verified signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network's (IFCN) Code of Principles, which promotes standards and best practice in the field. The Africa Facts network also provides added value as a regional community where fact-checking organisations can access support tailored to the continent's unique challenges, issues and opportunities.

For example, internet shutdowns are increasingly common as a way to suppress political dissent and restrict protest action,² which further complicates the job of fact-checkers and others working to promote freedom of expression in African countries. At the same time, digital access and digital literacy on the continent lags behind the rest of the world, with internet penetration in Africa at 39.3% in 2020, compared to the global average of 58.8%.³ Africa's fact-checking organisations therefore face the double challenge of ensuring their work reaches communities on a diverse range of platforms, and that it may require different strategies than other regions of the world.

The fact-checking organisations interviewed for this research agreed that mis- and disinformation were here to stay, and welcomed more opportunities for collaboration in tackling this threat. Many countries on the continent are younger democracies with less established political and health systems, where securing the quality of information and public debate is felt to be of existential significance. African fact-checking organisations therefore aim to not only provide verified, trustworthy information but also to help empower the public by increasing their ability to identify false or misleading information and hold their public representatives and institutions to account.

This section describes some of important factors African Facts network members said had helped them establish themselves, and grow.

¹ See, for example, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019, which surveyed 75,000 people in 38 countries: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf and the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer which found trust in all news sources has dropped to record lows around the world <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>

² Access Now (2020), "Shattered Dreams and Lost Opportunities: A Year in the Fight to #KeepitOn" <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/>

³ Statista (2020), "Internet penetration rate in Africa as of the first quarter of 2020, compared to the global average" <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1176654/internet-penetration-rate-africa-compared-to-global-average/>



Fact-checkers take no sides: our even-handed approach earns people's trust

Independence from political parties and state influence is fundamental to the integrity of fact-checking organisations. Indeed, the first principle in the IFCN code of principles is “a commitment to nonpartisanship and fairness”.⁴ Given that they operate in an atmosphere of widespread and at times justified suspicion of the media, fact-checking organisations have stressed the need to explicitly reassure their audiences of their impartiality. One interviewee told us: “I can't over-emphasise that people are hypersensitive to any suggestion you have taken political sides.” (*Participant 3*)

Staking out a role as arbiter in a highly disunified space and demonstrating professional neutrality builds the trust needed for organisations to reach audiences across the political divide. Indeed, fact-checking organisations may improve the public's relationship with the media by “helping to project journalism in a different light”. (*Participant 1*)

Another way to build public trust is fact-checking issues beyond politics and governance, which tend to be factional topics for readers. One organisation said that focusing on the day-to-day issues on which people need accurate, up-to-date information – such as health, sanitation and service provision – helped them gain traction. When Covid-19 misinformation began to spread, the organisation's reputation as a trusted source of information was already in place.

Establish good relationships with authoritative, trustworthy sources who can help you verify claims

Another key driver of success, mentioned by many fact-checkers, is their relationship with sources. Experts and other sources play an instrumental role, as illustrated by Africa Check's five-step fact-checking process:⁵

1. Identify the original source and verify the content
2. Define the terms and concepts within the claim
3. Inspect the evidence using the latest reliable data
4. Approach neutral and objective experts in the field
5. Set out your evidence

In some of the countries where Africa Facts network member organisations are based, legislative or political restrictions impede fact-checkers' ability to access public data. One interviewee told us: “It's difficult to verify some things; even things that should be open are closed, and it's hard for a journalist to get access to them.” (*Participant 5*) Another said: “The legwork that we have to employ to get information is a lot more than our colleagues in developed countries where their systems are more responsive.” (*Participant 3*)

Expert sources can provide invaluable insights into claims, so cultivating relationships with them is essential. And demonstrating its access to an authoritative source may boost a fact-checking organisation's credibility in the media landscape. One interviewee described how they were able to stop an international TV station's bulletin on misreported information. After their intervention, the station instead reported the correct information. The verified information went viral, with diplomats and the country's UN representative congratulating the organisation for their thorough investigation.

⁴ IFCN (accessed March 2021), “The commitments of the code of principles” <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/know-more/the-commitments-of-the-code-of-principles>

⁵ Africa Check (accessed March 2021), “GUIDE: The five-step fact-check” <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/guides/guide-five-step-fact-check>



“A journalist without sources is like a farmer without a hoe.” (Participant 4)

The Africa Facts network thus provides an additional benefit by expanding the pool of trusted sources organisations can draw on. This is particularly valuable when an organisation reports regional news or checks information about another country on the continent.

Not everyone is online, or uses dominant languages – fact-checks need to reach people in many different ways

People in African countries have less access to the internet than people elsewhere in the world. A 2019 report by Research ICT Africa found that African countries had an average internet penetration of below 20%. People in rural and peri-urban areas had even less access, with those in urban areas having more.⁶

Even where there is internet connectivity and access, the disproportionately high cost of data in Africa also influences information flows. For example, Facebook’s prominence is partly explained by it providing low-data (“Lite”) and free versions of some of its products, including WhatsApp, to attract users in developing countries. For fact-checkers, too, the cost of internet and phone calls can be prohibitive. One interviewee recalls: “Sometimes we could not write some articles because we literally could not check [the information].” (*Participant 5*) This makes sources even more crucial to fact-checkers’ work.

Africa Facts network members described the creative ways they got their fact-checking reports out to the public. One said: “Every day we are trying to get new tools, such as using SMS during Covid-19, because we know that not everyone has access to the internet.” (*Participant 5*) Fact-checkers have also worked with traditional media organisations, including newspapers, radio and television, to reach people offline. They have also reached out directly to communities by, for example, attending festivals and gatherings in churches, schools and villages – an approach one organisation called “fact-checking on the ground”. (*Participant 5*)

Africa is the world’s most linguistically diverse continent, which also makes it imperative for fact-checking organisations to diversify the way they reach the public. In Nigeria, for example, more than 500 languages are spoken. This can present a challenging dynamic, as one participant pointed out. Say false information is fact-checked in the most commonly spoken or official language of a country. “This kind of content [can then] surface in local languages with no counter-narrative and can spread quickly, especially once people are able to relate to it, given the language it’s written in.” (*Participant 2*) Many fact-checkers said it was important to produce fact-checking reports in several languages, so that the correct information was amplified and could reach different communities directly. The Africa Facts network was seen to be a helpful forum for members to share methods and best practice.

Build a committed and passionate team, and keep up to date with trends in false information

All interviewees said their teams’ passion and commitment had helped their organisations become more successful. They added that the rapid pace of change meant their teams needed to continually improve their skills and develop new tools to combat mis- and disinformation. The interviewees said there was a willingness and commitment to carry out regular training, to stay abreast of new techniques and to empower their teams by increasing their skills.

⁶ Research ICT Africa (2019), “After Access: Africa Comparative Report” <https://researchictafrica.net/2019/05/16/after-access-africa-comparative-report/>



As small organisations, often in their start-up phase, members often didn't have the capacity for training as often as they would like. They saw the Africa Facts network and IFCN as important sources of support and additional training opportunities to help bridge this gap and build their teams' capacity. Interviewees said the peer learning and exchange aspect of these opportunities contributed to their success: "While we run internal courses, nothing replaces cross-country, cross-cultural experiences." (*Participant 3*)

Connect with colleagues from other countries and continents to share and learn from each other's experience

Successful fact-checking initiatives seize opportunities to connect with colleagues in other countries and on other continents. False claims are made in every region in the world. The fact-checkers we surveyed suggested that learning from the experiences of peers and exchanging ideas and methods helped their organisations achieve success, innovation and sustainability. These connections also built a valued camaraderie and sense of community.

Interviewees also said colleagues from other countries had provided practical advice that helped them start up their fact-checking organisations more quickly. One interviewee described how, before their organisation had even launched, transnational colleagues advised them to work towards applying for IFCN signatory status, which would make them eligible for partnerships and funding opportunities. This allowed them to hit the ground running. (*Participant 1*)

In the next section, we look the specific ways the Africa Facts network has helped create productive connections between its members.



3 The impact of the Africa Facts network

The Africa Facts network helps fact-checking organisations across the continent connect, share knowledge and skills and collaborate in the fight against false information. Launched by Africa Check in 2017, the network helps build the continent’s fact-checking community with annual gatherings, newsletters, online meetings and broader advice on issues identified by members.

Table 1: Africa Facts network activities

Newsletter	Our quarterly newsletter reports fact-checking developments in Africa, and across the world. It is also a forum for African fact-checking organisations to update the network on their progress, successes and challenges.
Online meetings	Also quarterly, these Slack meetings are where network members discuss fact-checking challenges and the solutions they have found. Before each meeting, members are asked to suggest topics for discussion and to offer to do a presentation.
Annual meeting	A gathering of representatives from member organisations, held each year. These meetings are on hold during the Covid-19 crisis.
Organisational support and guidance	Africa Check advises and guides new fact-checkers on how to run a fact-checking organisation, how to get funding, how to find the best team of fact-checkers, and more. Some members of the Africa Facts network have benefitted from Africa Check’s annual fellowship programme.

Online meetings of the Africa Facts network are held every three months on Slack, a work collaboration app designed for both desktop and mobile. All nine of the research interviewees have attended these meetings. Slack allows text-only meetings – instead of online meetings with bandwidth-heavy video and audio – allowing members with limited or expensive network connections to join and contribute.

In the next section we identify ways Africa Facts members have said the network helped start and contributed to the growth of their organisations.



Building a community of fact-checkers based in Africa, with knowledge and practice relevant to the continent

The Africa Facts network allows fact-checkers across the continent to share experiences and learn from similar experiences, contexts and environments.

“In Africa, we have the same and different story and context. It’s an oxymoron.” (Participant 6)

The network is a voice for African fact-checkers in the global fact-checking community. Many African fact-checkers work in young democracies, where their work has a particular urgency. Interviewees pointed to the link between good media literacy in a country and the strength of that country’s democracy – citing Western nations as examples of how fragile even established democracies can be. The interviewees noted that government interference was one of the main challenges in media reporting in their countries.

Network members also stressed the importance of spreading the fact-checking word – to “get people to be more informed” and “understand they can do their own research”. (Participant 2) Many interviewees said they aimed to pass their fact-checking skills on to journalists and the general public, in current and future projects.

The Africa Facts network has helped new fact-checkers learn from the experiences of more established organisations, allowing startups to accelerate their growth.

One organisation raised the issue of disinformation on WhatsApp, where false claims may proliferate in closed and private groups, such as community and church groups. WhatsApp is a popular source of information in many African countries.

The organisation’s strategy to reduce the spread on disinformation on WhatsApp was ingenious. They invited a person from the closed group to join a group run by the fact-checking organisation. The fact-checkers were then able to communicate the correct information to the closed WhatsApp group. The interviewee said their solution came from “the experience of colleagues already running fact-checking platforms”.

Other tips and tricks from partners helped Africa Facts members resolve fact-checking challenges in their own countries. As explained above, many people in African countries have far less access to the internet than those in the Global North.⁷ One interviewee said they had been inspired by Congo Check’s idea of running roadshows during Africa Facts network meetings, which helped reach people less likely to consume information online.

⁷ The Global North is a socioeconomic term referring generally to the group of countries in Europe, North America and the more developed parts of Asia and Australasia (Source: Cambridge English Dictionary), used by academics and researchers to denote a generic geographic, historical, economic, educational and political division and disparity in control of global resources <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/economic-impact-of-digital-media/50101>



Contacts and sources for fact-checking across borders

Africa Facts is a network. It connects fact-checkers, and their sources, across African borders. This enables organisations who don't have staff or partners on the ground in other countries to verify information from there.

One example cited was that when elections were taking place in neighbouring countries, it could be crucial to have a trusted local perspective to help fact-check and identify nuances in reporting. "Content [can have] malice you wouldn't really notice or be aware of, especially if you're looking at it from another country." (*Participant 2*) This kind of collaboration has proved invaluable in tackling false claims related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which have appeared across the continent. As Africa Check's Kenya editor Alphonse Shiundu points out in a blog, false information can be particularly difficult to counter when it circulates in societies with shared "experiential and communal worldviews", which give readers a perception of its "innate accuracy".⁸

False information is a global challenge. The same disinformation often crops up in different countries with slight amendments to make it appeal to local communities. According to a forthcoming report, about 50% of information identified by a group of 14 African fact-checkers from July to December 2019 either originated in or made reference to countries other than the one in which it was originally observed by the fact-checker. One interviewee said that while investigating a video spreading in their country, they found it had also gone viral in two other African countries, dubbed into those countries' local languages. Similarly, African fact-checkers reported misinformation originating from the West "trickling down" (*Participant 1*) to find new audiences in their countries. Viral content from the United States has found its way to Anglophone countries and content from France to Francophone countries, despite it being created in another context.

The Africa Facts network helps its members better understand and navigate these complex transnational dynamics, and increase their efficiency, reach and impact.

Closely related are the opportunities it provides for collaboration, allowing members to amplify their work and avoid duplication of effort. For instance, GhanaFact, ZimFact and Dubawa worked with Africa Check to grow its Info Finder into a shared repository of facts from the work of African fact-checkers. In 2020 Info Finder was declared one of seven global winners of the Fact-Checking Innovation Initiative, a joint project of the International Fact-Checking Network and the Facebook Journalism Project.

As fact-checking is a labour-intensive yet time-sensitive process, Africa Facts members value the network as a channel to showcase and access others' work, particularly on topics that affect a region or even the entire continent. The Africa Facts network both gives individual fact-checking organisations a platform to reach a much larger audience, and enables them to focus their resources to "concentrate on serving as local as possible" (*Participant 3*).

Delivering opportunities for skills development, training and capacity-building, including fellowships and workshops

All interviewees said training was essential to their success. The creators of misinformation and disinformation are constantly evolving new and more sophisticated ways to spread their content, so fact-checkers must keep pace with regular training and upskilling.

⁸ Alphonse Shiundu (2020), "BLOG: What we learnt fact-checking the Covid-19 infodemic on WhatsApp in Kenya". <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/blog/blog-what-we-learnt-fact-checking-covid-19-infodemic-whatsapp-kenya>



The Africa Facts network's training and capacity-building opportunities were particularly valued as many fact-checking organisations are run by small teams, often in their early stages, and training mostly has to take place "on the job" (*Participant 1*). The network both bolsters internal training and offers a wider, cross-cultural perspective. The network has alerted members to, for example, fellowships available at Africa Check, the lead organisation, and presentations on best practice by Africa Facts members at network meetings.

"It's really difficult for fact-checkers across the continent to meet and discuss certain things – the Africa Facts network is a fantastic platform to share and to learn." (*Participant 2*)

The network's in-person meetings are unfortunately on hold during the Covid-19 crisis, but members also said that the gatherings – as well as Africa Check's fellowship programme – helped fact-checkers on the continent "not just grow but also innovate" (*Participant 1*). They said they hoped to see more opportunities for gatherings and knowledge exchange in future.



Helping ensure members' sustainability by giving guidance on how to position themselves to secure funding for their fact-checking work

Fundraising is a challenge for all NGOs, but the standards of transparency and nonpartisanship fact-checking organisations require to assure the integrity of their work can make it even more challenging. Interviewees emphasised that fact-checking should be fuelled by passion; some personally funded their organisations in the early stages of their work.

The Africa Facts network provides advice and guidance on funding, drawing on the experience of Africa Check, its founder and longest-running member. This has helped member organisations secure longer-term growth and sustainability. One interviewee described how Africa Check had pointed them to funding that “sustained us and gave us the impetus to continue with our work” (*Participant 1*). Another was able to recommend a fellow member for a partnership with Google, having first been connected with them through the network.

The network also encourages and supports members to apply to become signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network's (IFCN) Code of Principles. This increases a fact-checker's likelihood of receiving funding from external parties or investors. (For example, Facebook uses IFCN certification as a minimum requirement for their third-party fact-checking partners.) Finally, while members have a variety of governance or business models, and corporate structures, the network encourages them to diversify their income sources and gives important guidance on maintaining editorial independence from funders.



4 Recommendations

The following members' recommendations describe the direction they believe fact-checking in Africa should take, as well as the path of the Africa Facts network as it continues to support a community of nonpartisan fact-checkers and foster the practice of fact-checking across the continent.

Recommendations for fact-checking organisations and those thinking of starting a fact-checking organisation

Establish a fact-checking organisation in every country on the continent – where it is possible to do so. To readers considering starting a fact-checking organisation in Africa, current members say: “Go for it!” A lot of work has been done in laying the groundwork, but there are still many opportunities for more to be done.

Cultivate collaborations and partnerships with other media organisations to help rebuild public trust in the media. Continue training and upskilling people in the media and the general population in fact-checking, media literacy and interpretation. This will also help your online fact-checks reach people offline.

Identify gaps in public interest reporting. Issues that affect people's day-to-day needs, such as service delivery, are sometimes under-reported compared to political stories but are linked in important ways to accountability and transparency. As one member said, there is a “huge space left for people who are just looking for unadulterated information of public interest” (*Participant 3*).

Work towards becoming signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network's Code of Principles. In addition to joining the Africa Facts network, organisations are encouraged to apply to become signatories to the IFCN Code of Principles.⁹ IFCN verification is a global standard of quality and independence. It is likely to become more relevant as political actors and parties begin to appropriate the rhetoric of fact-checking in their own narratives. The international network also connects signatories to colleagues across the world, allowing them to learn from and showcase their work to an even broader global audience.

Continue to experiment with different platforms to reach as wide an audience as possible. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and diverse voices, languages and methods will help fact-checking organisations improve their reach and credibility.

Explore strategies to engage young people. Africa's population is younger than those on other continents. As one member said, this can present a particular challenge as the youth may distrust the media because it is seen to be dominated by an older generation and so excludes and de-prioritises their needs. Recruiting and training young people as fact-checkers will help reach this large section of the population.

⁹ International Fact-Checking Network Code of Principles (accessed March 2021) <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/know-more>



Recommendations for Africa Check

Support Africa Facts members in achieving the recommendations above. This could include helping negotiate media partnerships, introducing members for potential collaborative projects, offering guidance and encouragement in achieving IFCN signatory status and continuing to share knowledge and best practice.

Explore even more ways to connect organisations for knowledge exchange. Interviewees suggested, for example, facilitating staff member exchanges so that fact-checkers could be embedded in another country's initiative and work together as colleagues. There could also be opportunities for "tiers" of engagement, allowing senior fact-checking staff to connect on strategic topics while junior staff or volunteers support each other to build their skills and share experiences.

Consider ways to support members in countries with restrictions on media freedom. Where organisations face specific challenges, including internet shutdowns and safety concerns, the network could share best practice and help advocate for better legislative environments.

Continue to highlight and share members' work. This could include a searchable repository of fact-checks, content and tools, as well as featuring the work of individual fact-checking initiatives to help boost their profile.



5 Conclusion

The main aim of the Africa Facts network, which is aligned with one of Africa Check's key goals, is to foster and support a community of nonpartisan fact-checkers across the continent.

Since its launch in 2017, the network has grown to 20 organisations working across all five of the continent's regions – North, West, Central, East and Southern Africa. (See Appendix A for the list of current members.)

Our research suggests that the network has played a significant role in encouraging and supporting the startup and development of its member organisations. Many tangible examples of impact are described in this report.

If you are an organisation doing or about to start fact-checking work, or a journalist who would like to start a fact-checking desk in your media organisation, email Carina van Wyk at training@africacheck.org to learn more about the network.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to the Africa Facts network and this research. Thank you to Peter Cunliffe-Jones, Rabiu Alhassan, Cris Chinaka, Opeyemi Kehinde, Rodriguez Katsuva and Eric Mugendi for generously sharing your time, expertise and perspectives, and to all other members who took the time to provide insights via the survey.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Africa Facts network members

Organisation	Country	Website
AFP Fact Check	Several	factcheck.afp.com
Africa Check	South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal	africacheck.org
Congo Check	DRC	congocheck.net
Dubawa	Nigeria, Ghana	dubawa.org
Ethiopia Check	Ethiopia	ethiopiacheck.org
FactCheckHub (International Centre for Investigative Reporting)	Nigeria	factcheckhub.com
Fasocheck	Burkina Faso	fasocheck.org
GhanaFact	Ghana	ghanafact.com
HumAngle Media	Nigeria	humangle.ng
INK Centre for Investigative Journalism	Botswana	inkjournalism.org
Kenya Community Media Network	Kenya	kcomnet.org
MISACheck	Mozambique	misa.org.mz
Namibia Fact Check	Namibia	namibiafactcheck.org.na
PesaCheck	Several	pesacheck.org
The Stage Media	Liberia	thestagemedia.com
TogoCheck	Togo	togocheck.com
Vox Populi	Uganda	voxpathuli.ug/category/ukweli-check
West Africa Democracy Radio	Senegal	wadr.org
ZimFact	Zimbabwe	zimfact.org
Zim Tracker	Zimbabwe	No website yet



Appendix B: Survey and topic guide

Survey questions

Name of your fact-checking or media organisation

Number of employees/volunteers

Date your organisation was founded

What was your inspiration behind your organisation being founded?

Date you and/or your organisation joined the Africa Facts network

How did you find out about the Africa Facts network?

Are you a member of the IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network)?

Yes / No

Have you or a member of your team taken part in any of the following (please tick all that apply)?

Africa Facts network meeting in Johannesburg (2017)

Africa Facts network meeting in Cape Town (2018)

Africa Facts network online Slack meetings

Africa Check fellowship programme

If applicable, how often on average do you attend the Africa Facts network online Slack meetings?

I attend almost every meeting

Every second meeting

One meeting a year

What in your view is the biggest benefit of being part of the Africa Facts network?

Would you be willing to participate in a telephone interview with an independent researcher about the impact of being a member of the Africa Facts network for your organisation?

This interview will feed into a case study to help showcase the work of the network and its members.



Interview topic guide

Introduction

Please tell us a little about the background to your organisation

Prompts: When was it founded, who by, was its founding inspired by any specific event or another organisation?

How would you define your organisation's mission?

Prompts: What kinds of content or assertions do you fact-check most often?

Who are the key audiences you aim to engage? Do you see yourselves as similar or different to other fact-checking organisations?

What does success mean to you as an organisation?

Prompts: What have been some of your most successful posts or articles? How do you measure the impact of your work?

What are the top three enabling factors or drivers that have helped your organisation establish itself and develop?

What are some of the key barriers or challenges that you experience as a fact-checking organisation?

Prompts: What are some challenges you face internally/as an organisation? What are the challenges that are influenced by the broader market or environment? Are there any challenges specific to your country/region?

How has the Africa Facts network specifically helped your organisation?

Did you get support from any other organisations as you were starting or growing your organisation? *Please tell us about this support. How did it help?*

Are there any ways in which you feel the network can improve its current support to members? What other support would you like in the future?

What are your ambitions for the organisation? How do you see it developing in the next year, next five years etc.?

Is there any advice you would give to anyone else looking to start a fact-checking organisation in Africa?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?



THANK YOU



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Sorting fact from fiction