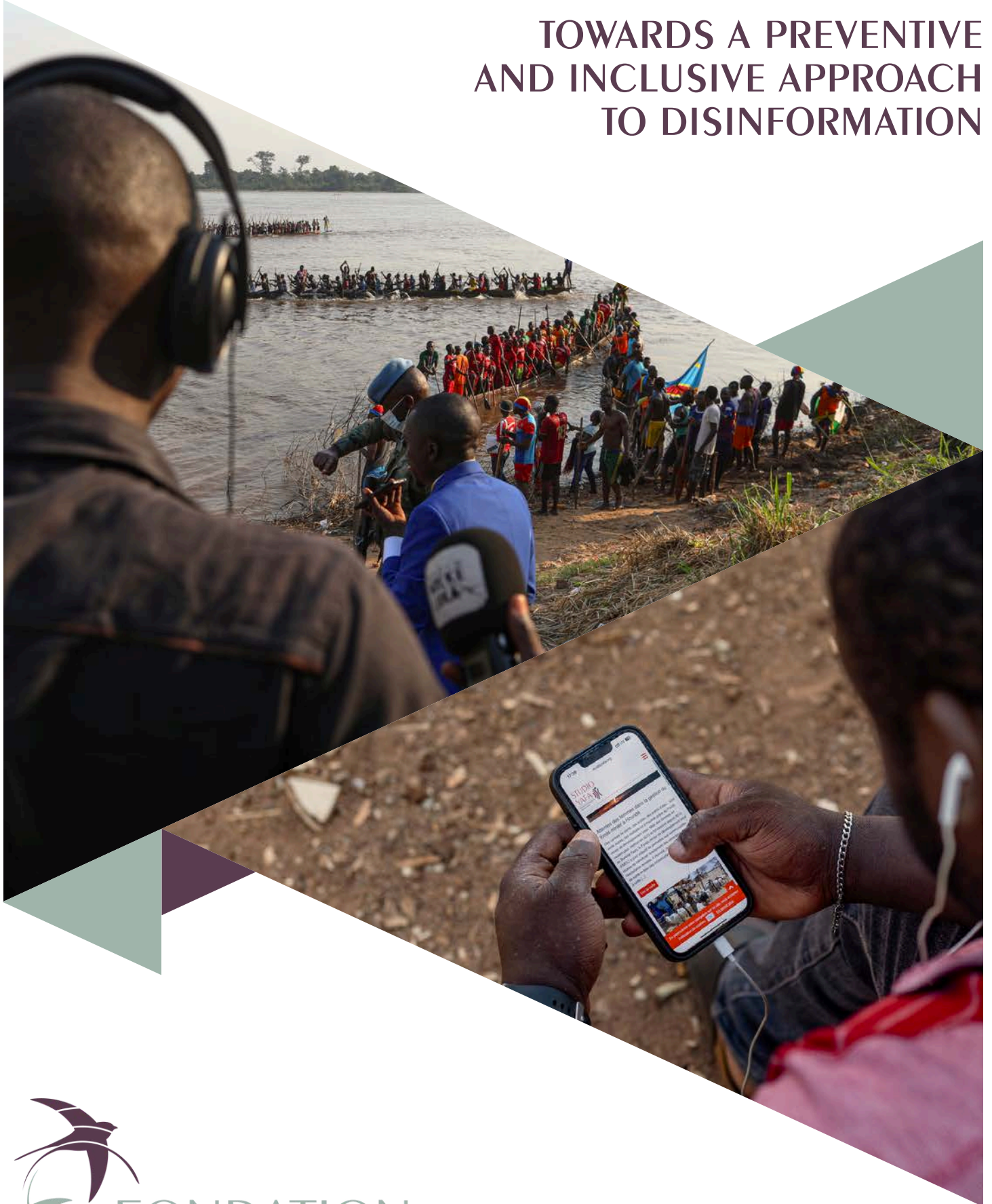


STRENGTHENING INFORMATION INTEGRITY

TOWARDS A PREVENTIVE
AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH
TO DISINFORMATION



FONDATION
HIRONDELLE
media for peace & human dignity



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A. CONTEXT AND RISKS

In its 2024 report on global risks, the World Economic Forum (WEF) identified disinformation as the greatest short-term global threat. The WEF estimates that over the next two years, the massive and rapid spread of disinformation will widen social and political gaps and lead to an increase in violent protests, hate crime and the erosion of institutional legitimacy¹.

The 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to researchers who demonstrated the influence of institutions—their quality, inclusivity and stability—on national prosperity². In light of this fact, it is important to note that trust in institutions correlates closely with public trust in the media. Comparative studies have described a "trust nexus": in strongly polarised societies, the erosion of trust in the media is often accompanied by a decrease in trust in public institutions, creating a vicious circle of generalised distrust³.

In this respect, the current climate has created the conditions for a perfect storm resulting from negative factors that are mutually reinforcing one another and increasing both the causes and the consequences of disinformation. Although the focus is on short-term threats, and despite the expression "perfect storm" implying a short-lived episode, this is no passing phenomenon: it is a deep-rooted movement with possibly lasting consequences.



Ornely Phanzu, journalist at Studio Hironde RDC, interviews a vendor in a market in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
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MULTIPLE FACTORS

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon, but its growth is based on multiple factors that are mutually reinforcing one another.

Human factors: individual and social factors such as a sense of isolation, lack of belonging and lack of opportunity⁴; cognitive biases such as confirmation bias, which encourages us to prefer sources of information that match our existing ideas; and the lack of metacognition, or the understanding of one's own thought processes, to perceive our cognitive bias and the factors that influence our perceptiveness.

Technological factors: including the rapid growth of digital, mobile and AI technologies that, on a daily basis, facilitate the production of fake news and deepfakes (fake images, sounds and even videos). At a time when it is becoming ever more difficult to separate lies from truth, some of the most influential digital platforms are reducing their investment in and mechanisms for controlling and moderating content. In addition, digital platforms are able to collect data about our personal preferences; to attract our attention through targeted content that reinforces our opinions (even those that are unfounded); and to polarise us in order to stimulate our engagement.

Economic factors: the traditional ad-based economic models of the news media sector have been weakened by digital platforms capable of microtargeting⁵; most media ownership is in the hands of influential economic actors; and public funding for the media has decreased, both at the national level and in terms of foreign development aid policies⁶.

Legal, political and security factors: as the civic space has shrunk, populist movements that profit from the spread of disinformation and polarising messages have grown; repressive laws and legal threats are being wielded; and politicians are attacking journalists and silencing critical voices. In stark contrast to these trends, there is a lack of regulation aimed at forcing the major digital technology firms to provide greater transparency into their algorithms, data capture techniques and ad revenues.

[1] World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Perception Survey 2023–2024*, 2024, Cf. [link](#)

[2] Nobel Prize Committee, *Press Release: The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel*, 2024, Cf. [link](#)

[3] Hanitzsch, T., Van Dalen, A., & Steindl, N., *Caught in the Nexus: A Comparative and Longitudinal Analysis of Public Trust in the Press*, *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2018, Cf. [lien](#) / Garusi, D., & Splendore, S., *Advancing a Qualitative Turn in News Media Trust Research*, *Sociology Compass*, 2023, Cf. [link](#)

[4] Research shows that online incivility is often linked to a weakened social status (such as unemployment or divorce), a sense of isolation, and economic deprivation. These factors fuel distrust in experts and increase vulnerability to disinformation. (Cf. Almela, Mikko & von Scheve, Christian. (2018). *Emotional dynamics of right-and left-wing political populism*, 2018, Cf. [lien](#) ; Juvonen & Graham, *Bullying in Schools: The Power of Bullies and the Plight of Victims*, 2014, Cf. [link](#)).

[5] Advertising strategy that targets very narrow groups—or even individuals—based on detailed data about their behaviors, interests, geolocation, or opinions. (Cf. Mozilla Foundation, *The Basics of Microtargeting and Political Ads on Facebook*, 2020, Cf. [link](#))

[6] According to the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), the sudden suspension of USAID funding led to the halt of \$268 million in grants intended to support independent media and press freedom in more than 30 countries, including under repressive regimes. (Cf. Global Investigative Journalism Network, *USAID Crisis: Funding and the Future of Independent Media*, 2024, Cf. [link](#))

For over 30 years, Fondation Hironnelle has been working in areas greatly affected by disinformation. From our perspective, the main risk linked to disinformation—which is increasing with digitalisation and the rise of generative AI—is that of an **epistemic rupture**. This complex notion refers to the thought structures of a social group, and in this case the rupture runs along three fault lines:

1. **A growing segment of the population is being taken in by counterfactual narratives.**
2. **The capacity for dialogue between those holding opposing points of view is eroding, creating polarisation.**
3. **Less-connected, less well-equipped populations and those speaking neglected languages are being overlooked in the production and sharing of knowledge.**

Without a shared epistemic foundation and in the absence of dialogue, it is not possible to understand and counter the effects of disinformation, to come together as a society and to find sustainable solutions to major challenges.

DISINFORMATION BREAKDOWN

·**Disinformation:** Fake information created deliberately to harm a person, social group, organisation or country.

·**Misinformation:** Fake information that has not been created or spread with the intention to harm.

·**Malinformation:** Information based on fact, but used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country.⁷

·**The manipulation of information and interference by a foreign (FIMI) or domestic (DIMI) entity,** while not usually illegal, is an activity that threatens or can negatively impact values, procedures and political processes. Such activities are manipulative, intentional and coordinated by either government or non-governmental actors, including their agents working within or outside their own national territory.⁸

**For the sake of brevity, the term disinformation will be used in this policy paper in its general sense, encompassing these other terms.*

B. FROM COUNTERING DISINFORMATION TO PROMOTING INFORMATION INTEGRITY

Freedom of expression has long been recognised as one of the cornerstones of democratic societies. Upheld by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, this liberal principle states that truth and knowledge can only stem from a "free market of ideas" in which differing points of view may be compared. However, it has become clear that simply creating a free market for information is not enough. In addition, the technological advances that have substantially increased the quantity of available information have not automatically made our hyper-connected societies more rational, equitable and stable.

Indeed, fact checking, truth seeking and initiating dialogue between different points of view are now more necessary than ever. In the words of Filipino journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa:

“ Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without all three, we have no shared reality, and democracy as we know it —and all meaningful human endeavours— are dead. ”

Today, rather than countering disinformation, the focus is on promoting information integrity. Of these two goals, the latter is the more ambitious, as it demands that citizens have access to trustworthy, balanced and complete information on current affairs, the actions of decision-makers, and other factors relevant to their personal decisions. This highlights the necessity to work proactively and to adopt holistic strategies that make it possible to address the multiple factors required to maintain a healthy information ecosystem.⁹

[7] UNESCO, *Journalism, fake news and disinformation*, 2018, Cf. [lien](#).

[8] European External Action Service (EEAS), *Tackling Disinformation, Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference*, 2021, Cf. [lien](#).

[9] Club de Madrid / UNDP, *Information Integrity: Forging a Pathway to Truth, Resilience and Trust*, 2020, Cf. [lien](#).

Nowadays, the promotion of information integrity is now considered a global priority, with the recent adoption of new international standards such as the Global Digital Compact (part of the Pact for the Future adopted by the UN in September 2024 to give fresh impetus to Sustainable Development Goals [SDG] and the Paris Climate Accords).

The principal commitments of the Global Digital Compact that relate to protecting information integrity are:

- 1.Design and roll out digital media and information literacy curricula to ensure that all users have the skills and knowledge to safely and critically interact with content and with information providers and to enhance resilience against the harmful impacts of misinformation and disinformation (SDGs 3 and 4);
- 2.Promote diverse and resilient information ecosystems, including by strengthening independent and public media and supporting journalists and media workers (SDGs 9 and 16).
- 3.Provide, promote and facilitate access to and dissemination of independent, fact-based, timely, targeted, clear, accessible, multilingual and sciencebased information to counter misinformation and disinformation (SDGs 3, 4, 9 and 16);
- 4.Promote access to relevant, reliable and accurate information in crisis situations, to protect and empower those in vulnerable situations (SDG 10);
- 5.Encourage United Nations entities, in collaboration with Governments and relevant stakeholders, to assess the impact of misinformation and disinformation on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 17).¹⁰

The OECD has also increasingly focused on this issue, and in 2024 published a recommendation to help countries develop public policies promoting information integrity¹¹. It also adopted Development Co-operation Principles to facilitate relevant and effective support for the media and the information environment.¹²

As disinformation is a global issue with multiple causes, it cannot be tackled by just one type of actor or measure. Addressing this issue demands greater collaboration with key actors in the public and private sectors, the media, civil society, think tanks, and the education and research sectors.

Advances in research are providing a clearer view of the factors that make individuals and societies vulnerable to disinformation. A review of the scientific literature demonstrates that support for local journalism is one of the most effective ways of preventing disinformation¹³. According to the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), the global research community expressed a strong consensus in stating that providing accurate information is the top priority in improving the global information environment. Experts agree that one of the ways to achieve this goal is to support free and independent media.¹⁴

At the time it was founded following the genocide in Rwanda 30 years ago, Fondation Hirondelle was already convinced of this fact: **local professional and independent media are essential in providing increased access to trustworthy information and inclusive spaces for dialogue, especially in fragile situations.**

[10] Nations Unies, *Pacte numérique mondial*, paragraphe 33, 2024, Cf. [lien](#)

[11] OECD, *Facts not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity*, 2024, Cf. [lien](#)

[12] OECD, *Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment*, 2024, Cf. [lien](#)

[13] Bateman, J., & Jackson, D., *Countering Disinformation Effectively: An Evidence-Based Policy Guide*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024, Cf. [lien](#) / Alverne, C., Ross Arguedas, A., Banerjee, S., Toff, B., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K., *The Electoral Misinformation Nexus*, Public Opinion Quarterly, 2024, 681–707, Cf. [lien](#)

[14] IPIE, *Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment*, 2024, Cf. [lien](#)

The research we have conducted with academic partners has confirmed this hypothesis:

- A study in CAR demonstrated the effectiveness of a journalistic approach in earning audience trust and helping citizens differentiate between fact and fiction in situations where disinformation is rife.¹⁵
- Another study in Madagascar revealed the positive impact of radio discussion programmes on young people's civic engagement, on their belief that they have a role to play in democratic processes, and on their support for inclusive dialogue.¹⁶
- In addition to the studies conducted on Fondation Hirondelle projects, the positive contributions of journalism to sustainable development goals are more and more evident, in particular as regards civic involvement, government accountability, and fighting corruption, including in middle- and low-income countries.¹⁷



Elia Randriamanantena, journalist at Studio Sifaka, prepares her program in the studio's offices, Madagascar. © iAko Randrianarivelo / Fondation Hirondelle

C. THE FONDATION HIRONDELLE APPROACH

Who are we? Fondation Hirondelle is a Swiss non-profit organisation that has been supporting media and journalists for over 30 years (since 1995) in fragile contexts where it is particularly difficult for local media to work professionally and independently.

In each of its interventions, Fondation Hirondelle's objective is to ensure that populations in crisis have access to trustworthy information that is checked according to journalistic ethics and is produced locally in the national languages. Fondation Hirondelle also aims to (re)create spaces for dialogue in order to strengthen social bonds and cohesion in divided societies.

Our approach to disinformation can be described as preventive and generalist, as its main objectives are to:

- 1. Fill the information gap with trustworthy, relevant information that is accessible to the widest possible audience.
- 2. Offer information and media literacy programmes.

[15] Fondation Hirondelle, *Building Trusted Media in a Fragile Setting - An Evaluation of Radio Ndeke Luka in Central African Republic*, 2023, Cf. [link](#)

[16] Fondation Hirondelle, *Engaging Malagasy Youth Through Radio Dialogue - An Evaluation of Studio Sifaka in Madagascar*, 2022, Cf. [link](#)

[17] Stiglitz, J., Schiffrin, A., & Groves, D., *Journalism for Development*, 2024, Cf. [link](#)

1. FILLING THE TRUSTWORTHY INFORMATION VACUUM

This first step aims to:

- -Fill the information vacuum and act before rumour and disinformation become the most accessible alternative to the insecurity caused by a lack of information, both on- and offline.
 - This approach therefore precedes fact-checking, which aims to identify and react to disinformation trends after the fact.
- Identify and respond to diverse information needs, rather than limiting coverage to only those subjects which attract disinformation.
 - It therefore differs from prebunking, which is generally seen as comprising three steps: 1) A warning against attempts to manipulate; 2) A brief summary of the false narrative in order to identify it; and 3) A refutation of the incorrect information.¹⁸

In order to be effective, our approach must be:

1.1 GROUNDED IN JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Journalistic ethics are comprised of a set of rules, such as **systematically verifying the accuracy of information by cross-checking sources**, as well as **differentiating between fact and opinion**. The journalist's role is not to present his/her own opinion or to promote a particular agenda, but rather to inform. This implies providing the most accurate picture possible by presenting checked facts, putting them in perspective, and allowing diverse opinion-holders, stakeholders, experts and decision-makers to express their thoughts about the conclusions that may be drawn. **Blurring the line between the role of the journalist and that of a spokesperson, activist or lobbyist** seeking to promote a particular point of view **weakens public trust in journalists**.

When the media fails to clearly distinguish information from opinions or communication campaigns that seek to promote a particular point of view (whether institutional, health-related, commercial or political), it risks losing credibility and the ability to attract diverse audiences, which are two vital conditions for successfully making a positive contribution to the whole of society. Independence from political and economic powers and respect for journalistic ethics are the cornerstones of media credibility. This credibility bolsters the trust of audiences, who are then better able to differentiate between truth and lies and form opinions based on trustworthy, diverse and relevant information.

Another key value of journalistic ethics is **proportionality**, which consists of responding to people's concerns by offering content in keeping with their expectations and needs, while avoiding the introduction of external agendas. Proportionality is also relevant when dealing with disinformation: it is important not to accord it an excessive importance which could contribute to its spread.

For journalistic ethics to be observed, the following conditions must be met:

- **Journalists require the professional, technical, financial means and sufficient time** to carry out their work. Journalists must receive training in the skills needed to check facts, relate them accurately and put them into context. Without these skills, journalists themselves can become transmitters of false information, rumour and disinformation.

[18] UNHCR guide to strengthening information integrity on digital platforms, Cf. [link](#).

However, training alone is not enough: even trained journalists, if not employed by media outlets able to provide them with a decent salary, are susceptible to corruption. Lastly, journalists cannot succeed in their work if they lack sufficient equipment, transportation, time and safety.

- **True editorial independence** demands that the choice of subjects and guests remain in the hands of journalists and editors. This independence must be supported by charters and protected in daily practice in order to avoid improper interference by media owners and those who finance or threaten them.

1.2 ATTENTIVE, LOCAL, AND INCLUSIVE

A journalist must be first and foremost a good **listener**, seeking to hear and understand the different points of view and information needs of their audience. This understanding requires a local base and a **proximity** that makes it possible to reach different communities, including the most marginalised, and gain their trust¹⁹. This proximity must be not only geographic, but linguistic: journalists need to speak or write to people **in their languages**, in an accessible manner.

Accessibility also depends on **which technology is used**. To reach the widest possible audience, including the poorest populations, media must be easy to use and either free or low-cost. Traditional forms of media such as the radio remain effective, especially in certain less-developed countries, in combination with online broadcasts and social media. **A hybrid (off- and online) and generalist (covering all types of news) approach** is desirable in order to reach a wide audience. This consists of producing content in different formats (audio, text, and video) for various broadcast methods (TV, radio, newspaper, website, social media, messaging apps, etc.) in multiple languages. Content must be adapted to diverse segments of the population, and especially to the most vulnerable. This category includes young people, who are often more active on social media and therefore more exposed to fake news, though they can be more agile in reacting to it than their elders. Women are still often the first victims of rumour and discriminatory speech and play a key role in spreading information within families and communities.

The journalist's role is therefore complex, drawing on numerous skills and requiring the right resources and sufficient time.

Contribution of digital technology and AI:

New digital technologies and AI (Artificial Intelligence) can improve the effectiveness of information production processes. They can also facilitate interactions between content producers and their audiences and foster an understanding of information needs on a wider scale (see our [research project](#) on using WhatsApp channels to understand the information needs of internally displaced people in Burkina Faso²⁰). These technologies can also be used to monitor disinformation trends and actors on- and offline.²¹

However, these technologies come at a cost and integrating them requires training and the adaptation of professional practices. These tools also raise ethical questions and must be used in a way that is transparent to audiences, with AI-produced content being explicitly labelled as such. In addition, all information produced by AI must be checked by humans to avoid the risk of contributing to the spread of incomplete, unsourced, reductive information or disinformation. This is a key point in situations of conflict, humanitarian crisis and digital divide. Given that AI works with digitalised data produced in majority languages, it is not neutral and reflects cultural, linguistic and ideological biases. These technologies cannot therefore replace a local presence in the field or human expertise and contact.

[19] Bello & Wilkinson, *The perception of community radio as public sphere and its potential impact on political action: lessons from Tanzania*, 2016, Cf. [link](#); Matsilele et al., *Social Media Applications and the Changing Newsroom Cultures in Africa: A Case Study of Lesotho*, 2002, Cf. [lien](#); Koetsenruijter & de Jong, *The Rhetoric of Trust in Local News Media: Proximity as a Quintessential News Quality*, 2023, Cf. [link](#)

[20] Fondation Hirondelle, *Comprendre les besoins d'information des personnes déplacées internes – Burkina Faso*, 2021, Cf. [link](#)

[21] Fondation Hirondelle, DEMOS, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, ICREEs, *Étude sur la diffusion de l'information dans la région du Nord-Kivu (RDC)*, 2019, Cf. [link](#)

Inclusive, professional and independent media is essential as it plays a bridging role between different communities of interest and opinion, and between decision-makers and populations. To do their job, journalists need to have access to decision-makers, experts, scientists and other opinion shapers as well as everyday citizens. In this way, they can contribute to making experts' and decision-makers' viewpoints known and understood by citizens, as well as to ensuring that the former remain accountable to the latter.

Public interest media has a vital role to play in restoring the balance of communication power in this age of digital superspreaders, when a tiny minority of accounts produce the vast majority of available content. According to sociologist Gérald Bronner, these imbalances lead to certain viewpoints gaining too much visibility, providing them with a level of exposure unwarranted by their basis in scientific evidence or their actual representativeness.²²

Our approach can be summarised as follows: **IF** the media verifies information and prioritises content according to public interest and not to economic or partisan interests, and **IF** it offers inclusive and balanced discussion programmes that bring together different communities of opinion and social components from the society addressed, **THEN** it can have many positive effects:

- Contributing to understanding²³, accountability²⁴ and greater trust in institutions and democratic processes.²⁵
- Gaining the trust of different segments of the population²⁶, including the most marginalised, with each person feeling that they have been taken into account and heard.²⁷
- Becoming catalysts for social empathy by counteracting the effects of polarising speech, echo chambers and (dis)information bubbles that compartmentalise ideas rather than share them; and in this way contributing to a culture of dialogue, making it possible to ease or even resolve conflicts.²⁸

2. INFORMATION AND MEDIA LITERACY (IML)

Alongside efforts to improve the offer (the quality and accessibility of informative content) the second vital step in preventing the effects of disinformation is to improve the demand. This step addresses the ability of audiences to evaluate the quality of the content to which they are exposed and which they choose to consume and share. To assist audiences in this, it is necessary to strengthen their ability to discern and improve their knowledge of how the media works and how information is created. These skills make up what is commonly known as information and media literacy.



Awareness workshop organized by Radio Ndeke Luka on the dangers of disinformation at a high school in Boali, Central African Republic.
© Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / Fondation Hironde

Information and media literacy can be highly effective in helping audiences spot disinformation and identify untrustworthy sources of information.²⁹ It can enable "motivated individuals to take control of their media consumption and seek out quality information by giving them self-confidence and making them take responsibility, while developing their skills."³⁰

[22] RTBF, *La science devient-elle une opinion comme une autre?*, 2023, Cf. [link](#).

[23] Fondation Hironde, *Building Trusted Media in a Fragile Setting - An Evaluation of Radio Ndeke Luka in Central African Republic*, 2023, Cf. [link](#).

[24] Mungiu-Pippidi, A., *The Quest for Good Governance: How Societies Develop Control of Corruption*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 56, Cf. [link](#).

[25] Alverne, C., Ross Arguedas, A., Banerjee, S., Toff, B., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K., *The Electoral Misinformation Nexus*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2024, 681–707, Cf. [link](#).

[26] Fondation Hironde, *Building Trusted Media in a Fragile Setting - An Evaluation of Radio Ndeke Luka in Central African Republic*, 2023, Cf. [link](#).

[28] Fondation Hironde, *Engaging Malagasy Youth Through Radio Dialogue - An Evaluation of Studio Sifaka in Madagascar*, 2022, Cf. [link](#).

[29] Cunliffe-Jones, P., Diagne, A., Finlay, A., Gaye, S., Gichunge, W., Onumah, C., Pretorius, C., & Schiffrin, A., *Misinformation Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, University of Westminster Press, 2021, Cf. [link](#).

[30] Bateman, J., & Jackson, D., *Countering Disinformation Effectively*, Carnegie, 2024, Cf. [link](#).

To accomplish this, information and media literacy must naturally address changes in information landscapes; how technological changes affect the way we consume and share information; how professional journalists are supposed to process information; and how to differentiate between trustworthy and untrustworthy information. It is also important to address the factors that make individuals particularly vulnerable to disinformation. Recent research has revealed two categories of such factors: 1) cognitive factors (including the absence of analytic thought and/or of deliberation); and 2) socio-affective factors (including information that provokes emotions and the emotional state of the person consuming it; and world view and identification with information sources).³¹

It is important to note that these intergenerational factors concern people of all ages, genders and social classes. Information and media literacy must therefore address everyone. In raising awareness about disinformation, it is also important to take an open approach based on discussion and mutual respect, avoiding judgements or accusations.³² It is essential to avoid a stigmatising approach that could risk antagonising the targeted audience.

In areas such as the Sahel and Central Africa, there is often a lack of knowledge of how the media works and how information is created. These are also regions in which the educational system is very fragile, and with the rapid spread of mobile and digital technology, people are becoming more connected than they are educated.³³ Media literacy cannot be left to educational systems that are already overloaded and underfunded.³⁴ There is a pressing need to enhance the spread of programmes that raise awareness about information and the media through accessible media, especially for the least-educated populations, and across all age groups.

2.1 INFORMATION AND MEDIA LITERACY THROUGH THE MEDIA

Information and media literacy through the media can be achieved in two ways: firstly, through greater transparency, with explanations of how journalists process and prioritise information; and secondly, by creating dedicated programmes such as a regular fact-checking feature and educational features focusing on subjects of disinformation. Such programmes make it possible to alert audiences and raise their awareness based on concrete examples of disinformation, while outlining ways in which they can guard against it.

Conducting this awareness-raising work in close proximity to audiences and communities will increase its credibility, acceptance and effectiveness.

2.2 WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

Following the example of Fondation Hirondelle and Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL, the most listened-to radio in the Central African Republic), physical spaces for meetings and dialogue can be created in neighbourhoods or villages to discuss the information circulating within a community. These forums—hosted by RNL journalists in partnership with community radio stations, local leaders or mediators—make it possible to clarify rumours and provide reliable information.

In addition, interactive public programmes recorded live in villages and neighbourhoods, rather than in the studio, provide opportunities for community members to learn how the media works. Such programmes also enable people to speak up and to share their concerns, ask questions about information being spread, and to learn—sometimes for the first time—that some of this information is actually rumour or disinformation.

[31] Ecker, U. K. H., Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., et al., *The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction*, Nature Reviews Psychology, 2022, Cf. [link](#)

[32] Harjani, T., Roozenbeek, J., Biddlestone, M., et al., *A Practical Guide to Prebunking Misinformation*, 2022, Cf. [link](#)

[33] Sissoko et al., 2024 ; Abdel Nasser, *Guerre informationnelle au Sahel : Qu'en pensent les Sahéliens ?*, Timbuktu Institute, 6 février 2025 (webinaire)

[34] Coopération suisse, *Media and Information Literacy | Part 1: Context and Key Issues*, 2021, Cf. [link](#) / *Part 2: Possible Actions*, 2021, Cf. [link](#)

During one such recording session in a region experiencing intercommunal tension in CAR, a poignant testimonial highlighted the devastating impact of rumour. A participant told how fake news spread about a supposed imminent conflict had led several families to flee their homes, abandoning their possessions and aggravating distrust among neighbours. This concrete example directly illustrated the dangers of rumour and led to a collective awareness. As well as countering rumours, this type of activity helps to rebuild social ties. Participants realise that malicious or inaccurate information is often divisive, while on the other hand, access to trustworthy and fact-checked information can foster cohesion. After these meetings, it is not unusual to hear of local leaders making spontaneous commitments to share the lessons learned and to encourage people to check the facts before sharing information. These initiatives also show that, in addition to the content broadcast by RNL, direct involvement with the public can have a lasting effect on preventing polarisation and tension.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prevent the effects of disinformation by strengthening the professionalism, independence and viability of local media.

- Strengthening these qualities makes it possible to respond to the information needs of local people and create spaces for dialogue on subjects related to their society and beyond, before rumour and disinformation are able to spread and to increase tensions.
- This journalistic approach includes but precedes fact checking, which reacts to disinformation trends when they are already in motion. It also goes beyond prebunking, which focuses on the subjects that attract disinformation.
- Such support must be kept separate from strategic communication or public diplomacy measures, which aim to promote the point of view of those who finance them. Confusing the two risks damaging the credibility of the media and thereby its ability to gain the trust of audiences.

2. Locally strengthen interactions between the media and different segments of the population to understand information needs.

- The use of digital tools and AI can strengthen the ability of the media to take the pulse of audiences on a wide scale, but face-to-face meetings (such as focus groups) and field research are still key in order to avoid drawing conclusions that are coloured by the digital divide and algorithmic bias.

3. Develop a hybrid (off- and online) inclusive multimedia offer that meets the needs of a more diverse group of specific audiences.

- In selecting formats, broadcast methods, languages, which subjects to address and which journalists to address them, it is important to consider inequalities and to bolster inclusivity in terms of gender, class, culture, language, religion, urban or rural setting, educational background, the digital divide, etc.

4. Strengthen the knowledge of journalists and their networks about subjects that are often the object of disinformation.

- Thematic training sessions should focus on conflict dynamics, politics, elections, the environment, gender, the economy, justice and public health. Sessions on these specific themes should only be offered to journalists as complementary training after they have acquired the principles and fundamentals of journalism.

5. Strengthen the knowledge of journalists and audiences about how digital platforms, social media and their algorithms work, as well as about Artificial Intelligence (AI).

- Training should focus on the opportunities and risks of using these technologies in the production and broadcasting of public interest media.
- Draw up charters for the use of these technologies, especially for generative AI, and ensure that their use is made transparent to audiences.
- Strengthen media literacy by addressing the risks linked to changing information landscapes through instructive and engaging media programmes that seek to raise awareness across audiences, including the most marginalised.