



FAJ

FEDERATION OF AFRICAN JOURNALISTS
FÉDÉRATION DES JOURNALISTES AFRICAINS



unesco

Misinformation

~~“FAKE NEWS”~~

“Disinformation”

**Action Plan on Combatting
Disinformation and Misinformation
through Media and Information
Literacy (MIL)**

INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of disinformation and misinformation has emerged as a significant threat to democratic institutions, media credibility and social cohesion across Africa. Recognising the urgency of this issue, leaders from journalist unions in the Southern Africa region convened under the ambit of the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) through its Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA) and with the backing of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), at a Training for Trainers (TOT) workshop held in Gaborone, Botswana, from 10th to 12th September 2024.

During this gathering, union leaders discussed, exchanged ideas and explored how journalists and their unions can assume a leading role in supporting and advocating for information integrity by combating disinformation and misinformation. Through this collaboration, they sought to effectively leverage Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as a powerful tool to safeguard quality and ethical journalism, that educates and informs the public.

Building on these discussions, the journalist leaders concluded the TOT by developing this Action Plan designed to tackle disinformation and misinformation across the continent. This document will serve as the foundation for broader continental efforts, with FAJ committed to replicating and expanding the initiative across all five regions of Africa – subject to raising the necessary resources. The goal is to ensure seamless implementation at the continental, regional, national and local levels, addressing the unique challenges posed by disinformation and misinformation.

This plan envisages deployment of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as a primary strategy for combatting false information. By empowering both journalists and the public to critically engage with the media landscape, the plan seeks to strengthen the capacity of journalists and raise awareness about disinformation.

VISION

African journalists equipped and empowered to fight disinformation and misinformation, promoting truth, accuracy and trust in the media and a well-informed African public, empowered to critically assess information.

OBJECTIVES

1. To equip African journalists with the skills and tools – mainly drawn from Media and Information Literacy (MIL) – to combat disinformation and misinformation and to provide them with foundational skills to harness Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven journalism.
2. To engage the public in Media and Information Literacy (MIL), fostering critical thinking, purposeful engagement in social discourse and wise media consumption.
3. To build collaborative networks among journalists, unions and media associations across Africa to form a unified front against disinformation.

4. To support policies that protect and promote media freedom while discouraging the spread of malicious false information.

ACTIVITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

1. Journalist Training and Capacity Building

To ensure that journalists are adequately prepared to tackle disinformation and misinformation, a series of structured training programmes will be delivered across the continent.

- **Workshops on Media and Information Literacy:** Journalists will participate in workshops focused on how MIL can be integrated into their day-to-day work. The training will teach journalists how to scrutinise sources, fact-check and prevent the dissemination of false information and reporting on MIL development at national, regional, continental and international levels. These workshops will target both established and emerging journalists in various regions.
- **Use of Digital Verification Tools:** Journalists be trained to use digital verification tools. This includes verifying images, videos and social media posts to prevent the spread of manipulated content. Through MIL-based training, journalists will gain practical skills to confront the challenges posed by disinformation/misinformation and digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence.
- **Union-led Capacity Building:** National journalist unions will organise capacity-building initiatives in which the principles of MIL are embedded. Unions will collaborate to ensure that MIL is central to combating false narratives across Africa.

2. Public Awareness Campaigns

As part of the Action Plan, it is critical to educate the public to build resilience to disinformation and misinformation. Journalists, equipped with MIL training, will spearhead these initiatives:

- **Community MIL Workshops:** Journalists will lead community-based workshops to teach citizens the basics of Media and Information Literacy. By educating the public to critically evaluate news sources, we will create a more informed society capable of distinguishing between fact and falsehood.
- **Mechanisms for Collective Media Reporting:** Journalists will develop collaborative reporting systems focused on key policy dialogues that align with media and information literacy goals. This will stimulate actions aimed at achieving comprehensive MIL, promoting MIL for all through various channels of communication.
- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs):** With the support of media organisations, PSAs will be developed and broadcast across radio, television and digital platforms. These announcements will focus on educating the public on identifying signs of disinformation and promoting fact-checking before sharing

information.

- **Social Media Engagement:** Social media is a breeding ground for misinformation, so journalists will launch social media campaigns aimed at reaching younger audiences with MIL. These campaigns will promote wise sharing and encourage users to critically analyse the content they encounter online. MIL will be used to create accessible tips and tools for social media users to help them identify and report disinformation.

3. Regional Collaboration for Media and Information Literacy and Fact-checking Networks

This Action Plan calls for strong regional cooperation among journalists and media organisations to effectively address disinformation that crosses borders.

- **Regional Media Hubs:** In strategic regions across Africa, media hubs will be established to facilitate collaboration between journalists. These hubs will serve as platforms where journalists can share best practices in MIL and develop collective strategies to counter disinformation.
- **Community Information Centres:** Unions across the continent will establish community information centres where communities will be equipped with MIL skills, young local journalists will be capacitated, and they will have access to the tools needed to fight misinformation and disinformation.
- **Joint Fact-checking Initiatives:** Journalists from different countries will work together on joint fact-checking platforms, using MIL frameworks to verify cross-border stories and debunk false narratives. This collaborative effort will enhance the credibility and reach of fact-checking efforts, while ensuring the timely correction of disinformation in multiple languages and contexts.
- **Knowledge-sharing Platforms:** To ensure ongoing collaboration, online platforms will be created where journalists, unions and media associations can exchange resources, research and MIL-based tools for combating disinformation. This includes making expert contributions to the development of tools developed by UNESCO and other partners such as a Multimedia MIL Toolkit for Media.

4. Advocacy for Legislative and Policy Reforms

The journalists also recognise the importance of legal and policy frameworks that promote responsible media practices while protecting journalists from undue pressures.

- **Engagement with Policy-Makers and Lawmakers:** Journalists and their unions will advocate for policies that promote transparency in media and encourage ethical journalism practices. The goal is to make MIL a recognised skill within journalism, which will help protect journalists from being wrongly accused of spreading misinformation while holding others accountable for disinformation campaigns. Furthermore, journalists and their unions will advocate for the development of national MIL policies and strategies connected with national media, access to information, digital transformation, education, and other policies and regulations based on international standards.

- **Protecting Journalists' Rights:** This action plan also includes a focus on lobbying governments to ensure the safety of journalists. As they engage in fact-checking and investigative work that often challenges powerful interests, journalists must be protected from retaliation. The promotion of MIL will help ensure that journalists inform and educate the public and are equipped with the tools to verify facts before publication, further enhancing their safety and credibility.

5. Documenting and Expanding Journalists' Network on Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

- Replicating the successful Southern African experience, efforts will focus on expanding similar networks to other regions of Africa to broaden the reach and impact of media and information literacy initiatives across the continent.
- Engaging with both the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) memberships will help establish MIL-focused journalists' networks or working groups in Africa and other parts of the world, strengthening regional and global efforts to enhance media and information literacy and support informed journalism.
- Support partnership with local stakeholders to advance UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Cities in countries across Africa.
- Active participation in international dialogues and contributing to the Global Media Partnership on MIL will promote global collaboration and foster the development of a media and information-literate public.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

The journalist leaders believe that regular monitoring is essential to ensure the success of this plan. We have developed a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to track the implementation of activities and measure their impact.

- **Bi-annual Progress Reports:** National unions and associations will submit progress reports every six months, highlighting the activities they've carried out, the impact on journalists and public engagement through MIL-based campaigns, which will be compiled into the bi-annual progress report.
- **Biennial Regional FAJ Affiliate Strategy Planning and Evaluation Meetings:** These meetings will facilitate continuous planning, monitoring and reporting of the action plan's implementation, ensuring that the strategy remains aligned with its goals.
- **Public Impact Surveys:** To gauge how effectively the public has been educated on MIL principles, periodic surveys will be conducted to assess whether citizens have developed stronger media literacy skills and whether they are more resistant to disinformation.
- **Independent Audits:** The success of this action plan will also be evaluated by external auditors, ensuring that the implementation remains transparent and achieves the intended impact across various regions.

Timeline for Implementation

- **Phase 1 (0-12 months):** Development, adaptation and deployment of MIL training materials, establishment of media hubs and initial journalist workshops. Launch of public awareness campaigns through workshops and PSAs.
- **Phase 2 (12-24 months):** Implementation of cross-border fact-checking platforms, continued training programmes and collaboration with policymakers on legislative frameworks.
- **Phase 3 (24-36 months):** Expansion of MIL training for journalists, broader public engagement campaigns and ongoing evaluation of the action plan's effectiveness.

Key Partners and Collaborators

This action plan relies on partnerships with key stakeholders:

- **National Journalist Unions and Associations:** They will lead national-level efforts to mobilise journalists and ensure that MIL-based strategies are implemented across their networks.
- **International Organisations:** Global partners such as UNESCO, IFJ and other international bodies will provide expertise and resources to support the plan.
- **Government Institutions:** National governments will be engaged in legislative advocacy efforts, focusing on policies that protect media integrity while addressing disinformation.
- **Media NGOs and other Civil Society Organisations:** Civil society groups will support public education efforts, amplifying the reach of MIL-based campaigns.
- **Private Sector stakeholders:** Such as Mobile Network Operators, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Universal Communications Funds, and Private Sector Foundations. etc will support Journalists advocacy actions for Information integrity, provide platform and infrastructure support and capacity building and financial support.

SUMMARY

This **Continental Action Plan**, collectively crafted by African journalist leaders under the ambit of the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), presents a comprehensive strategy to tackle the growing threat of disinformation and misinformation. By incorporating **Media and Information Literacy (MIL)** as a central tool, the plan ensures that both journalists and the public are empowered to critically assess information, promote truth and safeguard the credibility of media across the continent. United in this effort, Africa's journalists can play a decisive role in shaping a media landscape that values accuracy, integrity and accountability.

Adopted in Gaborone, Botswana, on 12 September 2024

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