MEDIA AND
INFORMATION
LITERACY

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Country Report
Uganda

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Content

Executive summary

Young Ugandans are reluctant to voice their concerns and take part in public discussions according to indicative findings from the MIL INDEX country study presented here. The eight focus groups conducted for the study in Kampala and Bugembe early in 2019 revealed that youths are using both traditional and social media extensively, but discussions of political and public issues take place mainly in closed circles on platforms like WhatsApp. "It is a suffocated environment," says media expert Gerald Businge.

This MIL INDEX study is aimed at obtaining a concise picture of media- and information-related skills amongst youths under the age of 35 in Uganda. It addresses five dimensions of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) based on DW Akademie's MIL model: access, analysis, reflection, creation, and action.

The focus group participants see themselves living in the "the dot-com era" though **access** to the Internet and even television is far from universal in Uganda. The smartphone is the most popular device and it serves as a benchmark when judging more traditional media (radio, television, and newspapers). Social media are used alongside traditional media, but there is a feeling that traditional media, especially radio, are losing touch with the Ugandan youth of today. There is a general neglect of printed media, based on an aversion to long reads and often also difficulties in understanding them. Some participants feel they are addicted to social media and online messengers.

When it comes to **analytical** skills, the Ugandan youths in the focus groups are not very critical of the media environment they live in despite the overwhelming evidence that state control, intimidation, and media concentration are problems in Uganda. But they do pick up on news bias and sensationalism. They are also aware of the fact that online sources and social media information should not be trusted blindly. Participants can differentiate between quality and tabloid-type media, but an alarming proportion does not know their constitutional right to freedom of expression.

The level of **reflection** on the part of focus group participants is medium to low. They can render many cases of cyberbullying/hate speech, disinformation and cybercrime, though they are not always aware of the difference. Especially the examples of cyber-harassment that are recounted in the focus groups reveal that female youths are primarily targeted. At the same time there seems to be little in the way of counselling for victims and there was not enough reflection of the background to such malevolent forms of communication. Strategies in coping with them are not very elaborate, though some groups did mention methods of verification in the context of disinformation several times. There is considerable potential for support when it comes to dealing with cyberbullying, cyber-harassment, hate speech and cybercrime.

The Ugandan youths in the focus groups displayed basic **creation** skills (photo, video and audio recording). They rarely go beyond what their smartphone offers them, but they are creative in the way they use the basic skills they do have. Their skills are employed mainly for trying to impress their peers, not so much for the common good. They also do not have more extensive advanced skills, which puts them at a disadvantage in a business world that is increasingly based on knowledge and communication.

In the **action** dimension, Ugandan youths rarely expose themselves by using their media skills for activism. This has to do with the inhibiting environment in Uganda. Legislation and state control lead to a withdrawal of youth from the public space into their own private communication circles. Some youths do play a more active role or aspire to do so, sometimes in donor-driven projects. Opportunities for discussing youth issues are offered by a few media outlets with dedicated youth formats. Youths use the media to compensate institutional deficits in the educational and health systems, but this makes them vulnerable to misinformation. They also use media to find inspiration for their future aspirations and ambitions. Some feel that media (and MIL training) could offer more in terms of helping young people succeed in life.

1. The MIL Index Approach

DW Akademie's model of Media and Information Literacy consists of five pillars:

Access refers to being able to use media technology for reception of media messages and knowing where to find which information.

Analysis is about being able to interpret and critically evaluate media messages, based on one's own media knowledge.

Reflection entails a critical self-examination of what type of information sources are used and what impact certain forms of communication can have.

Creation refers to being able to create and compose messages to express ideas or opinions and to share information.

Action stands for putting one's MIL skills into practice for the benefit of the community, but also for the benefit of the individual.

Image 1 *DW Akademie's Media and Information Literacy Model*

The world is currently experiencing a transformation in communication and information flows comparable to the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century or the advent of radio and television in the twentieth century. The change is associated with an unprecedented increase in available information sources, but also with unparalleled levels of disinformation and hateful messages. Navigating through, participating in, and engaging with this new environment requires citizens to have certain skills. These abilities are often summarized under the umbrella term Media and Information Literacy (see UNESCO 2013). The purpose of the MIL INDEX study is to ascertain the levels of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) amongst adolescent and young adult citizens in six African countries. It is based on data collected between November 2018 and April 2019 in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, and Uganda.

This study draws primarily on qualitative data. Eight focus groups were conducted with 78 youths between the ages of 15 and 34, half in urban Kampala and half in the small semi-rural town of Bugembe. They were split 50:50 amongst 15-20-year-olds and 21-34-year-olds and the gender balance was also half-half. The participants answered questions that were drawn from the five key MIL skill sets of the model: access, analysis, reflection, creation, and action. After each group an additional questionnaire was completed by the young people. The groups were somewhat higher educated than the general Ugandan population. Since Bugembe is quite close to the fourth biggest city in Uganda, Jinja, the youths involved are not comparable to youths in very rural parts of Uganda, for instance on the border to South Sudan. This should be borne in mind when considering the results to follow.

Beyond focus groups and an accompanying survey, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with two Ugandan key informants each from the following areas of expertise: media, youth, education, and MIL.

2. Access

Access refers to being able to use media technology for reception of media messages and knowing where to find and use information.

Access to information is a basic human right as defined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948). It is an important prerequisite for being able to make important decisions in everyday life, be it as a citizen or as a consumer. Traditionally, access to information has been closely linked to being able to access and use mass media such as radio, television, and newspapers. Today, access to the Internet and digital services is of equal importance. Being able to use smartphones and other digital devices is key to tapping into the vast knowledge base that the World Wide Web provides. Access and use of information are particularly important in democracies because governments and political parties can only be transparent if citizens are able to receive the information they disseminate. "It's how citizens get the power to hold […] the leaders […] accountable," as Mpindi Abaas, CEO of the Ugandan Media Challenge Initiative, put it in an interview for the MIL INDEX study.

The political context for media in Uganda is regularly criticized by non-governmental organizations, such as Reporters Without Borders (2019) and Freedom House (2017), for being marred by intimidation and censorship by governmental institutions. Additionally, the social media tax[1] has had an adverse effect on access to information and freedom of expression. "It is a suffocated media environment," reports Gerald Businge, Executive Director of consultancy group Ultimate Multimedia. He mentions government restrictions, but also media capture by means of an uneven distribution of government advertising as causes and self-censorship by journalists as one of the effects of this environment. At the same time, the media landscape remains quite expansive, with over 250 FM radio stations, more than 30 local television stations and over 10 newspapers (CIA Fact Book/Munzinger Archive 2020). However, Mr. Businge judges it to be "below average" in terms of diversity since there is a lot of copy-and-paste journalism. "[W]e don't see a lot of other, new or undiscussed issues being brought to the fore," says the communication specialist and researcher.

All experts interviewed for this study report that Uganda's youth have turned to digital and particularly social media as an important source of information and self-expression. Reasons mentioned by the experts include that social media are cheap—several report that many young persons have developed techniques to circumvent the social media tax—, they are perceived as modern, they do not have gatekeepers; and they allow young people to create their own content and publish it to a wide audience.

Data from other studies show that digital access, and access to television for that matter, is far from being universal in Uganda. The data is not always congruent. Estimates for Internet access based on representative studies and subscriptions range from 21.3% for 2018 (Afrobarometer 2018) to 49.9% for 2017 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2019):[2] The data shows that there is a significant rural-urban split (Afrobarometer 2018: Internet access of urban 18-34-year-olds at 30.5% vs. 22.9% for rural youths). At the same time, radio remains the prime source for news, especially in rural Uganda. A DW Akademie study in 2014 revealed that there is also a center-periphery divide. Kampala is far ahead of other cities when it comes to Internet access (DW Akademie 2015).
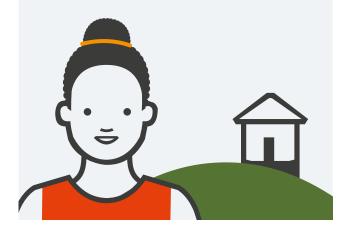
Radio and television

The radio, traditionally the most important medium in Uganda, is valued by the focus groups for its affordability, flexibility, and ease of access. Batteries and FM reception make radios independent of power cables and Wi-Fi connectivity. Radio sets are also viewed as more robust in comparison to other devices and are portable. Television and Internet access are associated with subscription and data costs whereas radio is perceived by many as free of cost. However, some groups draw attention to the cost of batteries and to the fact that radio sets can require maintenance. Regarding radio programming, youths appreciate the music, but also the information they get from the radio.

[1] In July 2018, the government of Uganda introduced a social media tax of 200 Ugandan shilling (UGX) per day, which corresponds to USD 0.05, to raise funds for the government.

[2] A representative DW Akademie study conducted in 2018 in Uganda with 871 respondents aged 15 to 35 years arrived at a 47.4% share of Internet users for this age group (DW Akademie 2019).

" The fact is people who are 15 to 18 rarely use a radio.

Male 15-20, Bugembe

" A TV set promotes friendship among some women in the same area, who converge together to watch soaps.

A recurring theme in the focus group discussions is considering what radio means to other segments of the population. One Kampala participant insists that radio is important for the illiterate and a participant from a different Kampala group says radios are more widespread in rural areas "because electricity is not yet there." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) A Bugembe participant notes, "[p]eople who are deep in villages can't afford smartphones up to now. They haven't heard about a smartphone." (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) One youth regrets that the radio cannot cater for the deaf.

Several participants feel radio is more important to the older generation, also offering programs in vernacular languages like Luganda and Lusoga. Correspondingly, there is a tendency amongst many groups to regard the radio as outdated for their generation. The 15-to-34-year-olds prefer digital media and television over FM stations. Both media are used as benchmarks to illustrate the deficits of radio: "with radio you can't see anything," (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) "radio is less entertaining than TV." (female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe)

In several groups it is frowned upon to be walking around with a radio set. This illustrates that the modern thing to do would be to listen to the radio using a feature phone or smartphone rather than a transistor radio which is not considered a status symbol. In this sense, many 15-to-34-year-olds also feel that other media have made radio sets obsolete: "on the smartphone you can still use the radio;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) "even though it's a feature phone it still has that radio app;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) "on Go TV

and DSTV we have radio stations;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) "people who don't have smartphones and TV, they use radio." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe)

Nevertheless, radio is used more frequently by the Bugembe than by the Kampala groups, indicating different media usage patterns between urban and peri-urban settings. Individual contributions show that radio stations are vying for young audiences by adapting television shows to the radio or transmitting live streams where "you can see presenters in a radio studio live on Facebook." (female, 21-to-34-year-old, Kampala)

Television is the second most popular medium after smartphones. An older participant assumes that television started to supplant radio as the prime medium when 24/7 transmissions commenced. TV is appreciated for its visual appeal, the diversity of programs and information it offers, as a medium that can bring together friends and family, and as a status symbol in the home. The issue of cost is judged differently from group to group, some saying of television sets "they are cheap and affordable" (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe), others insisting that only "the people who are rich" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) can buy them. Pay TV subscriptions are also seen as a cost driving factor: "You get what you pay for," (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) as one participant put it. Some also compare the television set to the smartphone, criticizing that TV can only be used in the confines of the home, and that linear programming prevents them from getting news on demand.

Male 15-20, Bugembe

" Newspapers have more detailed information.

TV is used mainly for entertainment purposes, including movies, series, and sports. Some participants warn that this type of programming can have an addictive appeal: "There are those people who concentrate on TV from morning till evening every other day." (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) Some groups emphasize the importance of television for news and information. News is sometimes described as reaching the viewer in between entertainment programs, as illustrated by the following quote: "I sit down [...] to watch soccer and in the break, they bring [...] news and then you capture it." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Some participants also mention more news-oriented television channels. The stations mentioned show that the youths watch local, national, and international channels.

Printed media

The printed media are unpopular amongst the 15-to-34-year-old focus group participants. Especially in the less urban focus groups, this is associated with an unwillingness to read: "some people don't have that culture of reading;" (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) "we don't want to take time and read something;" (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) "people hate reading so much;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) "most of us don't like long stories." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) This goes along with problems in understanding newspaper texts on account of the high register and complex subject matter they deal with, something Sharon Akidi of NGO Action For Fundamental Change And Development (AFFCAD) confirms. Speak-

ing of youth and newspapers, she remarks: "I don't think that information is easily understood." Illiteracy is not a problem in the groups themselves but is referred to as another deterrent for the general population in accepting newspapers as a useful medium. Some also argue that the topics covered in newspapers are not relevant to them or that there is no entertainment. Other aspects mentioned include that both newspapers and magazines cost money and require vendors that stock them, which is not always the case, especially in more rural areas.

Newspapers are seen by many as something that is easily replaced by what they can access via their smartphones, which are also perceived as timelier in providing information. Only some participants are aware and do value newspapers for the fact that they deal with matters in more detail. For participants more familiar with magazines, some regard them as superficial, only focusing on gossip and fashion, while others feel that they are more interesting and colorful than newspapers, "where you read and get bored." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) Printed media are also considered to be expensive in comparison to online media that are perceived as cheap.

Smartphones and social media

The focus group participants all indicate that digital media are at the top of their media list. This is epitomized by three separate groups speaking of the "dot-com generation" or of living in the "dot-com era" or "dot-com world". The preferred device for accessing the Internet is the mobile phone. Ownership is widespread amongst the youths taking part, with many owning a smartphone and only some being in possession of a feature phone. A Bugembe participant reports most people living in her small town "have feature phones because they are affordable." (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) The cost issue does not merely apply to purchasing the device, but also to the cost of data bundles for Internet services. One group reports that video calls on WhatsApp are not used very often because "it is data consuming." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) As mentioned above, the social media tax, often termed "OTT" (over-the-top), is another factor. Although youths often find ways to evade it, participants report that it is driving the cost of data bundles and methods to circumnavigate the tax prevented them from using certain Internet-based functions such as video calls.

The smartphone is valued for its multi-functionality, portability, flexibility in use, and as a status symbol. Functions mentioned include phone calls, SMS, e-mail, social media and messaging, listening to music, watching videos, playing online games and doing online shopping. "I normally use the phone for everything," (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) says one teenager and a young adult participant tops the statement by saying: "[W]ithout my phone, I am nothing." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Smartphones are a typical example

> **This is a dot-com world. Each and everybody is yearning to own a smartphone.**

> **On Facebook you can go to Daily Monitor and then watch the news.**

of media convergence. As one participant puts it, "I can use the smartphone to get whatever I would want to get from the newspapers [and] TV." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) Besides the diversity of uses, the smartphone is perceived as versatile because "you can use it any place and also any time," (female, 15-to-20-year-old) as a participant from a different Kampala focus group observes.

However, connectivity issues do surface in several groups. For instance, one Kampala focus group reports having to go to university campus in order to have reliable Wi-Fi if they need it. The experts interviewed report that cybercafés are losing popularity in Uganda as schools, libraries, and restaurants increasingly offer Wi-Fi connections.

Other devices for accessing the Internet are not very widespread. Desktop computers, laptops, and tablets are considered expensive and less intuitive to operate. People would shy away from these devices because they lack ICT skills, especially in rural areas. Another argument is the limited portability of desktop computers and the bulky nature of laptops and tablets, showing once again that the smartphone is the benchmark device.

The most frequently used Internet-based services are social media and online messengers. WhatsApp and Facebook are the most popular networks, but participants also mention Twitter, Instagram, and the messenger Imo. Twitter is seen as more of an urban elite network, while Instagram does not have the same social importance as Facebook because it is not as fre-

quently used. Snapchat is increasing in relevance, but Tiktok is rarely mentioned as of the time the focus groups were conducted in early 2019. With rural-urban and center-periphery divides in Internet access, it stands to reason that use of social media is also more prevalent in urban centers and in the Kampala-Entebbe region than in other parts of the country.

Interestingly, focus group participants and an expert describe two distinct directions of information reception flows: one from the traditional to social media and the other from social media to mass media. In the first case, media expert Gerald Businge describes opinion leaders that read newspapers and listen to the radio who would then share topics of interest "on other platforms using a phone, using Facebook, [...] Twitter [or] WhatsApp." In the other case, a focus group participant reports receiving information that someone has posted and going "to trusted sources to confirm." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) In both cases, social media play an important role as relay stations in a two-step flow of information. Trusted media brands are also sought out in social media: "Following traditional news sources such as the Daily Monitor's Facebook page is an important source of news for the youth." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

Facebook is seen as the superior source of information compared to messengers: "[T]he flow of information on Facebook is more speedy than [...] on Whatsapp [...]. On Facebook, I may follow some radio or television station and some other accounts. Whenever I check, there is some information that is coming in." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) The social network is also

seen as a more effective means of sharing information with many people. WhatsApp is regarded more as a closed circuit for sharing and discussing issues in groups of family or friends. The youths value both social media and messengers for the fact that "you get immediate feedback," (female, 15-21-year-old, Bugembe) if you voice an opinion.

Beyond social media, blogs seem to play an important role for some young people in Uganda. Participants in several groups report following bloggers. One Kampala participant for instance regularly reads a female musician's blog because "it is inspiring," (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) and another turns to a specific blog for more detailed "information about Bobi Wine" (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala), the musician and opposition politician.

Participants are aware of the problematic side of social media, including cyberbullying, disinformation, and cybercrime. This will be dealt with in more detail in the reflection chapter.

Summarizing the findings for the access dimension, the focus groups document the increasing importance of Internet access in urban and peri-urban areas of Uganda. Radio remains an important medium, but from the youths' perspective it is losing touch with their preferences. They are turning to television, but more for entertainment than for news, and to social media. Smartphone users report being "hooked" to their devices. WhatsApp and Facebook are the apps that they use most often and information from journalistic media is often woven into the messages youths receive in their feeds. Traditional media brands are also sought out in social media.

3. Analysis

Analysis is about being able to interpret and critically evaluate media messages, based on one's own media knowledge.

Being able to analyze media enables users to understand how media messages are produced and constructed. Beyond understanding the mechanisms of media communication, developing a more fundamental understanding of the function of media in society helps citizens to critically interpret and evaluate the media they use and participate in.

When it comes to analytical skills of youth in Uganda, "I think we still have a lot of work to do," says Prossy Kawala, co-founder and director of media initiatives at the Centre for Media Literacy and Community Development (CEMCOD). Wabwire W'a Waheirire of Youth Connect Uganda agrees, demanding "how media functions [...] is something we need to incorporate in our education system right from the word go." Sharon Akidi of AFFCAD believes that there is also an urban-rural divide when it comes to analytics skills. "Youth in urban areas have an idea how [...] media works compared to youth from rural areas."

Media knowledge and media norms

Analytical skills are built on a thorough knowledge of how media function and on a critical attitude that strives to question media messages in terms of their motivations and their effects.

In the accompanying questionnaire, the focus group respondents were asked to answer several multiple-choice questions. The answers reveal that the youths are well versed in digital and journalistic knowledge, but there is a lack of awareness of their right to freedom of expression. Over 80% of the 78 respondents can define Facebook and journalism adequately, but only 65.4% are aware of the fact that the Ugandan constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression for all. The constitutional clause in question reads: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media." (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995) The lack of awareness of the respondents might be interpreted as a lack of knowledge, or as a skeptical take on realities in terms of individual freedoms in today's Uganda.

The focus group youths are not very critical of the Ugandan media landscape. This is in contrast to the assessment both of the experts interviewed and of the ratings Uganda receives in international media freedom indices (rank 125 on Reporters

without Borders' Press Freedom Index 2019; partly free, 58/100 on Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Index 2017).

One recurrent issue that does surface several times in the focus groups is biased reporting. A Bugembe group indicates only trusting UBC, the public broadcaster "50%, because it is so political," (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) implying the channel is biased in favor of government positions. A Kampala group mentions not trusting an FM station because it tends to "report only the opposite side of the government." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) And a Bugembe participant says of a tabloid newspaper that "they give biased information." (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) Media expert Gerald Businge estimates that "over 60% of the radio stations are owned by politicians," which explains the specific sensitivity of some of the participants to sub-standard objectivity among Ugandan media outlets.

Media outlets that exaggerate information are also mentioned several times in the Bugembe focus groups only, and this category goes across different types of media. One participant speaks of TV stations employing "scary news or headlines" (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) to attract audiences, an older participant from another group mentions two tabloids that he feels "overexaggerate" (male, 21-to-34-year-old, Bugembe) the news, and another youth says of a yellow press paper: "it exaggerates its information—they don't analyze." (male, 21-to-34-year-old, Bugembe)

Beyond objectivity issues and sensationalism, there are limited references to quality standards by the young participants. There is criticism of "pornographic content" (male, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) on television stations and of newspapers that use headlines to bait their audience but only back it up with "half-baked information" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) in the story itself.

A recurrent argument for skepticism towards social media in one focus group from Bugembe is that they lack privacy, indicating that at least some participants in the group were aware of digital rights issues and the value of digital privacy. But generally, there is also lacking awareness of the problematic side effects of social media communication in terms of privacy and security.

> **❝ Sometimes newspapers overexaggerate. For example, 'Bukedde' and 'Red Pepper'.**

Trustworthiness of media

"Traditional media are more trusted than the new media," according to media expert Gerald Businge. Even though young people are active on social media and online messengers, "they know that what is there can hardly be trusted." This is in line with the assessment of the youths themselves. Trust in journalistic media is high, though the young participants do pick up on biased news outlets, while the trustworthiness of social media is judged as ambivalent.

"There's a lot of propaganda [and] unresearched news," (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) one participant remarks, speaking of social media. A Bugembe participant associates Facebook with "fraud, as in people pretend to be others." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) And another participant from the capital city says of WhatsApp that it is not to be trusted: "anyone can put anything [there], even fake news." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) But social media and search engines are also valued as a source of information: "With Facebook you will know what is happening, it gets you updated;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "Google gives real information." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

Television is judged by many participants as trustworthy because of the visual element: "TV as a medium [...] is more credible than radio because what they speak you also see with your own eyes;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "you see the source of the information, where it originated;" (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "it shows actual evidence for news, so you don't get any doubt." (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) Certain television

stations are regarded as particularly trustworthy. *NTV*, a station owned by Kenyan Nation Media Group, is mentioned frequently as the most trusted television station. It is valued for broadcasting international news, educational and health programs, and is also said to have a good picture quality. *NBS* of Ugandan Next Media Group is also mentioned several times as a trusted source. Participants argue that *NBS* is good when it comes to politics, relevant people are invited to discuss important topics, and they have programs that serve as an inspiration to youth.

Radio is trusted because it is considered to be close to the community with local news and music. The focus groups tend to mention many radio stations they trust and few that they do not trust. The trusted stations are characterized as having longer news bulletins and tending to send reporters to the scene of events. Participants from both rural and urban groups can recount examples of good radio reporting, where stations had given detailed accounts of events or could confirm from their own experience that the reporters had given a true account of what had happened. The few FM stations the 15-34-year-olds don't trust are linked to the fact that they believe that "they don't broadcast credible information" (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) or "because of false information." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe)

Newspapers though seldom read are generally viewed as a trustworthy medium. The national press is trusted, although some rural groups discuss whether *New Vision* can be trusted on account of its being "for the government." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) Tabloid newspapers such as *Red Pepper* and the *Kampala Sun* are not trusted because they are considered to spread mainly gossip.

Summarizing the findings for analysis, the youths are not very critical of their media landscape. Issues mentioned several times included the objectivity and the style of reporting, participants criticizing bias and exaggerated portrayals of news. Traditional media are indeed trusted more than social media, but the distinction is not clear cut. The youths are aware of different types of journalistic media that they do not trust, mainly tabloid media. But the general tendency is to trust traditional media and be wary of (dis)information they get from social media. However, there was no mention of the strong concentration that characterizes the Ugandan media landscape, or the censorship and closure of media outlets that have become quite common. (see Nassanga & Tayeebwa 2018) Young people seem to be quite unaware of state interventions in and intimidation of the media.

4. Reflection

Reflection entails a critical self-examination of what type of information sources are used and what impact certain forms of communication can have.

The reflection dimension of the DW Akademie MIL model deals with the capacity of (young) people to reflect their own behavior when it comes to media use and creation. Are they aware of malevolent forms of communication such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and disinformation? Can they gauge the impact they have on individuals and society as a whole? What are their strategies in coping with these challenges?

Youth expert Wabwire W'a Waheirire argues in his interview for the MIL INDEX study that the polarization between government and opposition factions is fueling hate speech and disinformation in Uganda. Youths are especially susceptible to such messages because they target young persons' emotions, adds Sharon Akidi of AFFCAD: "[T]hey are just going to jump on it without […] verifying what was actually intended with the […] message." Consequently, the key to coping with these problems is "empower[ing] these youths to have self-regulation in terms of use of the media", suggests Ssensaba Goba of the Ugandan National Teachers' Union. She envisions a future where self-reflection will lead to "safety for all," "respect for each other" and a media landscape that "ends up being productive." CEMCOD's Prossy Kawala insists that reflection can only be nurtured by involving institutions. "[W]e need to talk to young people. […] [W]e need […] to help them reflect on the things they are doing right now, and what to do thereafter."

As it currently stands, most experts interviewed do not rate the reflective skills of Ugandan youths very highly. "There are very few of them […] reflecting about what they are writing about, what they are accessing and […] they are sharing," evaluates Gerald Businge of Ultimate Multimedia.

Cyberbullying und hate speech

The experts interviewed for this study agree that cyberbullying and hate speech are pressing issues in Uganda. They mention cases of body shaming, insults, creating memes to mock others, intimidation, and even cases in which young people were driven to take their own lives on account of what others had posted on social media. Facebook and WhatsApp are most often the scenes of such behavior. The perpetrators seem to use the anonymity of the web as camouflage. This is confirmed by the frequent mentioning of fake accounts in the focus groups.

Prossy Kawala notes that not only young people are targeted: "It cuts across all social media users." But Mpindi Abaas is convinced that it is especially the young people that are perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying. He blames the behavior on a lack of reflection. The guilty parties "don't know what impact they have caused to somebody." Sharon Akidi warns, "it's a growing trend among the youth and if nothing is done about it […] then it will go beyond us." She feels that stronger legislation and law enforcement should be put in place.

Judging by the results of the focus group participants in the accompanying questionnaire, there is certainly an awareness amongst the youth that cyberbullying and hate speech are to be rejected. Almost two thirds of the respondents reject a case where a journalist was threatened to be beaten up during a call-in show as "not funny." Over three quarters of respondents say a fictitious case of cyberbullying via WhatsApp is "not okay."

The focus groups could render countless cases of cyberbullying that they had experienced or heard of. Many participants could speak from their own experience, showing that cyberbullying indeed is widespread. Judging by what was conveyed in the discussions, females are targeted more often than males and victims are often overwhelmed by such attacks. Female participants from the more urban groups describe the phenomenon as ubiquitous: "cyberbullying is just everywhere;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "there is a lot of cyberbullying and it's according to what you tweet." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala)

Clustering the cases, the following types of hateful, insulting, and threatening messages are recounted by the participants, with illustrative examples:

– Body shaming: "The person gave a comment they had never seen an ugly chick like her;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala)

– Tribalism: "A friend […] took a picture of [another friend] when she was eating kalo," (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

and people commented, mocking her because eating kalo was seen as indicative of having a certain ethnic background in western Uganda

– Gender-based cyber harassment: a female friend was on Facebook and "all of a sudden all the boys who were on Facebook began to comment and she hates some of the things that the people did to her;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala)

– Intimidation: "I posted about [a bank] [...] and some lady called me and told me to delete it. [...] I deleted directly. I was in fear;" (female, 21-34-year-old, female)

– Gender-based stalking: a participant spoke of a young man she had met online physically following her without telling her: "I got really scared;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

– Hijacking accounts: "Some friend of mine hacked into my Facebook account. Then he was sending bad messages to people so people would ask me things which I also did not know;" (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe)

– Verbal abuse of celebrities: in the case of a boat accident involving a Ugandan prince, people commented online using "bad and obscene words." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

Young female participants that had been targeted describe feelings of helplessness and find it difficult to cope with the aftermath: "You can ignore for a certain time, but you reach a point where it's too much and you yourself you don't know what to do;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) "I was once cyber-bullied. That's why I withdrew from Facebook. I don't want to talk about it"; (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) "I first cried, but afterwards I let it go." (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) This is in line with what Mpindi Abaas criticizes as a lack of counselling services for young victims of cyber harassment in Uganda.

The two main strategies in coping with such cases recommended by the focus groups are either to act as if nothing had happened, as epitomized by one male participant's advice: "Just ignore and look for things that are relevant for you." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) This method of dealing with hateful messages is often combined with an exit strategy: "Take a break from social media for some time." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Or the youths give the advice to seek help from friends, families, or school counsellors: "Sometimes relatives and friends [...] are actually those you can really turn to." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Rarely do the participants consider strategies like reporting the incidents to social networks or law enforcement. There is a sense amongst the youths that there is nothing that can be done about cyberbullying: "Even if you go to police it will not help." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe)

Female, 21-34, Kampala

" There is a lot of cyberbullying.

Disinformation

According to the experts, young Ugandans are involved in disinformation at different levels. Firstly, they can be the audience falling for content that is not true. "They are vulnerable to spin, bias, and fake news", says Sharon Akidi. Secondly, they can become relay stations for disinformation. "Even when they know something is not true, they still go ahead and share it," reports Gerald Businge. And they can also, thirdly, fabricate disinformative messages themselves. "The same young people now have the skills to create false content and discredit," Ssensaba Goba is convinced.

When it comes to how youth come to terms with what many of the experts interviewed term "fake news," Ms. Akidi is skeptical: "Do they have the skills to verify this information? The majority don't. They don't go an extra mile to verify information." Ms. Goba agrees: "For them what comes to them as news is the gospel truth." In the Ugandan context, media expert Mpindi Abaas reports that influencers and other people that "need to create content [...] and drive traffic to websites" are often the source of disinformative communication.

Again, the results of the accompanying questionnaire paint a somewhat more positive picture of youths' ability to identify disinformative content. 71.1% of the 78 participants reject a Facebook message in which a company promised a cure for HIV/AIDS and cancer as not to be trusted. Less than one fifth of the respondents are willing to accept the message as trustworthy.

As in the case of hate speech and cyberbullying, the focus group participants do not run out of examples, illustrating how prevalent misleading and false information are in Uganda. The most frequent type of disinformation are false reports alleging that a celebrity or politician has died. But the youths report diverse recurring types of disinformative content:

– False prophecies: "Last year on the 1st of July it was said there would be change of government in Uganda and it was all over social media and it was fake news" (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

– Photos tagged with misleading information: "You see what happened with the plane crash, people were already posting the ancient crashes [...]. They would even get the hostesses from the Emirates and say these are the people that died" (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

– Photos edited to mislead: "Like Bobi Wine, they edited his face when he was taken to be tortured, [...] but in actual sense he wasn't tortured. [...] It was photoshopped" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

– Supposed celebrity deaths: "Maybe they were shooting a movie and there was a scene [...] where someone looked as though they had been shot. And then they will [...] post the picture and say, 'he is dead'" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

– False personal information aimed at discrediting a person: "There are some people who talk bad about pastors and this fake news gives a bad name to the pastors" (male, 15-20-year-old, Kampala)

When asked where this kind of content originates, the participants mention different sources. Several groups blame youth in general, saying "anyone" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) would contribute such content or "just forward" (male, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) it. Most content originates from within Uganda; international content is rarely mentioned. Only two groups have more elaborated theories on the origins of disinformative news. One group argues bloggers with "a big following" (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) play a key role in the dissemination of such content, another assumes that it is often spread by rival politicians in an attempt to discredit each other. The latter also argues that state institutions were partially to blame for false information in reporting, since they would often "fail to give information on time." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

Verification of false information is mentioned in several groups as a strategy in coming to terms with disinformation: "the [...] information could be on Facebook, maybe from a fake account, and then you will have to go and look for a verified page;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "before you take news to be concrete, first compare from different sources;"

Male, 21-34, Kampala

" Facebook has a lot of job scammers.

(female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) "before you use that information you first check other sources with right information." (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) One Kampala participant also mentions the advantage of being able to contact the source on WhatsApp or Twitter to find out where they had obtained the information. Other ideas for overcoming disinformation include prosecution "in the court of law" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) and "sensitizing people on how to use media very well." (female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe)

Beyond online, only one group also mentions isolated incidents of traditional media misinforming their audiences. "Fake news" is generally perceived as an online problem.

Cybercrime

Though cybercrime is not explicitly mentioned in the original focus group guide for this study, it soon emerged that it is a major issue for young people in Uganda. This corresponds with what media expert Gerald Businge observes: "There are [...] people targeting people to steal their information, taking people's accounts, conning people."

As with cyberbullying, hate speech, and disinformation, fake accounts play an important role in cybercrime as well. Sometimes accounts are not created anew but hijacked by the perpetrators: "Someone can use your page and con people." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Three separate groups speak of a ploy in which persons would contact them and promise them

certain computer and mobile devices if they sent them some money. The following elaborate description is from one of the groups. It is included here in deliberate detail to illustrate how cunning such online fraudsters operate:

"Someone sent a friend request pretending to be another person and [...] I accepted the person. He told me she stays in the US and I should give her my email address so that we communicate. In the profile it's a 'he' but the person came as a 'she'. He portrayed himself in such a manner that you believe that is the person, so I gave him my email address and the person sent me a mail and was like, 'I am coming to Uganda soon. I want you go get me to those cool places in Uganda. [...]' and stuff like that. But meanwhile I have sent you some gifts [...], a tablet and a smartphone, two computers. [...] Then he told me for me to access those things I had to send [...] money through Western Union. He gave me all the payment stuff and was like, after sending the money I scan the receipts and details of the payment and I forward it back to him. So, I went back to Facebook and tried to ask some of my friends. They said similar information came to them, but the name was different." (female, 15-20-year-old, urban)

Other groups mention supposed investment opportunities that turned out to be based on fictitious information, hacking of accounts to get personal information in order to blackmail persons, supposed lottery wins aimed at obtaining personal contact details, and fabricated mobile money messages to get the recipients to return the money that was supposedly transferred. Since this issue was not part of the focus group guide, it is no surprise that there is not much discussion on how such instances could be prevented. One Bugembe participant proposes stepping up cybersecurity with strict laws and devising a regulatory body for social media to enforce it.

In summary, there is considerable awareness of malevolent forms of communication. The numerous cases mentioned by the groups show that cyberbullying, hate speech, disinformation, and cybercrime are major issues in Uganda. In the case of cyberbullying, it becomes evident that women are especially vulnerable and that not enough is being done to help the victims. But there is also a problematic tendency among youths to argue that such behavior should somehow be quietly tolerated. The causes of disinformative content are not reflected very profoundly, though several groups do mention verification strategies as a way of dealing with it.

5. Creation

Creation refers to being able to create and compose messages to express ideas or opinions and to share information.

When it comes to mediated content, young people today are no longer confined to a passive, lean back role as media users. They can play an activate part in creating, participating in, sharing, and disseminating information. Taking photos, making video and audio recordings, writing and publishing texts have become daily routines for youths thanks to media convergence and the World Wide Web. "It's the age of expression," as Wabwire W'a Waheirere puts it.

"The young people in this area are very creative," says Ssensaba Goba of the Ugandan youth. They see themselves not merely as consumers but they "also contribute to [...] content that is spread all over [...] media platforms," adds Prossy Kawala of CEMCOD. Social media are the main platforms that young people use to disseminate what they have created. The topics range from what is happening in their communities to "selfies" aimed at presenting themselves in a good light.

Most of these basic skills are self-taught through trial and error or passed on from peer to peer, according to Gerald Businge. An expert who requested not to be named says more advanced skills of media creation are to be found mainly amongst urban youths and in the context of higher educational institutions like universities, again suggesting a rural-urban gap in MIL skills. Another expert that requested anonymity, however, is critical even of educational institutions that specialize in mass communications. "[T]hey don't have the equipment," the expert observes.

Basic techniques such as taking photos (91%) and making audio recordings (78.9%) regularly are very common amongst the 78 participants in the focus groups. Video recording (47.4%), writing (55.1%), and publishing reports (41.1%) are done less often. In the case of videos this might be an indirect effect of the high cost of data bundles and of the OTT tax (see access chapter), because videos are data intensive and video calls are also less common due to the technical solutions youths utilize to circumvent the tax. Advanced skills such as computer programming (25.3%) or creating one's own website or weblog (9.9%) are also less common.

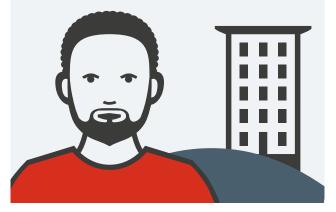Taking pictures and videos and uploading them to social media is mentioned consistently throughout the focus groups as a favorite pastime of the young generation. The purpose of these activities is often to gain respect and admiration from their peers. There is frequent mention of "selfies," video and audio calls. One participant has 9,000 followers on Instagram and invests considerable time in going to "really nice places" and documenting it with "a nice camera." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) She also does her own editing. Taking photos is a constant activity for another participant from a different Kampala group: "Today we may be here and then I take a photo. Then I post on Facebook that we were in such and such a place. And then immediately after here, I will be moving home and then I find an accident, so I again shoot, and I post." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Another Kampalan mentions posting "dancing videos" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) on Tiktok. Writing reports that go beyond short messages is only documented in one group, in which several participants seem to have been active as citizen reporters.

Photo and audio editing are mentioned in more than one group when youths describe what they do with their smartphones. One participant employs live streaming to document events. But generally, more advanced skills are lacking amongst the youths.

Summarizing the findings for the creation dimension, the experts are right in saying the youths do not have very advanced skills when it comes to creation, but they are creative in the way they use the basic skills they do have. However, there is a tendency to use the skills for short-term rather than long-term gratifications. Youths often seem to want to improve their status amongst their peers, while at the same time not being very interested in using their skills for a common cause.

Male, 21-34, Kampala

❝ A smartphone has that feature of live streaming that can enable me to upload live events.

6. Action

Action stands for putting one's MIL skills into practice for the benefit of the community, but also for the benefit of the individual.

This chapter discusses how youths put their MIL skills into practice, either for the benefit of society as a whole, or to further their own individual goals. It looks at how young people in Uganda utilize media to realize their full potential. An important aspect is whether young people put their right to freedom of expression into practice by voicing their concerns and effecting change in their society.

Constructive dialogue that takes youth issues into account is lacking in Uganda, according to several experts interviewed for this study. One factor that negatively influences readiness to voice concerns is that people are being arrested for speaking their minds, leading to a great deal of self-censorship. This is linked by media expert Gerald Businge to the polarization of the public sphere between government and opposition factions, but also to the Computer Misuse Act, legislation that leaves authorities considerable leeway in judging what online behavior is considered against the law. "So you can understand why some are reluctant to engage", says Mr. Businge. Another factor mentioned by media expert Mpindi Abaas is what he terms "a culture of submission", meaning youth traditionally are expected to "submit to the elders" in Uganda. This leads to what Wabwire W'a Waheirere calls a "cynical" attitude of youths on whether "their voices will actually be heard."

Activism using media

Despite the reservations mentioned above, the experts present several examples of cases in which the youths had voiced their concerns and exerted pressure to effect change in Uganda. An education expert gives the example of youth protesting because of high unemployment and lack of support from the government. Their actions received a considerable amount of press coverage. But the same expert, who asked not to be named, also says that politicians would also instrumentalize youth to "champion their causes." Mr. Abaas adds another case where people were mobilized via social media to oppose the OTT tax on social media.

Youths are also engaged in making events and news public according to some experts. Prossy Kawala names a project run by CEMCOD and supported by DW Akademie as an example of how the young generation could engage in "amplifying voices of their communities through media." And Sharon Akidi sees an increasing tendency amongst urban youth to become active in documenting events as they happen: "Youth [...] do not necessarily wait for information from a radio station [...] but they take the initiative, they take [...] short video clips and share them." However, Ssensaba Goba thinks media outlets should involve youth more in order for them to share their experiences with a wider public.

Judging by the focus group discussions, youths utilize media more for their individual benefit than for the public good (see next sub-chapter for more details on the individual level). Social media are the preferred platform for voicing concerns, though this is often in closed groups with peers: "I [...] share my worries with a friend;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) "[v]ia WhatsApp I can post on how to overcome [...] a political situation." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) Several focus groups mention school, community, or church groups as important places for discussing their issues, as well as public forums where youths discuss how "we can help each other without relying on politics." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe)

Some participants do share what they experience and discuss more openly on social media. This is particularly true of the group that included several freelance reporters: "I was at the scene, so I know each and every detail which happened. So, I write the whole topic on what happened. Then I upload all the facts." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Another Kampalan reports that he uses his smartphone for "expressing some [...] information to the public" (male, 15-20-year-old, Kampala), mainly using Facebook and Twitter.

Several youths mention particular media formats that focus on youth inclusion. One Bugembe group names a particular talk show in the Soga language as an option for youth in their region where "you can feel free to call in." (female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) That group also talks of an influencer who functions as an amplifier for youth concerns: "I follow Basajja Mivule. I raise my points, then I follow him and when he goes on *Baba TV*, [...] he brings them on the platform and they discuss." (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) And a Kampala group mentions three television programs on *NBS*, *Bukkede* and *NTV* "where the youth are the ones who are upfront." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) And another Bugembe participant says he contributes ideas to an *NBS* program by commenting on their social media pages.

But the reservations about stepping into the public limelight mentioned by Mr. Businge also resonate in the focus groups. An urban group reports that many are frightened of going into

❝ I have posted about poverty and have received comments and shares from my friends.

politics in Uganda because of the way politicians are sometimes treated by the people (violence, abuse). A rural group also mentions that the polarization of Ugandan society is a threat to public engagement: "Journalists are killed." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) There is a common awareness of prominent cases of persons that were incarcerated under the Computer Misuse Act for speaking their minds online. Another deterrent for public engagement is the feeling that voicing concerns does not make a difference. One Kampala participant says of politicians: "It is like public opinion doesn't matter to them." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

The latter comment highlights the fact that some 15-to-34-year-old participants are disenchanted with politics. While the semi-urban groups tend to be less interested in political issues, the urban groups often are political in their argumentation, but also very critical of current affairs in Uganda. Almost all groups mention cases of corruption, bribery and embezzlement of public funding. "I think that corruption is everywhere," (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) says one participant. Persons involved range from politicians, across administrative staff to policemen, according to the focus groups.

However, some youths also propose employing advocacy for political engagement. An older participant posts "motivational quotes" (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) to get other young people inspired for certain causes. An urban youth shares his hope for the future: "I hope to be an advocate of human rights especially in media, because whenever I see human rights

being infringed on, I feel sad." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) And a third aspires to become someone "fighting for child rights." (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe)

The youths believe media can play a role in holding political institutions to account. "[M]edia do expose [if] there was corruption in a state house. [R]ecently they exposed those people. They were taken to court." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) They also see a role for media in the general advancement of development in the country, by drawing attention to areas in which the state and the private sector should invest, or by teaching segments of the population "how to do agriculture to get out of poverty." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) One participant mentions "poverty eradication programs" (female, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe) as an illustrative example of how media support development, on television stations *NTV*, Bukedde, and *NBS*.

Beyond politics, the youths are particularly interested in education and health care. When asked which media outlets play an important role in education, youths tend to answer the Internet or social media. YouTube is mentioned in two groups as a popular source for tutorials on issues ranging from elementary "spelling, quiz and tests" (female, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) to more advanced "accountancy courses." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) Scholarships play an important role if youths strive for tertiary education. Participants report encountering advertising for scholarships in adverts "on Instagram" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) or on a "Facebook [...] page for scholarships." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) But traditional media also have a role to play: "[T]V programs [...] can educate us about the different skills [...] we desire," (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) says one participant.

The media also play an important part when it comes to health issues, according to the youths. Firstly, "the media has helped to sensitize how people should live" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) in terms of staying healthy. The participants regard both traditional and social media as important in this respect. Secondly, several groups mention programs that focus specifically on certain types of diseases and aspects of health care. A Bugembe participant, for instance, mentions a program on *NBS* that would "sensitize people about certain diseases like cholera," (male, 21-34-year-old, Bugembe) and a Kampala youth knows that "on *NTV* there is a doctor show on Sundays." (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) Beyond the traditional media, youths also turn to Internet sources for advice: "You can get information on health practices on social media platforms [...]. You can Google about a certain disease and they give you prescriptions or herbal medicine." (male, 15-20-year-old, Bugembe)

Using MIL skills for one's own benefit

As mentioned above, the risks associated with public activism lead many Ugandan youths to retreat into the private sphere,

pursuing their own private goals and aspirations. MIL skills can, of course, also be employed for one's own benefit.

An omnipresent topic in the focus groups is fear of failure and hope for success, often in combination with the issue of un-employment. Youths use their digital and media skills to cope with these pressures. Several participants report using both traditional and social media when looking for a job and say the media are important as advertising platforms for existing businesses. Traditional and social media are also sought out for inspiration: "[T]here is a program on *NBS*, they normally host people who have made it in life [...] and they talk about how they got there;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Kampala) "sometimes when you go on social media there are [...] posts [that show] people who have achieved some success, so that will motivate you." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) But one youth argues that the media are not doing enough to help: "The content is more polit-ical [...]. They're not analyzing the knowledge you need in daily life." (male, 21-34-year-old, Kampala)

Some youths dream of creating their own business. Several are already earning money using the Internet as a platform. One Kampala participant reports that he has created a channel on YouTube that has enough views for him to receive revenue from the video platform. Others are working as freelance reporters, also making media their source of income.
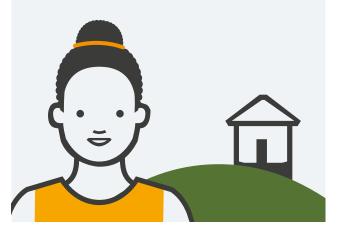
On a critical note, one focus group participant that had taken part in MIL training emphasizes that this kind of training should have some kind of employment benefit: "You might be trained, given all the skills, but if we are not facilitated to do the work, we shall die with that skill." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) This echoes what a media expert argues in his MIL INDEX interview: "[I]nformation literacy [:] is this something that gives them [...] tangible knowledge of development [...]?" The expert, who did not want to be named, says the main issue of youth is, "how do I create a job for myself?" The statement implies that MIL will not have an impact if it does not offer youths any benefits at the individual level.

Another aspiration of youths is having a family and a home of their own. Some are convinced that the media can also contrib-ute to this: "They can tell you [...] how to balance work and fam-ily, how to [...] cater for kids;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "talk shows [...] [have] mothers talking about how they run their homes;" (female, 21-34-year-old, Kampala) "this one group [...] is called Dribble Parents on Facebook. There are people who come and post and get advice." (female, 21-34-year-old, Kam-pala) *NBS* and *Smart TV* are mentioned as TV stations that cater for this kind of information.

Summing up the findings in the action dimension, state inter-ventions in the media and communication sector cause young people to shy away from voicing their concerns in public. They prefer to discuss their issues in closed environments, such as

Female, 15-20, Bugembe

" A TV set helps me get inspiration from different people.

in WhatsApp groups, rather than taking them into the open. Media formats seem to be one way of getting youth issues into the public realm. Youths use media to solve everyday problems in the fields of education, health, and employment. Traditional media serve as inspirational sources in defining young people's aspirations.

7. Conclusions

The MIL INDEX study for Uganda focused on the Media and Information Literacy skills of Ugandans between 15 and 34. In contrast to countries in which representative studies could be conducted (Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso), the methodology was purely qualitative, relying on key informant interviews and focus groups. The findings presented are indicative of the state of MIL of young people in urban and peri-urban Uganda but cannot claim to be representative of the entire population. Additionally, there is no score or rating system that allows direct comparisons with the other countries in the overarching MIL INDEX project. Nevertheless, the results do give an indication of where the strengths and weaknesses of the 78 youths involved in the study lie.

Access

The global shift towards digital media, termed "the dot-com era" by the participating youths, has left its mark on media access and use preferences amongst the participants involved in the focus groups. The smartphone is the most popular device and it serves as a benchmark when judging more traditional media (radio, television, and newspapers). Both urban and peri-urban focus group participants still use traditional media and seek out trusted journalistic brands on social media. But there is a feeling that traditional media are losing touch with the Ugandan youth of today. Radio is still valued highly, but mainly as a sign of solidarity for older or physically challenged segments of the population. The groups favor television over radio. There was a general neglect of printed media, based on an unwillingness to read long texts and on a lack of comprehension owing to the high register of printed news publications. Social media and online messengers, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, play an important role in the lives of youth, some of whom feel they are almost addicted to them. There is a rural-urban divide in media access, especially when it comes to online-based services, as mentioned by both the experts interviewed and the youth focus groups.

Analysis

The Ugandan youths in the focus groups are not very critical of the media environment they live in, although experts and media freedom indices alert to the fact that there are serious issues with censorship, intimidation, media concentration, and associated effects. They do pick up on news bias and sensationalism, but few issues beyond that. Youths are certainly conscious of the fact that information from online sources and social media should be treated with care. They are also able to differentiate between serious outlets that produce quality content and tabloid-type outlets that have an ambivalent relationship to the truth. It is worth noting that while respondents were very good at answering multiple choice questions on digital and journalistic media, an alarming number of respondents did not know that there is a constitutional right to freedom of expression and that it applies to all citizens.

Reflection

Focus group participants were able to render numerous cases of cyberbullying/hate speech, disinformation, and cybercrime, documenting that these issues are omnipresent and should be of prime concern to MIL practitioners in Uganda. Especially the examples of cyber-harassment revealed that female youths are primarily targeted. At the same time there seems to be little in the way of counselling for victims. The groups rarely reflected the motivations behind such malevolent forms of communication, such as, in the case of disinformation, the polarization of the political landscape in Uganda. On a positive note, verification strategies were mentioned in several groups as a strategy to overcome disinformation. Cybercrime seems to be a serious issue in Uganda, but it seems youths are left to their own devices and often learn their lesson by falling prey to fraudulent schemes.

Creation

The Ugandan youths in the focus groups displayed basic skills (taking photos, video and audio recording) when it comes to creating media. They rarely go beyond what their smartphone offers them, but they are creative in the way they use the basic skills they do have. Their skills are employed mainly for impression management, less for the common good.

Action

Ugandan youths rarely use traditional and social media to effect change in their society. This has less to do with their abilities than with the inhibiting communication environment that presents itself in Uganda. State control and legislation have led to a withdrawal of many youths into the private realm and closed communication circles. Some youths do play a more active role or aspire to do so. Media formats addressing youth issues seem to be one way in which youths can actually have their say in the public realm. There is an awareness of the fact that the media can help compensate the deficits of the education and health systems, though especially social media can contain unverified content. Youth also use traditional and social media as sources of inspiration for their future aspirations and specifically social media for learning job skills and finding employment. Some participants feel that the traditional media could cater more for their everyday needs.

Positive results	Critical results

Access

+ Trusted journalistic brands are used via traditional channels and social media.
+ Solidarity towards segments of the population that depend on radio, though youths feel it is losing touch with their wants and needs.

– Urban/rural divide in media access and use: the more rural, the less online.
– Neglect of printed media while believing short online articles are a worthy substitute.
– Some youth feel they cannot break loose from constant engagement with social media.

Analysis

+ Participants are very aware of news bias and sensationalism.
+ They are also aware of the pitfalls of information they get via social media in terms of trustworthiness.
+ Good differentiation between quality and tabloid type media.

– Participants are alarmingly oblivious to many shortcomings of the Ugandan media environment.
– A significant proportion is not conscious of their right to freedom of expression.

Reflection

+ High awareness of cyberbullying/hate speech, disin formation and cybercrime.
+ Several participants are also aware of verification techniques to counter disinformation.

– Often female victims of cyberbullying and harassment do not know who to turn to for help.
– Motivation behind malevolent communication is not reflected enough.
– Few strategies to cope with cybercrime, except learning the hard way.

Creation

+ Basic skills are frequently used.

– Low awareness of how to harness technical skills for more ambitious purposes.
– Advanced skills lacking.

Action

+ Youths take the inhibiting communication environment in Uganda into account when voicing and discussing their concerns in the public realm.
+ They use media to come to terms with everyday challenges (education, health, employment).
+ Certain media formats are in place to reflect youth issues and are used by several focus groups.

– There is not a lot of activism among the participants in terms of using media to further the development of Uganda.
– Compensating deficits in the educational and health sectors through unverified social media can put youths at risk.

8. Recommendations

Drawing on the above findings for Uganda, these are the resulting recommendations:

Access

Improve technical access and usage skills of rural youths: The expert interviews and some remarks by the focus groups indicated that rural youth are cut off from the wealth of information that the Internet and television offers. This should be addressed.

Promote responsible use of social media: Several youths reported being "hooked" on social media. Young Ugandans (and parents) should receive guidance on how to prioritize their activities and on what extent of social media use is to be considered healthy for young people.

Foster an appreciation of printed media: Young Ugandans argued that they are not part of a culture of the written word. Nevertheless, printed media (including books) are important sources of information that often go beyond what electronic media can offer. Thus, youth should be encouraged to engage with more quality newspapers.

Analysis

Enhance critical attitude: The young Ugandans were conscious of news bias and sensationalism but lack knowledge of the shortcomings of the Ugandan media and information environment. MIL efforts should focus on giving them that knowledge.

Awareness of right to freedom of expression: An alarmingly high proportion of the young participants did not know their constitutional right to freedom of expression. They should be made aware of this, while taking into account the limitations in today's Uganda.

Reflection

Provide counselling for victims of cyber harassment: The focus groups revealed that female victims of harassment often feel isolated and need counselling. This should urgently be addressed.

Reflect the motivation behind malevolent behavior: Despite the considerable awareness for malevolent forms of communication (disinformation, hate speech), the participants did not fully understand the mechanisms behind them. The roots of this type of behavior should be reflected more thoroughly.

Equip against cybercrime: Cybercrime is a serious problem. Young people should be equipped with strategies to prevent them falling prey to such schemes.

Creation

Use technical skills for more ambitious purposes: Young Ugandans should be shown ways of putting their creative abilities to use for more ambitious purposes. As it stands, they are very focused on presenting themselves to their peers.

Advance skills in terms of creation: Youths should learn to go beyond basic skills (using smartphones for photos, audio, video). More advanced media skills (e.g., computer programming, advanced presentation skills) will also be useful for them in the workplace.

Action

Promote activism for the public good: Youths are shying away from public activism because of the oppressive environment in Uganda. But they can be encouraged to use their media skills for the public good in areas that are less controversial and put them at less of a risk.

Responsible use of information sources: Youths turn to traditional and social media to solve their everyday problems. Especially in the educational and health spheres, they should be cautioned to verify the information they get from less trustworthy sources.

Implement MIL curriculum: Young Ugandans should receive the opportunity of learning about media and information sources from an early age. Integrating MIL into school curricula would help to address some of the challenges presented in this report.

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