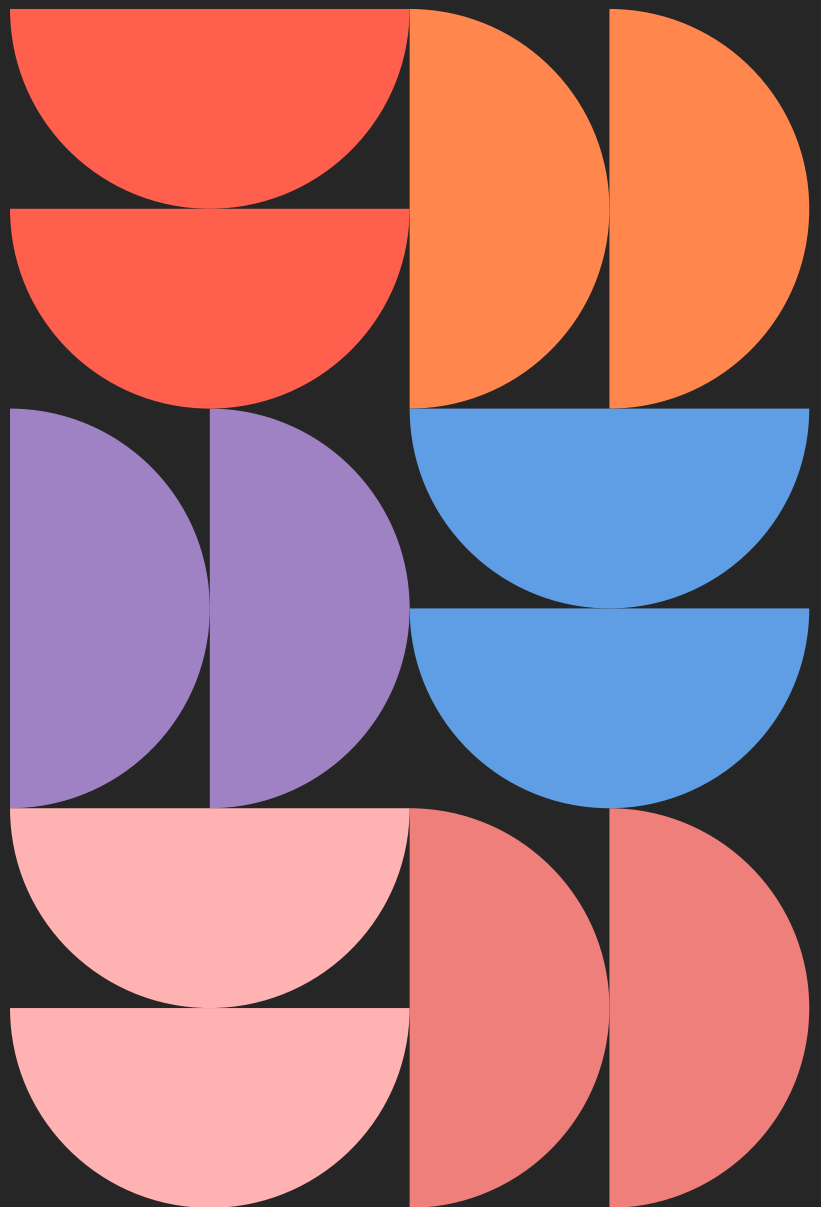


Check Global

2020 Executive Summary





Introduction

Our plan for 2020 was to continue delivering to our Check Global project targets, whilst also embracing the potential to respond to emerging global events and situations, which has so often been afforded in our relationship with our funder, Sida. This flexibility was exercised to its fullest in 2020, with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As per 2019, we continued our work under the five project pillars of technology, network, training, research and data, but, in agreement with Sida, we were able to redefine the expected outputs in order to: 1) deal with the impact of COVID-19 on our planned activities (notably, face-to-face training) and also 2) assist journalists, organisations, and communities with the challenges of misinformation, digital literacy and reporting stemming from the pandemic.

The project was affected by COVID-19 in several ways. Global travel was curtailed from March onwards, initially stopping team members and partners attending events, followed by more localised lockdowns in the projects' various regions, making face-to-face network events, meetings, workshops and training largely impossible. Many of our partner countries such as India, Mexico and Brazil were impacted heavily with rising cases from June through to 2021. Partners and project staff worked from home as effectively as possible and alternatives were often scheduled online to reach and work with the usual beneficiary communities, but equivalent activities were not always practical to achieve.

Nonetheless, 2020 targets have still largely been met due to the creative and innovative ways that our project managers have worked with partners. In some cases and across all five pillars, entire project targets were even met or exceeded early, in advance of 2021. This has allowed us some flexibility again in how we approach our final year, when 2021 has also been thus far beset by complications due to COVID-19.


The challenges of 2020 have also not affected our determination to address themes of gender, and equality, diversity and inclusion concerns (EDI). As of 2020, women comprised 56% of Meedan's core team, with 50% of director and C-level roles also being women. Within Meedan, the organisation also continued practices of title standardisation, gender parity at leadership level, and professional development reviews. Meedan carried out formalised EDI training led by Meedan board member and global EDI consultant Hanan Heikal, and launched a mentoring program for women and non-binary staff, with these new practices partly informed by our 2020 organisational survey.



Hanan Heikal
Global EDI Expert | Executive Coach | Consultant
hheikal@gmail.com
www.linkedin.com/in/hanan-heikal

Meedan Staff Call
8:00 – 9:30am PST
October 21, 2020

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Training Curriculum: Kick-Off Session



Session Objectives

- 01 Learn practical terminologies & frameworks for applying EDI in your day-to-day work
- 02 Build greater awareness about how to operationalize Meedan's core values in the context of EDI
- 03 Strengthen personal accountability for EDI-related behaviors, actions and results

Slides from Hanan Heikal's EDI Training session

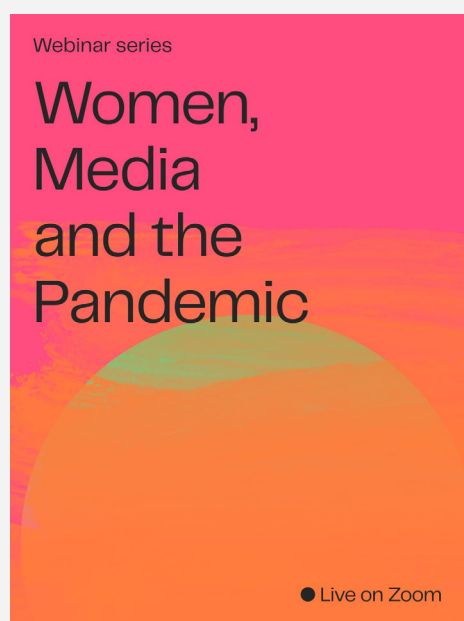
The gender focus carried through to our partners and their beneficiaries too. Taking the Latin America region as an example, 90% of the COVID-19 themed microgrants issued there were for women-led initiatives, and, of the 4,000+ participants using our MOOCS, 90% were cisgender women. Network events have often included similar focus, such as our *Independent, Innovative & Feminist: Three Newsrooms Champion Access to Information* workshop, held online in September 2020. Other examples of our gender focus can be found throughout the full report.



The 15 women that led the Chicas Poderosas MOOC



Video stills from the Chicas Poderosas MOOC



Graphic for the event 'Independent, Innovative & Feminist: Three Newsrooms Champion Access to Information'

Technology



377

Features and workflow improvements published



605

New Check Users in 2020



290,319

Check items created in 2020

Meedan continued to work on developing our fact-checking and verification Check software, based on feedback from partners and the wider user base. In some cases this improved interfaces, but also included new features such as an analysis sidebar, metadata fields, a new version of the browser extension, support for video and audio files, the ability to flag sensitive content, and new search features. The user base was widened to broader publics in developing the 'tipline' feature which allows sources to make contact through private messaging.

Alongside this development and integration work, Meedan also provided support to our range of global partners, journalists and communities using Check, whether in coverage of elections, fact-checking initiatives or investigative reporting. Meedan worked with partners such as HURIDOCS on their own publishing platform [Uwazi](#) and its integration with [Digital Evidence Vault](#), and more widely supported the developer community using Check, through documentation, use of wikis, and attendance of events such as [Hacktoberfest](#).

Highlights

Check interface and messaging was localised, based on partner needs.

Project target was five languages.

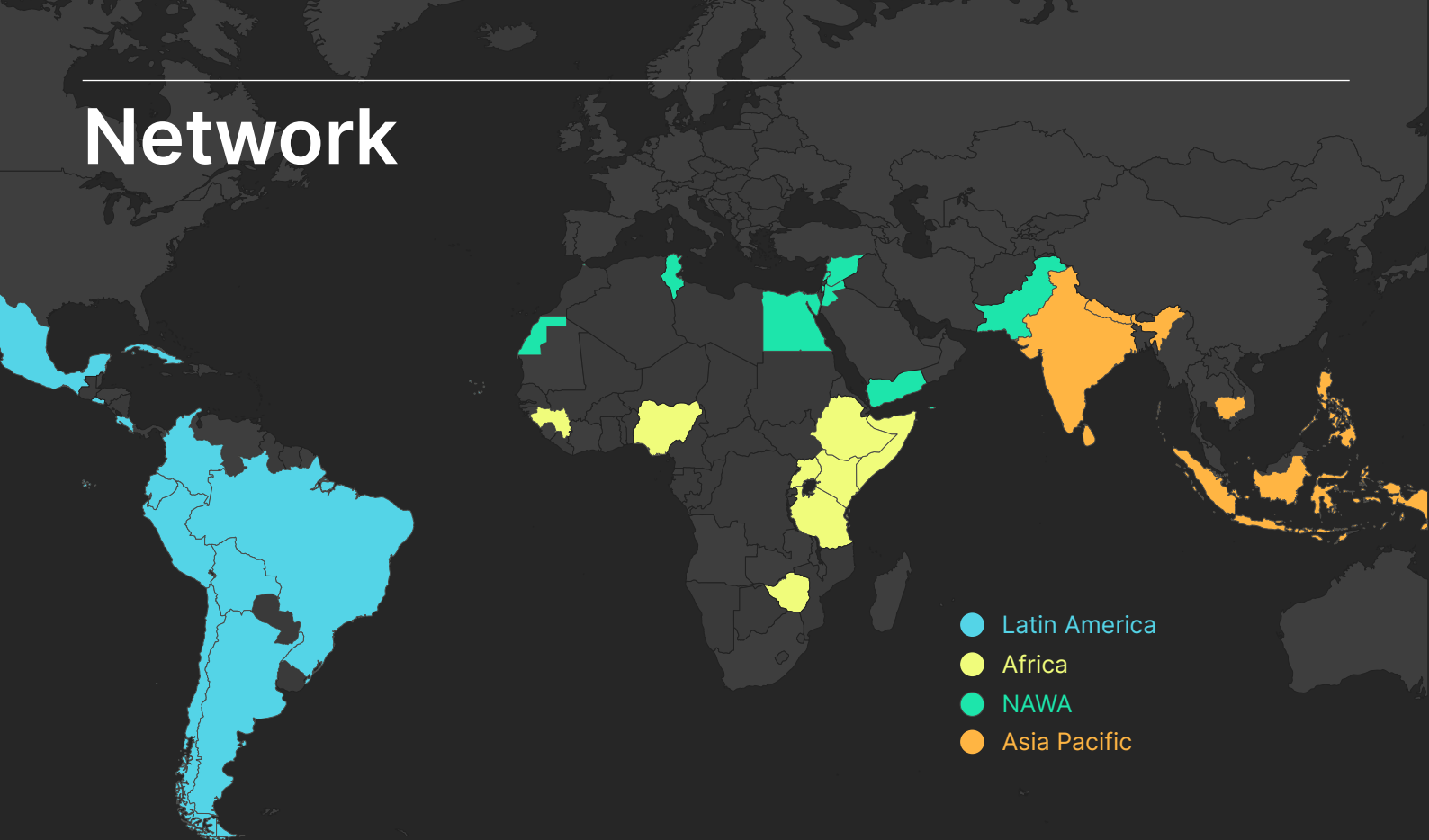
Localised to 6 new languages in 2020 alone (Bengali, Filipino, Hindi, Malayalam, Swahili and Telugu), achieving a project **total of 13 languages**.

Partners

[HURIDOCS](#)

[VFRAME](#)

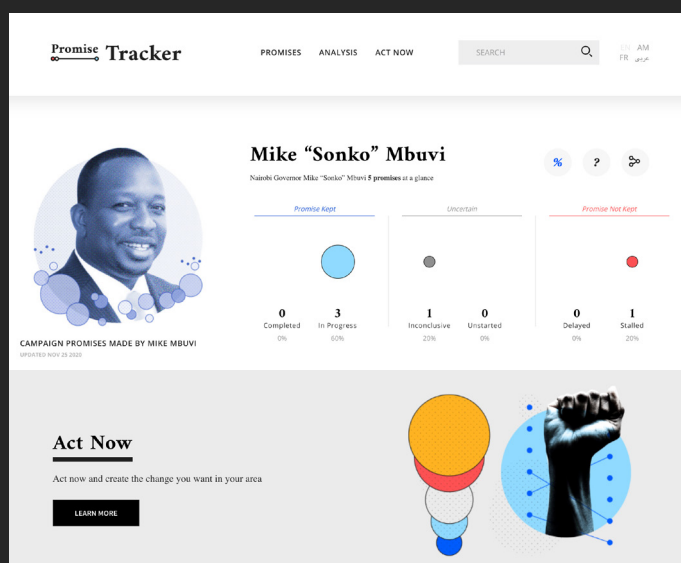
Network



Network activities involving travel weren't possible due to COVID-19, so the various teams worked responsively. Chicas Poderosas held [#ConversacionesPoderosas](#) virtual meetings for journalists, designers, communicators and entrepreneurs, and continued their online [Hermanas \(Sisters\) project](#), a platform for women's healthcare in Latin America. PesaCheck and CITE were supported in developing their platforms in Kenya and Zimbabwe respectively, with aims of sharing public information, fact-checking and social accountability at government level. Meedan also supported and collaborated on election monitoring work in Myanmar and Ghana, and Mnemonic's documentation of attacks on medical facilities in Syria.



Chicas Poderosas: Hermanas ["I have papilloma"](#).



PesaCheck's [Promise Tracker](#)

Our NAWA Investigative Fund continued to support projects, campaigns, and initiatives through our open application process. Ten projects were funded, in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and the Asia-Pacific region. An additional 24 global grassroots organisations were selected for COVID-19 specific projects, selected from a pool of 298 applications - for example, projects dealing with human rights injustices and health misinformation. Funds were also allocated to a Beirut Response Fund following the August 2020 explosion, supporting the work of journalists and grassroots organisations in Lebanon.

In April, Meedan opened for a new wave of recruitment for the Check Global Network, followed by an online launch involving members from Philippines, Indonesia, Syria, Yemen, Western Sahara, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Brazil. Three following Network events were held, a weekly newsletter (The Checklist) was launched, and other activities tied into established events such as World Press Freedom Day. The usual Meedan team retreat was replaced by a Virtual Summit running online from June through to July.



The Checklist



The Beirut Response Fund

Highlights

NAWA-Investigative Funds: expectation to fund 30 recipients over 3 years.

37 awards granted in 2020 alone, partly responsive to crises such as COVID-19 and Beirut explosion in August.

In addition to 13 2019 recipients, this totals **50 recipients**.

Partners

Mnemonic (The Syrian Archive and Yemeni Archive)

Chicas Poderosas

CITE

PesaCheck

Training

218

people trained
by Mnemonic

91

people trained
by CITE

550

people completed
the Chicas
Poderosas MOOC

464

people used the
Sowt MOOC

103

people trained
by VERA Files

362

people trained
by PesaCheck

We expanded our Lebanese Newsroom to a more comprehensive Pan-Arab Newsroom. 24 students took part, from Yemen, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon and were trained through Open Democracy's six-month programme on subjects such as digital security, sourcing, and open-source investigations. We supported the students in publishing 41 articles in Arabic and four in English. Further to this, we also funded four larger student investigative projects in 2020, such as the [Lebanese Warehouse 12 podcast series](#), focusing on those affected by the Beirut explosion. The NAWA Media website continued to provide a safe space for their representation and publishing work. Further global support was developed through the CheckU programme, to train university journalism students regarding verification principles.

Our partners also continued to train journalists, human rights organisations, and activist communities, despite the challenges of COVID-19. Mnemonic trained 218

people over eight sessions, including 120 male and 98 females from Syria, Yemen and Sudan. Chicas Poderosas delivered their [Women, Power and Media course](#) through an online MOOC, delivered by 15 women instructors and largely from Latin America; 4,000+ participants enrolled and 550 completed the course. CITE trained 60 people 'in person' until March and then continued online until June. PesaCheck's activity was moved to online, with 362 being trained on verification and fact-checking via webinars. PesaCheck also ran sessions with 22 participants from six Kenyan newsrooms, resulting in the students using these new skills to produce 157 'fact-checks'. VERAFiles ran two training sessions to 50 students, first learning fact-checking principles and then how to train others in these skills. Finally, three MOOCs were developed by: Sowt, on [podcasting](#); Yemeni Archive, on [human rights advocacy for journalists](#); Digital Rights Foundation, on [gendered security issues for journalists](#).

Highlights

Training target over 3 years:
1,500 trainees.

2020: 2,824 journalists, organisations and students were trained.

2019 + 2020 total was **3,545 trainees**, exceeding overall target.

Partners

[VERAFiles](#)

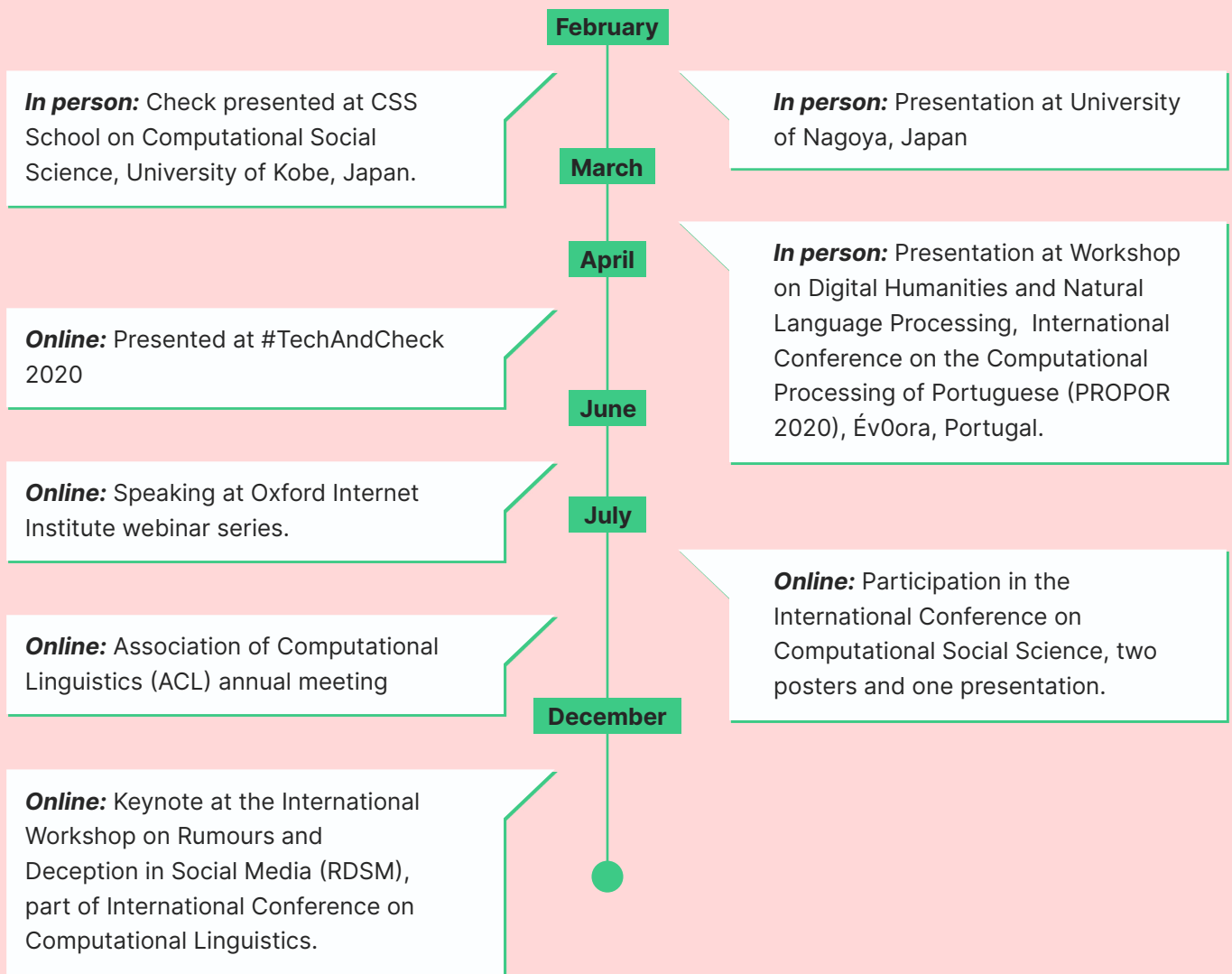
[Mnemonic \(The Syrian Archive and Yemeni Archive\)](#)

[Chicas Poderosas](#)

[CITE](#)

[PesaCheck](#)

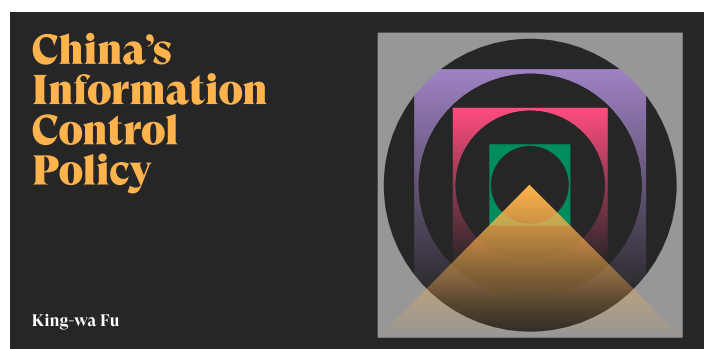
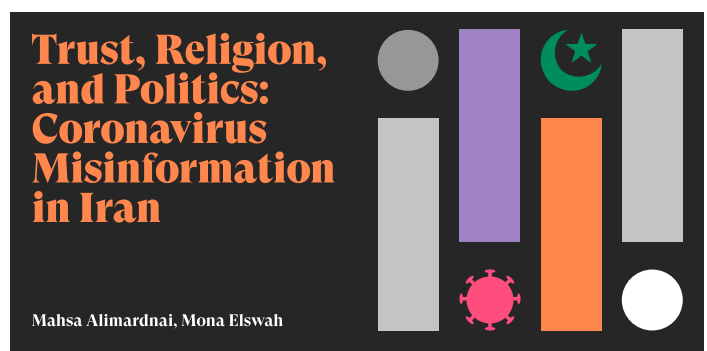
Research



In 2020 we created a bespoke, open-access space for our Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit on our NAWA Media website, including guides, tools, templates, and forms to be used in project evaluation by our project partners, but also other similar projects. We offered partner support through evaluation meetings and mid-year reviews, and collated their reports and data into our 2020 report. This benefited from input at various levels, from the Meedan project management team, to our partners, and right down to ground level beneficiaries such as NAWA-IF funding recipients, trainees and students.

We presented at academic conferences and events, before such gatherings reverted to online. Meedan researchers and developers shared their work at a computational social science level, for example, their paper detailing methods for identifying similar textual statements in large volumes of data, presented at the International Conference on the Computational

Processing of Portuguese. Whilst in Japan, presenting at the CSS School on Computational Social Science, Dr Scott Hale then also presented to a group of academics at University of Nagoya. 2020's research outputs included: an article published in the open-access online journal First Monday, [*Understanding factors and barriers to alternative media development in emerging economies: Learning from the Check Global project*](#); an article in collaboration with University of Birmingham, [*Measuring relative opinion from location-based social media: A case study of the 2016 US presidential election*](#); a paper based on a project on hate speech with the Alan Turing Institute, [*Detecting East Asian Prejudice on Social Media*](#). The project team also collaborated on research with partners, for example, the development of a 'Misinfodemics' report, exploring the impact of COVID-19 and misinformation in various global regions. Whilst not funded by Sida, it is still also worth noting Meedan's work on [*Digital Health Lab*](#), which has benefited our partners and resulted in sharing accurate COVID-19 information for over 700,000 people in eight languages.



[2020 Misinfodemic Report: COVID-19 in Emerging Economies](#)

Highlights

Project target to speak at 5 conferences and academic gatherings.

In 2020 (even with COVID-19 limitations), we spoke at three 'in person' conferences, and four online.

In addition to 2019's attendance of 34 events in 17 countries, this exceeds our project target: **41 events in total**.

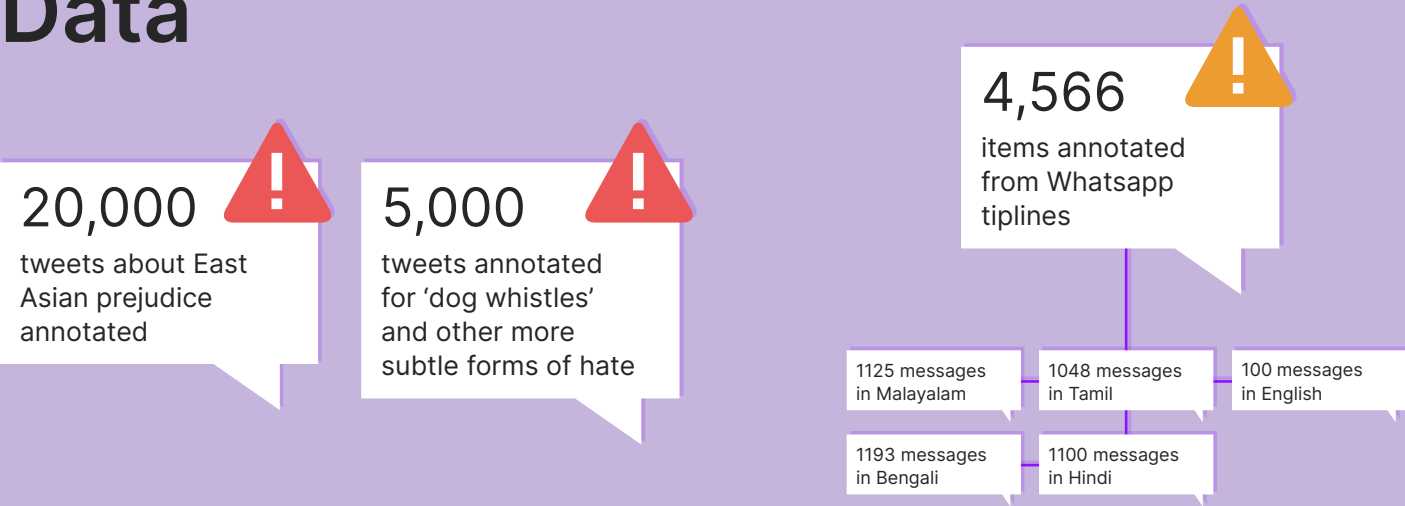
Partners

[Birmingham City University](#)

[Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford](#)

[Federal University of Bahia \(Brazil\)](#)

Data



With increased partner activity in Check workspaces comes the need to improve the analytics available to partners. In March 2020, Meedan developed a new analytics infrastructure to create weekly reports for partners. The software team then collaborated with the Workbench open access journalism platform, to allow effective partner access to workflow and content analytics. In 2021, this will lead onto further work to more deeply integrate [Workbench](#) functionalities within the Check platform.

Significant work was also put into improving project data sharing and integration with academics and their work. This was achieved by improving ClaimReview, a tagging system used to make fact-checks and their data visible to search engines and social media platforms, and this approach to academics is increasingly important given the need

to expose and correct misinformation. This will ultimately allow academics to conduct analyses with Check and project data, for use in their work.

In 2020, we also worked on developing and releasing annotated datasets, to allow for collaborative works between our partners and academics. This often involved annotating tens of thousands of tweets or WhatsApp tipline messages on a single subject such as East Asian prejudice, before then sharing the data freely with researchers and practitioners. Similar exercises were carried out with data from the Check platform and added to the Claims and Memes Database. This work has been further augmented this year by Meedan's development of Fetch, a system to automatically import historical and new content stored either publicly or privately by partner organisations.

Highlights

Project target was for 3,000 entries in the Claims and Memes Database.

23,545 items were added in 2020, adding to 2019 totals, to **25,901 items**.

The Data work is not funded by Sida but is relational to the project, therefore worth noting our partnerships with:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Credibility Coalition | The MIT Institute for Data, Systems and Society |
| The Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford | Digital Public |
| The Alan Turing Institute | Harvard Berkman Klein Center's Cyberlaw Clinic |

What we've done really well



We have partnered with new groups in 2020. The number of groups that we have reached out to has been higher than ever before. We have also designed interventions that are responsive to the challenges being faced by civil society groups in different regions. The COVID-19 microgrants and the Beirut response fund are examples of our strategies to address global crises. The election monitoring initiatives in Myanmar and Ghana are efforts to address misinformation and disinformation around large events of public interest. In 2020, we also launched the Check Global Network and organised events to mark significant days and share strategies and best practices across different regions.

Shalini Joshi

Program Director, APAC



With the explosion of COVID-19 globally, we managed to transition our planned in-person four-day NAWA Newsroom training into a six-month online training program with the help of independent investigative media outlet openDemocracy, offering our students the chance to take their time in learning about a variety of journalistic skills, including open-source investigative methods, sourcing, podcasting, fact-checking and verification. Likewise, we have been able to rapidly respond to global crises in record time, whether through the establishment of our Check Global COVID-19 microgrants or the Beirut Response Fund. Both of these responses sit firmly within Check Global's global strategy and mission.

Azza El Masri

Program Manager, NAWA



Through the COVID-19 microgrants the Check Global network was able to rise up to the occasion in a short span of time by supporting grass-roots level organizations in addressing information gaps and inequities. The rapid and timely response was a great example of developing community level strategies during crises and expanding the network to include grass-roots level actors.

Sneha Alexander

Program Associate, APAC



Our team of program managers coming together and shaping our resources into an emergency response to support initiatives in our regions was, in its own way, uplifting and essential. We live in these periphery regions that were and are still severely affected by the pandemic. I believe that being able to design and quickly implement this response strategy helped not only strengthen our network but it also gave us a sense of fortitude amid the uncertainties of these times.

Isabella Barroso

Program Manager, Latin America

What we need to improve moving forward



Being able to support and respond quickly to the needs of grassroots organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic was an amazing and impactful experience. It opened a window into the innovative pathways these organizations created during trying times. It also highlighted the need for more opportunities to cultivate not only the relationship with these new partners but also ways to connect them.

Isabella Barroso

Program Manager, Latin America



The network brings together organizations and individuals with varying levels of knowledge and experience, and one way to make this interaction more meaningful for everyone is to encourage cross-network mentorship and experience-sharing opportunities. Additionally, the sub-Saharan Africa region is largely underrepresented, and this is an opportunity to increase our presence, reach and impact in the region.

Eric Mugendi

Program Manager, East Africa



We are in a good position to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration between partners across regions and those working in different capacities. For instance, more exchanges between fact-checking organizations and civil society organizations can strengthen the efforts of addressing misinformation, as the former have skills and expertise in verification while the latter have greater community-level access. Such collaborations and cross pollination of ideas can be supported by holding regular regional and cross regional events and training sessions led by network members.

Sneha Alexander

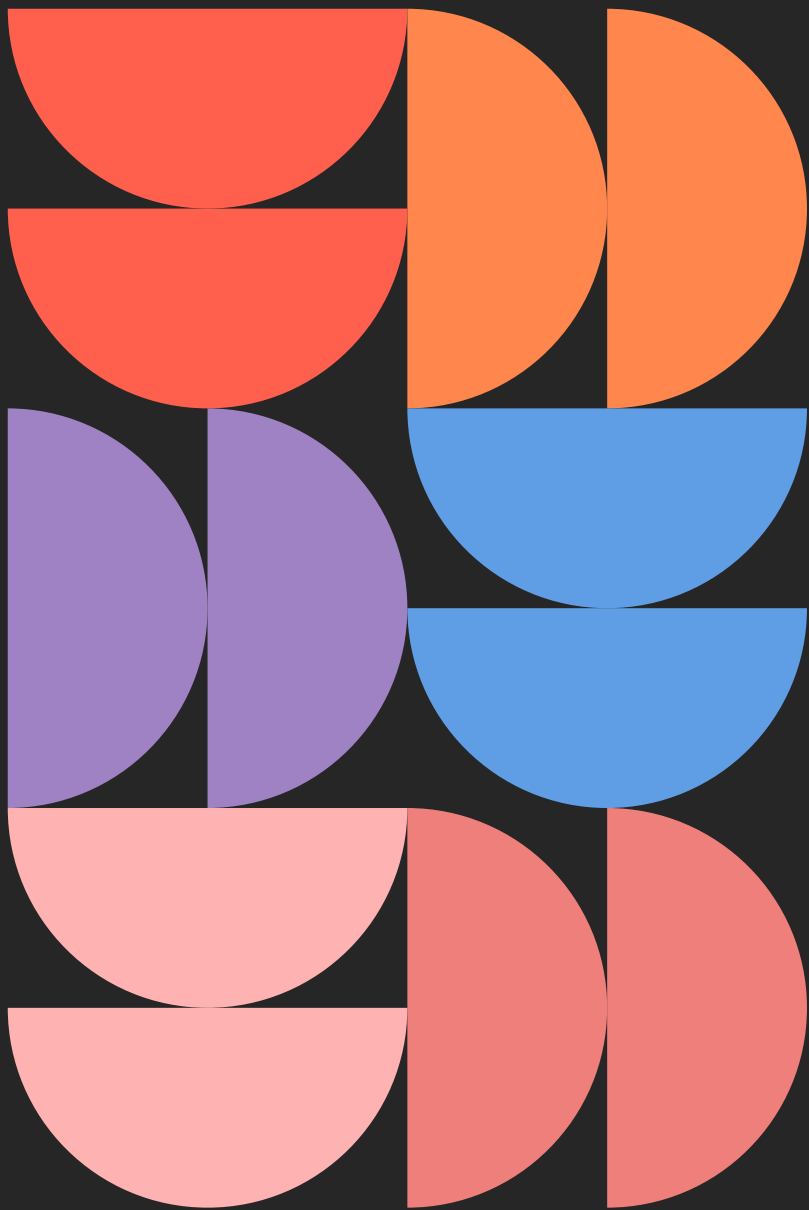
Program Associate, APAC



I think we need to do better in bringing our regions' work together, and facilitate cross-regional collaboration. In 2020, especially as COVID-19 ravaged countries in the Global South, we saw governments and authorities turn on independent journalists and other vulnerable groups, which we support through our Check Global program. We learned that our problems are shared not only regionally, but across the globe. The Check Global Network, therefore, is best suited in being the space and platform for potential collaborations, but I think our work should extend to encouraging our current and future partners to collaborate together.

Azza El Masri

Program Manager, NAWA



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