LEARNING BRIEF #5–AMPLIFYING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Authors: Randi Rumbold, Michael Moses, Gayatri Malhotra, Dion Cheatham, Kerry Jules-Smith, Lynne Franco
Contributors: 'Sumbo Oladipo, Temitayo M. Ladipo, Olufunke Opadokun

Introduction

The MacArthur Foundation's Big Bet On Nigeria program invests in expanding the quality and reach of corruption-related reporting to increase citizen awareness of corruption and engagement in anticorruption efforts in Nigeria. This learning brief explores how On Nigeria Media and Journalism (MJ) grantees try to build investigative reporting skills among journalists, how they amplify investigative reports, and the results to which they contribute. In doing so, the brief sheds light on MJ grantees' work to apply the skill building, collaboration, and GESI approaches that are integral to the On Nigeria Theory of Change, and to the Media and Journalism-specific Theory of Change.

Sample and Methods

Learning Question

1.4 How do grantee strategies most effectively amplify investigative reporting and encourage voice and teeth actors to take action against corruption?

This learning brief contributes to answering Learning Question 1.4 (see box). EnCompass reviewed MJ grantee proposals and reports, identifying 16 grantees that conducted investigative reporting training and/or amplified investigative reporting, and then collected a total of 33 training documents from these grantees.[1] EnCompass also conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with seven of the

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[1] NOTE**:** During the review of proposals and briefs, 14 MJ grantees were identified as having planned or completed training (the two remaining MJ grantees engaged solely in amplification). Four of those grantees provided the 33 documents covered in this analysis (the number of documents submitted per grantee ranged from 2 to 19), the majority of which were PowerPoint presentations. This means that this brief covers only a subset of the training conducted by MJ grantees. In total, eight of the 14 grantees engaged in journalism training efforts are represented across the document review and KIIs.

14 grantees to further explore their work related to investigative reporting training and amplification. EnCompass coded, analyzed, integrated, and synthesized the collected data to generate the overarching findings and conclusions presented in this brief.

Findings

Findings are presented under four crosscutting lines of inquiry: (1) investigative journalism training, (2) amplification and dissemination, (3) investigative reporting barriers and successes, and (4) gender equity and social inclusion (GESI).

Investigative journalism training

A number of grantees seek to build investigative reporting capacity in Nigeria. They do so in different ways. Some grantees also monitor the effectiveness and results of their skill-building activities.

Finding 1: Grantees seek to strengthen journalists' capacity through training courses, fellowships, and mentorships. These activities often include a focus on the fundamentals of investigative reporting. Some cover technical aspects of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act/Laws (ACJA/ACJLs) and budgets, how to maintain journalists' well-being, and how to treat sources with respect.

> *Investigative reporting is newspaper or broadcast journalism that focuses on long-term efforts to uncover corruption or misconduct, especially by public institutions and government.—Media & Journalism Grantee Training Document*

Ten of the 33 training documents submitted by grantees introduced investigative journalism, emphasizing the importance of research and the role investigative reporting plays in strengthening accountability and exposing misconduct. Five of the 33 documents explored the causes and consequences of corruption, government budget processes and tracking, the criminal justice system, and/or the ACJA/ACJLs. Both the document review and KIIs identified additional training topics, including how to write and structure articles, how to ensure the mental and physical well-being of journalists, and how to treat sources respectfully and ethically.

Grantees engage a wide network of outside experts to facilitate or co-facilitate training. The importance of qualified experts was reflected in both the training documents (12 of which were authored by organizations other than the grantee that submitted them, including one case where a non-grantee law office trained journalists in the ACJA/ACJLs) and KIIs.

Six grantees conduct fellowships or mentorship programs. The breadth and depth of these programs varied across grantees, with one grantee's fellowship taking place over several months, alternating periods of training and practical experience with mentorship. Other programs consist of training followed by regular check-ins with mentors at intervals during the investigative reporting process.

Finding 2: Grantee training covered many of the topics in the *Quality of Investigative Reporting Rubric*, with Research Quality discussed most often, and Source Variety and Report Originality

discussed the least. Training content related to Research Quality, Public Interest, and Neutrality of Investigation did not fully align with the standards in the rubric.

Only one grantee's training documents touched on all five domains of the *Quality of Investigative Reporting Rubric* (found in Annex 1).[2] Exhibit 1 shows the number of documents that discuss at least one criterion under the Met Standards (Score of 4) category in each domain of the rubric.

> *No numbers without stories, no stories without numbers.*
> *—Media & Journalism Grantee Training Document*

The **Research Quality** domain was discussed the most, though none of the documents covered establishing a source's authority and the rationale for keeping a source anonymous. More often, the documents included guidance and tools for effective interviewing, open-source online research, and social media research. In the KIIs, all grantees that mentioned training discussed topics related to the Research Quality domain, such as how to use data and fact-checking.

Topics related to the **Public Interest** domain encouraged journalists to identify stories that affect people and get them to care about the subject, but did not emphasize making clear connections between the needs of a specific community and the broader population or relating a specific issue to the average citizen, which are the core criteria for meeting the domain's standard. In KIIs, two grantees mentioned covering Public Interest in training—both described sticking to topics that affect a great number of people. The documents touched on some of the criteria to meet the standards of **Neutrality of Investigation** but did not instruct journalists to explain how they maintained neutrality or to disclose any conflicts of interest in their articles. Two grantees mentioned Neutrality of Investigation during the KIIs, but in relation to their selection of journalists rather than a topic covered during training.

Report Originality was not widely discussed in the training materials, many of which simply stated that investigative reports should be novel. However, one document instructed journalists to review previous reports during the pitch process which could contribute to Report Originality. Report Originality was not mentioned in the KIIs. **Source Variety** was also rarely mentioned, instructing journalists to include a variety of perspectives in their investigative reporting. In KIIs the only mention of Source Variety was that journalists should verify allegations with multiple sources.

Exhibit 1. Number of training documents that met one or more of the criteria under "Met Standards" (Score 4) of the *Quality of Investigative Reporting Rubric* for each domain (n = 33).

	One or more criteria of the "Met standard (Score: 4)" category were discussed but not all*	Did NOT discuss any criterion of the "Met standard (Score: 4)" category
Research Quality	21	12
Public Interest	0**	33

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[2] Grantees were not expected to use the rubric to inform the development of training materials.

	One or more criteria of the "Met standard (Score: 4)" category were discussed but not all*	Did NOT discuss any criterion of the "Met standard (Score: 4)" category
Neutrality of Investigation	7	26
Report Originality	3	30
Source Variety	3	30

*Only the "Met standard (score of 4)" category was used as a benchmark to analyze training materials. See Annex 1 for the full rubric.

**While public interest was mentioned in ten documents, the specific criteria in the rubric were not mentioned.

Finding 3: Several, but not all, grantees reported that they monitor the effects of their training and have seen improvements in trainees' investigative reporting skills. Some also mentioned that trainees may be re-trained if warranted.

> *I make this point that we are not in the business of just getting grants and just doing training, no. We want to see the effect of the training in the long term, so we appoint mentors for them.*
> *—Media & Journalism Grantee*

Grantees that facilitate fellowships or mentorship programs sometimes report monitoring trainees to ensure that they apply new skills in their reporting, but they do so to varying extents. Three of the six grantees that reported on training use specific indicators to monitor their journalists' work. One grantee reported using indicators like the number of trainings conducted, the number of journalists trained, and the number of reports produced and broadcast to monitor journalists. Two others said they track the number of stories their organization or their journalists have produced, while two also specifically mentioned monitoring their journalists' conduct and ethics by listening to interview recordings.

Grantees reported that trainees' investigative reporting knowledge and skills have improved in four key areas: (1) better organization and structure to investigative reports; (2) higher quality research and use of data; (3) improved use of multimedia, infographics, and geospatial data; and (4) improved skills in identifying fake photos and videos.

> *Of course, from the beginning . . . we would receive lots of stories from them that were not balanced and all of that. . . . Now. . . We do not have to remind them to do that anymore, because . . . they make sure that it is balanced before they file it and also that it is factual.*
> *—Media & Journalism Grantee*

Three grantees mentioned that they may re-train journalists who do not seem to have implemented the training in their work. One of these grantees specifically asked journalists if they did not understand the training or if something may have affected their learning. This grantee also mentioned that if a radio station is unable to keep up with their standards and processes, it may be dropped from receiving their support.

Dissemination and amplification of investigative reporting

Grantees use a variety of approaches to disseminate and amplify investigative reporting on corruption and anticorruption. They use multiple platforms for these efforts and see more potential for amplification on social media in particular.

Please see Exhibit 2 for definitions of key terms related to dissemination and amplification that are used throughout this section.

Exhibit 2. Amplification and dissemination key terms

Term	Definition
Dissemination	Sharing journalism content with potential users in the same industry
Content Syndication	Process of publishing existing proprietary online content on a variety of third-party platforms with the aim of reaching a wide and diverse audience
Content Amplification	Process and methods used to boost the reach of media and journalism content
Strategic Amplification	Both news media organizations and non-media partner organizations collaborate to develop and employ best practices for ensuring responsibility and accountability when producing and amplifying content

Finding 4: Radio town halls are effective platforms for amplifying investigative reports because they enable a range of stakeholders—government officials, civil society organization (CSO) staff, journalists, and community leaders—to engage and reach a wider audience.

Seven grantees either host radio town halls or are affiliated with a radio show. Of these, five grantees reported inviting: government officials to speak on corruption policies; journalists for interviews about investigation stories; citizens to share their corruption-related experiences and responses through telephone call-ins; and CSOs to advocate for anticorruption causes. To engage local communities, some grantees host these programs in local languages and invite traditional leaders to appear.

> *We get the officials of anticorruption agencies to come and sensitize people on various government policies on anticorruption or corruption. . . . So, we get from ICPC [Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission], we get from EFCC [Economic and financial Crimes Commission] and all of that to come on different occasions to come and explain what these policies are talking about.—Media & Journalism Grantee*

Grantees also mentioned using other media platforms such as TV, magazines, podcasts, and newspapers to amplify investigative reports. Three MJ grantees explained that TV programming does not seem as engaging for citizens as radio. Four MJ grantees mentioned using podcasts to amplify investigative stories on elections, security trends, and violence against women and girls. Other forms of

amplification include journalists sharing their investigative reports directly with a community, media organizations publishing a magazine to engage offline audiences, and journalists developing a policy brief.

Finding 5: Almost all grantees leverage various social media platforms to amplify investigative stories, and two grantees use subscription-based platforms. Grantees believe social media has the potential to successfully engage youth and other audiences.

Six out of seven grantees reported leveraging multiple social media platforms—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok—to amplify investigative reports. Depending on the social media platform, corruption-related topics were shared in various ways: grantees published sound bites and small pieces of information from investigative reports in tweets and Facebook posts from their media organization's accounts, as well as sound and video clips on Instagram and YouTube. Two grantees mentioned using subscription-based platforms via WhatsApp, Telegram, and newsletters, in which users opt in to receive information and updates by providing their phone numbers or email addresses, to amplify investigative reporting.

Even those grantees who did not mention directly using social media discussed the untapped potential of Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube to engage with hard-to-reach communities in local languages and with youth. Traditional media platforms are not sufficient to gain the interest of young people and communities who predominantly speak Nigerian languages. There is a need to explore and create more appealing multimedia content, such as videos, to amplify the reach of investigative stories.

> *Younger people don't want to read newspapers and they don't visit websites as you expect them to do. They are on YouTube, they are on Twitter, some of them are on Facebook. . . . And even if you are using the new media, you have to present it in the format that will be appealing.—Media & Journalism Grantee*

Finding 6: Grantees collaborate with other organizations to amplify their investigative reporting via content syndication and multiple forms of media.

> *I should start with the collaboration, the partnership with the media houses, our partners, our media partners . . . that works well for us. . . . The syndication also works well . . .*
> *– Media & Journalism Grantee*

Four grantees reported that collaborative content syndication efforts undertaken with partner stations and media houses have facilitated their efforts to amplify investigative reports in various ways, from increasing their access to credible interview guests, to strengthening their ability to air stories on various networks and multimedia platforms and expanding the reach of their stories and user engagements.

Three grantees highlighted that partners like Daily Trust and PRIMORG have been instrumental in increasing their use of nontraditional media like Twitter, TikTok, webinars, podcasts, and documentaries to engage a wide range of followers and amplify content.

Finding 7: MJ grantees reported that they often need to repeatedly amplify investigative reports to prompt government action or response.

Grantees have strategically, and repeatedly, amplified investigative reports to achieve results. For example, one grantee shared that they must amplify the same story at least three or four times before the government responds, which other grantees corroborated in several examples during KIIs. In one case, a journalist provided all of the affected community members they had interviewed for a story about an unfinished public works project with a link to the final report. Those community members picked up the engagement by continuing to take photos and repeatedly reporting on the incomplete work until they reached the correct government official to remedy the issue. Targeted amplification took various forms including documentary films, Twitter Spaces events, radio talk shows, YouTube videos, and reaching out directly to the accused party of corruption or to the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) to provide information for an investigation.

> *We got to know that in worst cases when a problem persists, because journalists and media organizations amplify such problems, it makes it easier for them to take action and to lead to policy change than when you just sit in a room and do side talks.—Media & Journalism Grantee*

Finding 8: Most grantees track the amplification and dissemination of their programming/stories, though they use different tools and methods to do so.

> *. . . we amplify, we check, I go through my social media . . . to record the type of — as in the number of — responses I get, from Facebook live videos, from the YouTube videos and the Twitter impressions, the Twitter engagements. . . . I also harvest the views and the engagement.*
> *—Media & Journalism Grantee*

The majority of grantees are aware of the importance of tracking results from the amplification of investigative reports and have incorporated monitoring approaches, including reviews of social media metrics like impressions and engagements (four grantees) and, in one case, the use a of logical framework. Two grantees regard tracking collaboration with partner agencies and various media houses as critical to their performance. Two grantees reported in KIIs that they track the number of times they must post and amplify the same investigative story to get a response or action from the government, private companies, or citizens, whereas four monitor whether and how government officials take action to remedy corruption, and to what effect.

Barriers and successes in investigative reporting

Despite facing serious challenges, grantees have contributed to a number of cases in which communities, partner organizations, and even government officials have taken action to address issues identified in investigative reports.

Finding 9: Grantees reported that they face several types of challenges while conducting investigative reporting, including the ability to access information relevant to reporting and safety concerns.

Five grantees indicated that trainees often confront delays in accessing the data they need for evidence in their investigative reporting. Government officials, especially those who may be implicated in a corruption scandal, often refuse to participate in interviews. And despite the Freedom of Information Act, grantees reported that most government agencies still ignore information requests. Grantees have sought legal redress but this challenge persists, especially when trying to obtain information from state authorities.

> *So, of course they have to reach out for the government, state officials to hear their stories, but more often than not, they get silence, they do not really get the responses that they need. So that is one area that they face challenges. —Media & Journalism Grantee*

> *One of our students investigated a corruption case . . . and by the time the story came out and it was shared, that student's life was under threat ever since; in fact, he had to flee the country and he is currently in the U.K. — Media & Journalism Grantee*

Safety is also a frequent issue for journalists. Four grantees explained that journalists including trainees had received death threats or been physically attacked as a result of their reporting on acts of corruption and either had to retreat from their investigations or flee the country. In some cases, law enforcement and politicians made the threats. As a result, journalists had to be discreet when attempting to access information or record videos. Grantees mentioned other challenges too, including the government's inability and/or unwillingness to dedicate resources to following up on corruption reports and deficits in camera skills.

Finding 10: Grantees reported successfully encouraging government actors at various levels to act on issues in several domains, such as financial crime, public service delivery, and voter registration. The actions taken varied, but included remediation, arrests, and investigations.

During the KIIs, grantees provided 36 examples of investigative reports that prompted action (Exhibit 3). Most of the examples described action by government agencies at the local, state, and national levels, though there were other actors, including the Abuja Electricity Distribution Commission (AEDC), construction companies, ICPC, and citizens. These reports covered several domains of corruption: financial crimes such as imposing illegal taxes, siphoning of pensions, and overcharging for electricity; charging for public services such as free hospital services, identification number registration, and voter registration; unfinished or poorly executed public projects including roads, dams, and schools; and human rights abuses and environmental concerns. Government agencies responded by firing individuals whom the reports had caught committing corrupt acts, while other offenders were arrested, and illegal or corrupt entities were shut down. Policy changes such as a ban on cash transfers were introduced to bypass opportunities for corruption and protect whistleblowers. Roads, medical centers, and dams were also completed or fixed following the reports. Other reports resulted in subsequent investigations and public announcements.

> *We did a story about a primary school that is in the FCT [Federal Capital Territory] here. Pupils sit on the floor to learn, we did the story with photographs and a week later government mobilized funds and they supplied desks.— Media & Journalism Grantee*

Exhibit 3. Examples of actions taken following grantee investigative report amplification and actors involved.

Corruption Issue	Example	Actors	Result
Extortion	Extortion of passport applicants	National Identity Management Commission (NIMC)	NIMC addressed complaints, forbade cash transactions, and announced to the public not to pay for identity number registration
	DISCOS cheating electricity consumers	Abuja Electricity Distribution Commission (AEDC)	AEDC addressed community issues and fired employees caught extorting
Misappropriation of public funds	Hydroelectric dam not providing energy for local people and causing floods	Construction Companies	The dam construction company came in and provided electricity, fixed some flood damage, and fixed what was causing the flooding
	Misappropriation of billions of naira by a state governor	Commissioners/ State Assembly	After issuing a press release to acknowledge misappropriation by a governor, the State Assembly changed its processes to protect the independence of the auditor-general
Bribery	Bribing of airport officials and fake COVID-19 documentation	Government	The government stepped in to reduce acceptance of bribes and fake COVID-19 documents by airport officials
	Collecting bribes to register voters	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	INEC issued a press release and fired two staff for accepting bribes for voter registration
Lack of protections for whistleblowers	Retaliation against whistleblower after report caused firing of illegally recruited government staff	Ministry of Information/ Grantee	A grantee stepped in to protect the whistleblower
	General whistleblowing	Federal Government	President Buhari and the National Assembly passed a Witness Protection Bill

GESI

Grantees seek to integrate GESI considerations into their work related to investigative reporting training and amplification. They do so in different ways.

Finding 11: Grantees make efforts to include marginalized groups in investigative journalism training, and to incorporate a GESI lens into their amplification approaches.

In KIIs, all six grantees providing investigative journalism training reported using a GESI lens to recruit and support the participation of diverse groups in their training. Five of the six reported trying to provide training to women, people with disabilities, and/or people in rural areas. They do so by encouraging applications from marginalized participants and designing programming that minimizes barriers to participation. For example, two grantees attempted to reduce accessibility barriers for people with disabilities, while all grantees used strategies to engage women in training. Similarly, four respondents described keeping internal target gender ratios, but only three designed programming intended to reduce women's barriers to participation. One grantee described a mentorship program to engage women in the South-East. Half of the grantees used intersectional approaches to reach women belonging to other marginalized groups. Each of them aimed to include women from hard-to-reach areas, such as the mentorship program described above, while one reached women with disabilities. Overall, five grantees described programs intended to provide training for people in rural areas, three of which explained that they develop training tailored to the needs and contexts of particular geographic regions.

> *It is not the fault of the ladies because of the systematic manner in which they have been relegated or they have not been given opportunity, so what we do is we take extra care to prop them up so the mentor who works with such persons.—Media & Journalism Grantee*

In terms of amplification, four grantees use local languages to strategically engage local communities. Specifically, they talk with non-English speakers via call-in radio programming, record audio in different languages on YouTube, translate newspapers, and teach local communities about investigative methods. The same grantees try to reach people with disabilities, youth, and women by increasing accessibility through audio fact-checks and video captions and including marginalized groups in town hall meetings.

> *. . . a good number of our fact-checks are translated into local languages . . . we also have the voice-overs that also goes on the same platforms . . . and in some cases also, we have videos for them. So, the target is to ensure that many of these reports can reach out to people who might not be so comfortable with the English language.—Media & Journalism Grantee*

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Grantees are working to build investigative reporting capacity via mentorship and training but are not addressing the range of the investigative reporting quality domains. The extent to which grantees' skill-building work contributes to the quality of investigative reporting is inconclusive, though grantees report observing some improvements and contributing to some successes, even in challenging circumstances. (Aligned with Findings 1, 2, 3, 9)

While grantees include some aspects of each of the quality of investigative reporting domains in their training and mentorship programs, Research Quality is covered in more detail than other domains, and training materials are more often aligned with the criteria of the Research Quality standard. Other domains receive less attention. Not all grantees are aware of the rubric, which may represent a missed opportunity.

As was the case under On Nigeria 1.0, trainees faced challenges in obtaining information and safety when reporting acts of corruption. These issues appear to result in delayed or aborted investigations. Despite these challenges, grantees felt that those who underwent training (which included representatives of marginalized communities) showed improved skills in conducting research as well as improved report structure and use of multimedia. Specific indicators and data, which could be used to more rigorously assess these reported improvements, are not widely available.

Conclusion 2: Grantees leverage several media platforms and use multiple strategies to amplify and monitor the impact of investigative reports. There is some evidence that amplification may have contributed to actions by teeth actors to address or reduce corruption. (Aligned with Findings 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11)

Grantees used a variety of media platforms, including radio programs, social media, podcasts, newsletters, and WhatsApp, to amplify investigative stories and breaking news, including among marginalized communities. Radio anticorruption town halls allowed voice and teeth actors to either directly or indirectly communicate with each other—citizens would call in to ask questions and share their complaints and government officials would explain anticorruption policies or be interviewed about a particular corruption case. Social media was used consistently by all grantees; however, they expressed an interest in increasing and broadening their reach on social media, especially to better engage youth.

Grantees employed strategic amplification tactics, such as repeated posting of investigative reports and collaborating with partners and CSOs, to urge Nigerian government action or response. In some cases, grantees successfully prompted teeth actors to address corruption cases, particularly on the topics of financial crime, public service delivery, and voter registration. Even if actions varied from remediation to arrests or investigations, grantees tracked the impact of their investigative reports. Developing more systematic strategic amplification efforts could, if explored further, potentially increase the likelihood of teeth actor responses.

Learning Considerations

Based on the findings and conclusions in this memo, the Program Team may benefit from reflecting on the following questions:

1. *What are the most effective and efficient ways of re-introducing grantees and subgrantees to the updated Quality of Investigative Reporting Rubric, and supporting them in applying the rubric in their training and investigative reporting activities?*
2. *Moving forward, how should the Program Team and grantees balance efforts to boost the quality and quantity of investigative reporting? Under what conditions do quality and/or quantity elicit action, and what might that mean for the work of different grantees, based on their unique skills, networks, and contexts?*
3. *How might MJ grantees further strengthen collaborative efforts with each other and with grantees in other cohorts, with a view towards improving journalist safety (to the extent possible) and the sustainability of anticorruption reporting beyond 2024?*