

EVALUATION REPORT 2023

Executive summary

Mongolia

Impact study on the support of the Media Council
of Mongolia

Background

Although, on paper, Mongolia has progressive media laws, there have been several attempts to tighten the laws and increase government control over the media. In parallel, the Media Council and other organizations are constantly lobbying for improved conditions.

There are more than 500 registered media outlets of which around 130 are TV stations, and several hundred are small online news sites. Each of these outlets competes for the attention of a total population of only 3.35 million inhabitants. In such a market, it is close to impossible to run a financially sustainable media business; the majority of outlets only exist because of the direct support from businesses that often share the political affiliations of the owners of the media outlets. As such, many outlets engage in a political rather than a journalistic or commercial agenda.

DW Akademie has been involved in strategic support to the media sector in Mongolia since 2013. The objectives of the existing programs working with the Media Council of Mongolia (MCM) are as follows:

2015-2017: "The Mongolian Media Council sets standards of journalistic professional ethics and provides the Mongolian population with a complaints mechanism in cases of unfair reporting."

2018-2020: "Mongolian journalists are sustainably strengthened in the independence of their reporting (from political and economic special interests)."

2021-2023: "Media actors dedicated to ethically sound journalism have been strengthened for the long-term."

And as part of the Asia regional program, the Mongolia country project was expected to contribute to an overall regional objective: "With the support of reliable information, disadvantaged population groups, especially in rural areas, are able to take responsibility for the shaping of social and political processes, even in crisis situations."

The support for the establishment and development of a Media Council has been one of DW Akademie's key activities in Mongolia. The Council was established

on the initiative of a local group of media practitioners and civil society activists, who saw the need for a self-regulatory body to improve the quality of media content and defend journalists against government control and limitations on the freedom of expression. The Council was formally established in 2015 with a small secretariat and a board of directors consisting of 15 people as well as two ethics committees with a total of 30 members. All members of the board and the committees are unpaid volunteers. Since its inception, the MCM has received more than 500 complaints.

The impact study was carried out from December 2022 until March 2023. The following work process was applied: A kick-off meeting with DW Akademie project staff and research specialists, an initial document review, online interviews with key stakeholders, additional document consultations, an online survey, a field mission with face-to-face interviews and focus groups as well as follow-up document consultations.

Impact study results

In summary, the study team concludes that:

- The Media Council of Mongolia (MCM) has established itself as a legitimate and credible voice of the media sector.
- The mere fact that the MCM exists and operates has strengthened advocacy against attempts to tighten government control over the media.
- The ethical guidelines developed by the MCM are widely accepted by the media

sector, and the guidelines have contributed to a decrease in the number of violations of the basic principles of good journalism.

- The decisions on complaints received by the Council are regarded as quality judgments by the media sector as well as by the judiciary. The decisions serve as guidance for newsrooms and courts of law.

- While the MCM is well known and accepted by the media sector, it still strug-

gles to enhance its public outreach. The Council is not known to the general public, which leads to a limited number of complaints from ordinary citizens, especially from rural areas.

- The long-term financial sustainability of the MCM is a critical issue which needs to be resolved as soon as possible.

Selected recommendations

- The Media Council should aim to extend its practice of proactive agenda setting
 - especially in regard to an accumulation of problematic habits or contents occurring across the media sector. A mode of operation could be introduced, independent from incoming complaints, that engages in regular monitoring with a focus on general media trends without “naming and shaming” individual media outlets.
- A media trends monitoring could be implemented in cooperation with other civil society organizations and linked to ongoing or future MIL projects.
- The MCM should consider publishing a quarterly “State of the Media” report based on the proposed monitoring.
- In connection with the distribution of its quarterly electronic newsletter, MCM should circulate a short ready-to-print summary of its decision-making. Main findings of the proposed media monitoring should be included, once implemented.
- The MCM should review its complaints handling procedures to ensure that the online complaint option functions as intended, and no unnecessary technical or formal hurdles lead to complaints being rejected or lost.
- The MCM should consider a legal screening of all complaints received and ensure that the ethics committees have access to legal expertise while processing complaints.
- As the DW Akademie’s support is set to end after 2024, the MCM should continue the efforts to secure sustainable, alternative funding for media self-regulation in Mongolia. Other international organizations and bilateral donors should be approached to explore the possibilities of gap-funding for a shorter period until the MCM can become fully financially sustainable.

DW Akademie


is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in more than 70 developing countries and emerging economies.

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The objective of the external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results. It does not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of DW Akademie. Nevertheless, all findings were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.