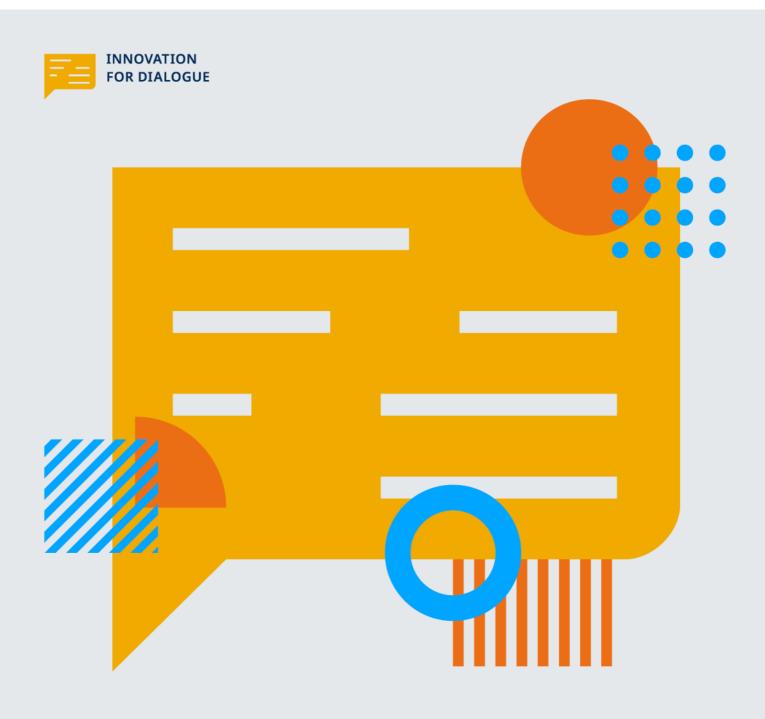




How to enhance constructive public dialogue on social media in Uganda

Recommendations from a multi-stakeholder consultation workshop, in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2023.



In November 2023, DW Akademie brought together journalists, civil society organizations, digital rights experts, and media influencers for a consultation workshop in Kampala, Uganda. In the two-day event, hosted by Media Challenge Initiative (MCI), the diverse group collaboratively developed recommendations on how to promote constructive public dialogue on social media, in Uganda.

In this publication, you will find these developed recommendations aimed at social media platforms, private actors, and governments (Part 1), and media organizations, journalists, tech and innovation hubs, civil society organizations, and media development organizations (Part 2).

The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants, and not necessarily those of the organizations they represent, or those of DW Akademie.

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Recommendations directed at social media platforms, private actors, governments, and social media users, clustered by four topics: Transparency, content moderation and curation, bridging the digital divide and oversight and accountability

Content moderation and curation

Social media platforms and private actors should:

- Establish local oversight boards: To ensure a more nuanced understanding of cultural contexts and sensitivities, social media platforms and private actors such as Facebook should establish local oversight boards. These boards should function in a way similar to the existing Oversight Board but with more powers and responsibilities to effectively address and moderate content based on local perspectives and concerns. The board's composition is important. To ensure its credibility, impartiality and a well-rounded decision-making process, it should consist of independent and multi-stakeholder members. It is essential to include representatives from diverse backgrounds, such as civil society, academia and human rights organizations.
- Define the independence of local oversight boards: Social media platforms should clearly define the independence of the oversight board, emphasizing freedom from political interference to ensure unbiased decision-making. They should implement a participatory approach in determining the board's composition, drawing inspiration from models such as Kenya's methodology for appointing individuals to public offices, to ensure diverse perspectives and expertise.
- Establish a regional oversight board for East African region: Social media platforms should establish a regional oversight board for the East African region to enhance credibility in content moderation efforts. This collaborative body can effectively address regional challenges and gain recognition at both regional and international levels.
- Invest in local moderation teams that include local language experts: A priority
 for social media platforms and private actors should be to include local language
 experts with cultural expertise in their moderation teams. These positions should be
 promoted inclusively and compensated in accordance with fair labor practices.
 These experts can better understand and interpret content in regional languages,
 accurately assess its context, and make informed unbiased decisions regarding
 whether content should be permitted or removed. This is vital for preventing
 misinterpretations and misjudgments. To effectively do this, social media platforms
 must prioritize staffing the teams with enough members and allocate sufficient
 resources to support their operations.

- **Collaborate with local stakeholders:** Social media platforms and private actors should invest in and collaborate with local institutions, researchers, and tech hubs to develop and institutionalize content moderation systems. This partnership should prioritize addressing content moderation in local languages in Uganda.
- Focus on behavior rather than content: Instead of solely relying on automated content filters to flag individual pieces of content, social media platforms and private actors should shift their focus to patterns of conduct, such as harassment, hate speech or coordinated misinformation campaigns. By addressing harmful behaviors in an ongoing form of governance, platforms can create a safer environment while minimizing the potential biases and limitations of automated content moderation (see suggestion by Douek). This can allow for a more nuanced and adaptable regulation that addresses the root causes of misconduct on social media platforms, while respecting the freedom of expression and diversity of opinions.

The government should:

- **Uphold freedom of expression:** The government should refrain from resorting to measures such as limiting access or shutting down platforms, recognizing the importance of preserving open channels for communication and the exchange of ideas.
- Establish independent governance mechanisms: The government should prioritize creating a favorable working environment for local oversight boards to operate and thrive. This will be the prerequisite to the establishment of independent control mechanisms, such as local and international oversight boards and moderation teams, instead of attempting to directly influence online dialogue. These independent structures should effectively regulate and moderate social media content while ensuring transparency, fairness and adherence to the guidelines and principles set up by the oversight boards.

Bridging the digital divide

Social media platforms and private actors should:

- Enhance accessibility and representation: Social media platforms should prioritize translating their services into local languages and provide terms and conditions, policies and standards in these languages. Collaborate to develop local keyboards, preventing auto-corrections that hinder communication in native languages. Platforms like Wikipedia should ensure representation by facilitating the upload of content from marginalized communities. Platforms should collaborate with private actors to address issues related to Internet access, electricity and digital literacy, and actively fund content creators to ensure that more diverse content is available online.
- **Broaden access:** Private actors, such as those in solar energy and telecommunications, should extend their services to underserved groups, ensuring accessibility to both electricity and Internet connectivity.

The following recommendations on transparency for social media platforms and private actors could be relevant at a later stage, but were not considered priorities within the current situation of dialogue in Uganda:

- Consult minorities and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes: Social media platforms and private actors should prioritize the inclusion of representatives from minorities and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes. This contributes to taking diverse perspectives into account and addressing the concerns of marginalized communities.
- Collaborate with local representatives, authorities and media organizations: Social media platforms and private actors should collaborate with local representatives, authorities and media organizations to bridge the gap between online and offline communities. This collaboration helps bring people affected by the digital divide (indirectly) into online discussions; local media and representatives could also summarize the debates for the public. Both approaches ensure that the voices of individuals are heard and considered.

The government should:

• Ensure affordable and accessible Internet (fair, open and accessible): The government should make it a priority to ensure that their populations have affordable and easy access to the Internet, including low-income groups and rural populations to ensure their right to freedom of expression. The government should refrain from implementing regressive policies such as imposing taxes on Internet usage, unilateral Internet shutdowns and from enacting laws that restrict people's access to information and freedom of expression.

- Recognize Internet access as a fundamental right and public good: The government should recognize access to the Internet as a fundamental right. The government should establish safe and free Internet access points in urban areas, at safe locations and during safe hours of the day. The government should conduct regular needs assessments using available data to determine optimal locations for secure Internet access. It should prioritize the needs of marginalized communities, women, and underserved groups in decision-making. Additionally, it should support communities seeking to establish Internet connections, fostering inclusivity and equitable access with government assistance.
- Facilitate hardware access for Internet connectivity: The government should prioritize ensuring citizens have access to devices for Internet connectivity. The government should consider establishing community access centers, such as pods or Internet cafés, offering not only Internet access but also access to computers and smartphones. The government should explore combining this offer with literacy trainings and device borrowing options, for example by setting up Internet cafés and eliminating taxes on IT accessories for certain groups, such as people with disabilities. This approach aligns with the government's interest in promoting their services, as it allows citizens to access their offers and better understand and comply with the government's rules and laws, thereby reducing potential revenue losses due to non-compliance.
- Ensure reliable electricity access for Internet connectivity and telecommunication infrastructure: The government should acknowledge the critical link between electricity and Internet access, particularly in areas facing infrastructure challenges like the western regions of Uganda. The government should initiate the expansion and development of the electricity network to reach rural areas. Recognizing that this will take time, the government should support private actors to sell electricity to communities (similar to initiatives in Kalanga) in the meantime.
- **Integrate digital literacy into curricula:** The government should incorporate digital literacy training into basic education curricula, starting from nursery school, to equip individuals with essential skills to address the evolving demands of the digital age.
- Collaborate with CSOs and private actors: The government should fund media and information literacy programs outside of schools, particularly in urban and rural areas, in collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) and private actors. These initiatives need to consider the context of marginalized communities in order to meet their needs.

- Set up accessible government-citizen dialogue formats across technologies:
 - Interactive government-citizen dialogue formats: The government should establish dialogue formats that transcend mere announcements, ensuring interactive and informed citizen participation. It should create accessible and independent channels for citizens to voice their opinions, fostering impartial and safe interactions.
 - **In-depth and accessible formats:** Develop dialogue formats that are both indepth and easy to understand, allowing citizens to engage meaningfully with information beyond the headlines.
 - Utilize existing methods to promote accessibility: The government should make their dialogue formats and spaces accessible via existing and widely used methods and technologies, like radio, megaphones, and townhall meetings. The government can act as a facilitator or make it easy for other actors to organize such gatherings, promoting inclusive participation.

Oversight and accountability

Social Media platforms and private actors should:

- Emphasize linguistic diversity: It is recommended that the local oversight boards (mentioned under "Content moderation and curation") not only possess multidisciplinary knowledge but are also linguistically diverse. This diversity ensures a nuanced and comprehensive approach to content moderation and curation, catering to the linguistic richness of the local context.
- **Create social media councils:** Encourage and support the establishment of social media councils that comprise representatives from civil society, academia and other relevant stakeholders. These councils can serve as a platform for dialogue and collaboration between the platforms, oversight boards and broader society.
- Advocate for inclusive social media governance: Encourage and support the establishment of social media councils in Uganda, utilizing existing legally constituted structures where applicable. These councils, made up of representatives from civil society, academia, and relevant stakeholders, should serve as platforms for inclusive dialogue and collaboration. The social media platforms should ensure collaborations with the oversight boards, promoting transparency and leveraging existing legal frameworks, such as engaging with the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), for effective online content moderation.

The government should:

- **Review and improve legislation:** The government should encourage a comprehensive review and enhancement of laws governing computer-based technology in Uganda, including acts such as the Computer Misuse Act, the Interception of Communications Act, and the Uganda Communications Act. Furthermore, the government is encouraged to aim for a legal environment conducive to fostering constructive online dialogue.
- Strengthen human rights-based online law enforcement: The government should improve human rights-based online law enforcement capabilities to investigate and prosecute online violence, especially against women in Uganda. It should ensure effective measures are in place to address digital offenses. It is crucial that any initiatives to enhance online law enforcement prioritize the preservation of human rights.

The following recommendations on transparency for social media platforms and private actors could be relevant at a later stage, but were not considered priorities within the current situation of dialogue in Uganda:

- Legally binding and independent regulation: Regulation mandating revenue allocation should have a clear legal basis and have provisions expressly outlining the responsibilities, powers and independence of the oversight board.
- **Government-mandated revenue allocation:** To finance the operations of the oversight boards and local moderation teams, the government should consider establishing regulations that require social media platforms to allocate a specific percentage of their revenue to a dedicated fund. The oversight boards must be run independently from government authorities (see recommendations on independence of oversight boards).

Social media users should:

- Promote social media literacy and user self-regulation through:
 - Social media literacy training: Social media users are encouraged to participate in social media literacy programs to enhance self-regulation among platform users. This includes sensitization on the impact of hateful speech, false information, and the interpretation of Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) for social media platforms.
 - **User-led self-regulation:** Social media users should support user-led initiatives for self-regulation, complementing local oversight boards. This involves engaging representatives from prominent social media groups, such as

Ugandans on Twitter and Maama Tendo, to identify and report inappropriate content for removal by tech companies. Media houses can leverage regular social media participants to enhance user moderation, mobilizing them to create safer online spaces voluntarily.

Transparency

Social Media platforms and private actors should:

- **Provide open APIs and Open Dashboards:** Social media platforms and private actors need to prioritize transparency by providing open APIs for researchers and media professionals. This transparency is needed to enable independent analysis and accountability regarding content visibility, algorithmic and human decision-making, and potential biases. Moreover, platforms should provide open dashboards that are accessible to everyone, ensuring that data is both secure as well as easily understandable. This would enable citizens to access and understand data that concerns them while protecting their privacy.
- Establish transparent conditions and rules of engagement with external partners: Social media platforms must establish transparency about their conditions and rules of engagement with external partners. This transparency would foster a better understanding of the platform's policies, content moderation practices, and partnership dynamic a prerequisite for informed participation and constructive collaboration with the public, a platforms' advisory board, civil society organizations, media organizations, and others.
- Establish rules for the formulation of terms and conditions: Social media platforms should ensure that terms and conditions are available in local languages and formulated in an understandable and comprehensive manner. They should be easily accessible and not require a strong legal understanding.
- Data on government and foreign influence: Social media platforms need to regularly analyze and make available data on governmental and foreign influence in the information space of each country they are active in. By sharing insights on disinformation campaigns, foreign interference, or other forms of manipulation, platforms can contribute to a better-informed public and support efforts to address and mitigate the impact of such activities.
- Establish and disclose clear criteria for identifying false information and guidelines for flagged content: Social media platforms should establish and disclose clear criteria for identifying false information and guidelines on how to respond to flagged content. This should include a clear timeline for the review of the content.

- Establish and disclose clear criteria for account verification: Social media platforms should establish and disclose clear criteria for the verification of accounts. Even if verification is subject to a charge, the criteria for verification need to be clear and transparent.
- Establish feedback loops with users on the content in their timelines: Social media platforms should conduct voluntary surveys, allowing users to submit their preferences for the content they want to receive in their timelines. Followingly, the platforms should implement timeline changes, ensure transparency in how they use the feedback. This contributes to endorsing content that is genuinely relevant to users and helps to address algorithms' bias towards the discourse culture of the countries in which the platforms are based, supporting regional sensibility and curation.

The government should:

- **Promote transparency of algorithms and data:** The government should enact legislation that obligates social media platforms to disclose the transparency of their algorithms and data, while simultaneously implementing robust measures to protect the privacy and information of activists and vulnerable groups. This approach ensures that users, researchers and regulating bodies have a clear understanding of how their content is managed on these platforms, minimizes the risk of algorithmic biases, and safeguards the data of those who engage in activism or belong to potentially vulnerable communities.
- Establish alternative ways to share government information on supporting constructive dialogue: The government should establish segments in which they share information on their efforts to enhance constructive public dialogue with the public. The government should offer various channels and formats addressing the diverse needs of the population, such as social media updates, newsletters, and interactive online platforms, ensuring broader accessibility. The starting point for such efforts could be Uganda's government's citizens' interaction center.

Part 2:

Recommendations directed at media organizations, journalists, tech and innovation hubs, and civil society organizations (CSOs), and media development organizations

Media Organizations and journalists should:

- Find ways to hold constructive dialogue on social media platforms: Media organizations should find ways of working with existing social media platforms that allow them to facilitate constructive public dialogue. This might include developing plug-ins that improve the existing digital infrastructure or setting up and moderating groups on social media. The media organizations should address current challenges hindering constructive public dialogue on social media, such as the lack of moderation, trolling, harassment, the digital divide, algorithms contributing to polarization, and the spread of propaganda and disinformation.
- **Diversify engagement channels:** Media organizations and journalists should alternate between online and offline formats to engage citizens, extending the online dialogue to those without internet access. Additionally, outlets should present their formats across various platforms (social media, TV, radio) to ensure that diverse communities, including marginalized groups, have access to information and opportunities to participate in meaningful dialogues. Online conversations can be a continuance of, and work in tandem with, offline conversations, instead of replacing them.
- Offer news and dialogue formats in local languages: To reach communities across Uganda, media organizations and journalists should offer content and opportunities to participate in dialogue formats in local languages. In the Ugandan context, media organizations should especially focus on promoting major local languages next to Luganda.
- Establish an open space for dialogue and collaboration: Media organizations and journalists should offer an open space for dialogue and for collaboration with citizens and among media outlets. They should set the topics for each of the dialogues beforehand and be open to suggestions from their audience, thereby creating new opportunities and bridging gaps of existing, yet infrequently held, dialogue formats held by the government.

However, the Ugandan governments currently limits media outlets to host "citizen bazaars" in public spaces. Therefore, one option for media outlets would be to facilitate a live dialogue in their studio with a selected, diverse group of participants. They could invite the audience to join the discussion through phone calls, voice notes and text messages which can be sent in live or prior to the show. In the long term, the media outlets should try to advocate for the government to lift these limitations, to enable opportunities for dialogue and collaboration in a form of a

"citizen bazaar," held in public spaces that are easily accessible for the community.

- Include marginalized voices, people from diverse backgrounds, and diverse experts: Media organizations and outlets should collaborate nationwide by establishing a platform or space that enables coordination when addressing similar topics in different regions. This facilitates the inclusion of individuals from diverse backgrounds, experts from various fields, and the engagement of marginalized voices. Additionally, media outlets should refrain from repeatedly inviting the same individuals to participate in dialogue formats, such as talk shows. Considering the declining revenue streams for numerous media outlets in Uganda, securing financial resources for such projects may pose a challenge. Therefore, media organizations should seek support from civil society, grants or other support for such initiatives.
- **Collaborate to develop innovative solutions:** Media organizations and journalists should unite to exchange lessons learned, pool resources, and collaborate on larger projects in order to develop innovative solutions together.
- Create a hub for collaborative initiatives: Media organizations are encouraged to establish a centralized platform or space where various media organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), and activists can contribute and showcase their ongoing initiatives. This initiative aims to foster enhanced collaboration and coordination among diverse entities, counteract working in silos, and ultimately promote a more cohesive and impactful collective effort.
- Experiment with, test and adapt solutions: Media organizations and journalists should seek inspiration from other initiatives, tailoring their approaches to their outlet and audience. It is important to remain flexible, agile, and start with small-scale initiatives to test and adapt strategies effectively.
- Invest in educating media consumers and the general public: Media organizations and journalists should invest in media literacy initiatives, including training citizens in media and digital literacy. These efforts are vital for fostering inclusive participation and meaningful public discourse. Simultaneously, media organizations and journalists should prioritize presenting news in easily understandable formats, using clear language and visuals. This dual approach empowers individuals to critically assess information, navigate the digital landscape, and engage in informed discussions.
- **Provide training to improve the standard of reporting and dialogue**: Media organizations and media development organizations should engage in training journalists and journalists in training on essential aspects such as ethical reporting, diversification of sources and constructive interview techniques, media literacy, and collaboration skills.

- Recognize good practice in ethical reporting and dialogue formats: Establish an entity dedicated to appreciating excellence in dialogue formats and ethical reporting. This entity could administer rewards and recognition for commendable formats and practices of media organizations and journalists, creating positive incentives instead of punitive measures for outlets.
- Develop manuals and guidelines on data archiving: Media organizations and journalists should develop and establish clear manuals and guidelines to protect and safeguard data archiving. To this end, guidelines on data storage, access controls, encryption, and retention policies are necessary to ensure the integrity of archived data and compliance with privacy regulations. Simultaneously, it's important to emphasize proactive data management practices, encouraging media organizations to effectively utilize the data at their disposal.
- **Report on challenges posed by social media:** Media organizations and journalists must report on the impact of social media so that their audiences can make informed decisions on their consumption and usage, as well as their civic and political engagement. It is crucial to focus on reporting where these challenges occur, specifically on social media platforms. Collaboration with influential content creators in these spaces can further enhance the reach and impact of such reporting.
- Foster multistakeholder dialogue addressing social media challenges for journalists: Media organizations should initiate dialogues with the government, social media companies, regulators, civil society organizations and tech/innovation hubs to address issues like hate speech and polarization on social media, and the impact of these on journalists.
- Unite to advocate for positive change: Media organizations and journalists should work together to advocate for their needs, seeking support from media development organizations to strengthen their impact and drive positive change.
- Gather evidence to advocate for a safe online environment: When moderating online spaces, media organizations and journalists should document and archive violations in order to strengthen their advocacy efforts for a safe online environment.

Tech and innovation hubs and civil society organizations should:

- Advocate for funding for journalism and dialogue initiatives: Tech and innovation hubs and civil society organizations should consider encouraging larger tech hubs, such as the Google News Initiative to fund journalism and dialogue innovation without established pre-conditions that could limit the potential outlets that can apply, and, consequently, the spectrum of the initiatives developed. Simultaneously, CSOs and tech/innovation hubs should actively engage start-ups to bolster advocacy efforts, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic landscape for journalism and dialogue initiatives. Funding lasting systemic structures in journalism should be prioritized over short-term projects, ensuring sustained support for future generations of journalists.
- Generate innovative solutions tailored to local languages and local/ geopolitical contexts: Tech and innovation hubs and civil society organizations must focus on considering local languages in innovation efforts. They should develop solutions that enable local language usage and are tailored to the local and geopolitical context. Cooperations with academics and computational linguistic and data science practitioners may help to develop solutions. Further steps towards inclusivity should incorporate sign language and provide ample space for diverse and inclusive formats.
- **Promote open-source solutions:** Tech and innovation hubs and civil society organizations should promote open-source solutions, accompanied by a code of conduct for their use rooted in local collaboration, to encourage transparency and inclusivity. This approach emphasizes the importance of open-source in supporting the localization and customization of solutions and human rights-based business models.
- **Pursue legal action when feasible**: Civil society organizations should actively engage in formal processes whenever possible, addressing infringements on freedom of speech, digital rights, or data privacy. Filing public interest litigation claims will serve as documentation and provide evidence of these violations, which is of high importance for jurisprudence. To bolster the credibility and impact of these submissions, civil society organizations should collaborate to document harmful content and relevant policies. This should help them to streamline and share the administrative burden of submitting to legal processes.
- Engage in grassroots advocacy and capacity building with rural communities: Civil society organizations should invest in dialogue infrastructure and formats to establish a regular dialogue with rural communities. These spaces should be used for digital and media literacy trainings, to understand their needs, discuss topics relevant to them and organize advocacy activities.

- **Approach universities to involve young people**: Young people need to be involved in the creation of dialogue formats for young audiences. Therefore, civil society organizations should approach universities and offer interactive formats at campuses and in youth clubs, for example the broadcasted youth debates from civic spaces.
- Adopt HCD-principles: Tech and innovation hubs and civil society organizations are advised to utilize human-centered design (HCD) approaches to develop solutions that are user-centric and address the specific needs of the target audience. For this approach, it is imperative to address an adequate spectrum of perspectives, especially from the most marginalized people. This means, for example, including people from a variety of local language communities and people who are able to speak but not read or write certain languages represented in Uganda.

Media development organizations should:

- **Coordinate and align for better advocacy:** Media development organizations should prioritize coordinating and aligning their positions on issues related to constructive online dialogue. By speaking with one voice about their challenges and asks, these organizations can better advocate for meaningful change. Moreover, (media) development organizations should coordinate their efforts to ensure all communities are catered for.
- **Implement dual regulation framework:** Advocate for a system of self-regulation for social media platforms alongside government regulations, fostering a collaborative approach with government entities. This synergy aims to enhance awareness of the social media's role in fostering constructive dialogue, striking a balance between internal and external regulatory measures.
- Invest in media literacy programs: Media development organizations should invest in media literacy programs to enhance content creation, audience understanding, and overall quality, fostering a diverse and impactful media landscape. Media development organizations are encouraged to develop shared learning resources, provide constructive dialogue training for educators, and foster collaboration by offering a secure space for media organizations to share and develop innovations.
- Leverage national talk shows: The power of national talk shows should be harnessed to address critical Ugandan issues, focusing the discussion around human-centric perspectives. Media development organizations should lobby for an allocated space, perhaps quarterly, where civil society organizations, activists and media outlets can address crucial national topics.

- Offer mutual support to enhance public dialogue: Media development organizations should support journalists and each other in uniting their efforts and voicing their needs to drive the changes in digital infrastructure that enhance public dialogue.
- Facilitate media development meetings: Organize annual gatherings, including round table discussions, to promote collaboration in the media development sector and advocate for diverse constructive dialogue.
- **Spotlight rural women**: Media development organizations should emphasize and actively involve the experiences of rural women working in media in their projects, particularly concerning access to information outside of Kampala.
- **Provide assistance for collaboration and innovation**: Media development organizations should assist journalists and each other to collaborate on innovative projects, fostering a collaborative environment and facilitating the development of impactful solutions.
- Encourage co-pitching for grants: Facilitate collaborative efforts for grant applications to mitigate the duplication of information. Media development organizations should shift their focus from funding individual projects to establishing sustainable funding structures.
- Invest in educating media consumers and the general public: Media development organizations should fund research on disinformation in Uganda and around the world to evaluate the measures taken by different actors and constantly adjust the necessary responses.
- Fund, organize, and distribute research on disinformation in Uganda: Media development organizations should fund, organize and distribute continued research on disinformation in Uganda and the region. These efforts will help to evaluate the measures taken by different actors and help to adjust necessary responses.