

EVALUATION REPORT 2021

Executive summary

Ukraine

Support to the National Public Broadcaster of Ukraine

Background

The “Support to the National Public Broadcaster of Ukraine” project was implemented from 2017 to 2021 by a consortium of three organizations – lead applicant DW Akademie, co-applicant BBC Media Action (BBCMA), both respected organizations with expertise in the field of media development, and the engineering consultancy firm NIRAS as a second co-applicant. The project is one of the largest projects to be financed from the general budget of the European Union, within the framework of the “Commission Implementing Decision of 26 July 2016 on Special Measure 2016 for Anti-Corruption and Support to Key Reforms in favor of Ukraine.” Co-funding was provided by the German Federal Foreign Office. The project aim and key objective was to promote the national public broadcaster of Ukraine (UA:PBC) through the establishment of a functioning digital multiplatform newsroom and a training center, the Public Media Academy (PMA). As a result of the project, UA:PBC was supposed to improve its effectiveness and create a permanent foundation for quality, objective, and unbiased news content for all segments of the population (television, radio, and new media both on the national and regional levels) by meeting the standards of a modern public broadcaster and improving its ability to produce high-quality news programs, by providing multiple viewpoints and news stories that are shot and edited using professional and modern production standards. Overall, the improved news products were expected to lead to the greater acceptance of UA:PBC by the public, thus contributing to the improvement of the information environment in Ukraine and a higher understanding of the role of public service

broadcasting in the country.

The project also sought to create a permanent basis for quality, objective, and unbiased news through the involvement of a wide range of international and local experts, in order to assure the provision of organizational development support to ensure the sustainable development of UA:PBC. Experts from the leading non-governmental Ukrainian media watchdog Detector Media supported the project team in conducting media monitoring and the analysis necessary to evaluate UA:PBC’s progress in reaching its key objectives of improved capacity and output.

The purpose of this final project evaluation was to provide an unbiased assessment of the extent to which the project achieved its objective. The evaluation methodology was grounded on the outcome-based approach through which the evaluation team explored the extent to which the project activities produced anticipated outputs, and the extent to which produced outputs generated outcomes leading to the accomplishment of the project objective.

The initial evaluation design included desk research, and data collection and analysis. The evaluation itself was expected to be completed by the end of April 2022. However, due to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the 24 February 2022, the evaluation team suggested amending the approach to account for the changing circumstances. Thus, the evaluation design was expanded to ensure the evaluation captured all available direct and indi-

rect evidence of the project results, their impact and sustainability. In addition to the initially envisaged review of the project documents, the evaluation team suggested expanding the desk research to include a review of open source studies and available reports that provide information on UA:PBC’s rating and image, as well as the quality of the produced content. Fieldwork was considered optional and as such the evaluation team could proceed if operational conditions allowed for arranging key informant interviews with UA:PBC staff and representatives of other relevant stakeholders. In the end, the evaluation included: expanded desk research, which covered the project documentation review as well as searches and reviews of other relevant studies, reports, and data; fieldwork, comprised of key informant interviews with the project team, the representatives of UA:PBC and other stakeholders; and an online survey of UA:PBC producers and editors. Additionally, with the approval from the EU Delegation, the project director suggested an extension of the evaluation term until the end of 2022 to ensure the largest amount of information on the project’s results and impact possible. The evaluation activities thus took place from February to November 2022, while the final evaluation report was prepared and submitted in early December 2022. This allowed the evaluators to not only engage in sufficient observations regarding the impact of the project and its sustainability over the additional period, but also to consider UA:PBC’s performance in wartime.

Project Evaluation Results

The evaluation found that the project accomplished all anticipated results to the extent possible, allowing UA:PBC to keep moving toward strengthening its position in the Ukrainian media landscape as an independent, unbiased media outlet addressing the informational needs of various segments of the population through the production and delivery of high-quality news content.

Relevance. The project was a timely opportunity to support UA:PBC’s transition from state-owned media company to public service broadcaster. The transition and reform process required not only improvements to the broadcaster’s technical capacity, changes at the organizational and management level, which were crucial for its continued consistent and efficient development, and build-

ing capacity at various levels, including management, production, editing, and journalistic output. The project outputs, their impact and sustainability proved its timeliness and relevance.

Coherence. The project was in line with Ukraine’s efforts to comply with the 2014 EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in terms of ensuring freedom of expression

and a stable, impartial media environment. UA:PBC, established as the public service broadcaster in early 2017, was considered a platform for reliable, independent, and objective reporting, and thus able to support Ukraine in fulfilling the Agreement's requirements. The efforts of DW Akademie and BBCMA were complemented by a further set of donor projects implemented within the same timeframe and aimed at supporting the reform process and capacity building in areas not envisaged within this project. Among these complementary initiatives, it is worth mentioning a project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, through which UA:PBC was able to create and promote its official website and develop the capacity of its regional branches, which is also crucial for the harmonization of the reform process across the entire organization.

Effectivity. The project outputs, such as the modern multimedia digital newsroom, revised organizational structure, re-organized news production workflow, and the establishment of the Public Media Academy – an in-house learning hub – provided UA:PBC with a solid basis for steady progress toward the improvement of its effectiveness and capacity to generate quality, objective, and unbiased news content for all segments of the population beyond the project end date. UA:PBC and other stakeholders considered the creation of the convergent newsroom as a flagship output, which became a jumping-off point for accelerating further internal transformations and a support during an extremely challenging time.

Efficiency. Despite delays related to both the construction of the newsroom and the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team and UA:PBC effectively managed the project's implementation through regular meetings, addressing the needs revealed by the public broadcaster's analysis, finding the most feasible solutions for challenges as they occurred. The partnership between DW Akademie and BBCMA demonstrated efficient teamwork and concordance. Each was able to leverage their expertise, which resulted in the balanced development of organi-

zational capacity in terms of workflows, improved technical capacity thanks to new equipment, and staff able to follow new workflows and produce quality news content. The project team's engagement in the coordination of the assistance to UA:PBC from other donors allowed the project to avoid double funding the same segments of the reform process.

Impact. The evaluation showed that outputs produced have the potential to further support the UA:PBC's mission to become a strong, independent public broadcaster. In fact, there is some evidence that the instigated changes are facilitating the development of systemic change. The public broadcaster succeeded in increasing its audience reach through digital communication channels. For instance, the official UA:PBC Telegram channel (launched in 2019) has more than 300,000 subscribers as of the final evaluation report submission date. While such audience numbers may seem small in comparison to other Ukrainian national media outlets, there has been slow but sustainable growth and an increase in the level of trust in UA:PBC as a source of information since 2017. It is worth mentioning that the newsroom was officially launched in late 2021, and only a few months later, Ukraine was at war, which made it very complicated to follow the desired development strategies as planned. In terms of TV audiences, there was a significant increase in 2021, from 1.97 million unique users in 2020 to 4.5 million unique users and thirteen million views in 2021. While the newsroom was still in the process of creation, improvements in the performance of journalists, producers, and editors was visible through the improved quality of the content produced, from compliance with most of journalistic standards to an improved visual presentation and quality.

In addition, the newsroom became a central point for the progress of UA:PBC operations toward cost-efficiency. Currently, the premises of the newsroom host Kyiv-based teams, which were previously located in a 24 story building known as the "pencil", maintenance of which drained the lion's share of the broadcaster's budget, especially for heating. As of

8 November 2022, UA:PBC officially put the "pencil" building out of service.

The ability of UA:PBC to provide staff capacity building through the establishment of the PMA positively influenced UA:PBC's image as an employer, as well as allowing it to address its own most urgent needs in terms of acquiring new skills or upgrading existing ones. For instance, since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the PMA adjusted its training agenda to build the capacity of journalists to work under wartime conditions.

Sustainability. The sustainability of the produced outputs was proven immediately through the wartime conditions. For instance, the team managed to relocate quickly to Lviv and continue delivery of news content in the framework of a national tele-marathon. Later, the team came back to the newsroom in Kyiv and thus to relative operational normality. During such turbulent and threatening times, UA:PBC preserved all approaches, methods and equipment delivered during the project's implementation. Considering the UA:PBC's previous capacity, including in terms of technical skills, one can state that without the progress made in response to the project's implementation, the public broadcaster would likely been unable to cope with the stressful and challenging operational environment of 2022. The evaluation found that, even in wartime, the broadcaster's team was looking for opportunities to develop and improve its performance.

Lessons learned

Both the project team and UA:PBC managed to adapt the course of the project to changes in the operational environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the reduced engagement of one of the consortium members, the resulting redistribution of roles and responsibilities between the remaining partners, and legal challenges related to the construction of the newsroom.

Both UA:PBC and DW Akademie gained the capacity to manage and implement tasks outside of their key expertise. The UA:PBC staff who were actively engaged in the construction of the newsroom not only gained an opportunity to create a space

of their dreams, but were also involved in specific workflows and processes related to construction and renovation. Once the situation in Ukraine allows, they will be able to use this experience in the building of regional hubs. As project implementer, DW Akademie can use the experiences gained in construction and renovation as a unique asset in the future to avoid possible pitfalls, and strengthen its project crisis management and resilience to specific stresses.

Building partnership with local partners based on trust is important for ensuring ownership over the implemented changes and their sustainability for the future.

Selected Recommendations

To ensure assessment consistency, as well as the ability to track evidence-based progress on performance improvement within specific domains, it is important to use the same assessment methodology over the entire course of the project. When planning further organizational development activities, the members of the consortium can use available organizational development assessment tools, adapting them to the area in question, to streamline and simplify the process of organizational development planning and progress assessment (for example, the media-specific organizational capacity assessment (OCA) tool developed by Internews, or any other structured tool, including one developed by the implementers themselves). The application of such a tool provides a structure for the needs assessment, implementation of any required changes and the analysis of any results. UA:PBC is a unique beneficiary in the Ukrainian media landscape, as it has received the support of numerous donors, with an emphasis on assistance for organizational development. It would therefore

be beneficial for UA:PBC to adapt the organizational capacity assessment approach, which would allow the team to track its progress over a longer time-span, ensure proper documentation of the processes and any progress, as well as offer donors a uniform approach and reporting mechanism.

Knowledge management should be an important component not only of the project itself, but of UA:PBC's overall learning process. In this case, the human resource department could play a key role in crafting a strategy and ensuring that there are trained professionals who can provide top and middle management with mentoring, support and training. A review of the experience gained and its documentation, including processes and lessons learned, should be part of any strategic planning and strategy reviews as well as one of the key elements of staff performance reviews.

Text edited by DW Akademie.

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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