

Report from workshops on “Building Trust in Media”



Workshop in Amman June 20th



Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Executive summary

In June and September, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted two informal workshops, as part of a pilot project on *"Building Trust in Media"*.

These workshops were a follow-up to a project, carried out by Reporters without Borders (RSF) in Sweden and the Community Media Network (CMN) in Jordan, funded by the Swedish Institute's *"Creative Force"*. The project aimed to promote transparency and trust through knowledge sharing and networking amongst media practitioners.

The project's main component was a study visit to Sweden, by three Jordanian journalists in June. During their visit they learned about trust-building in Swedish public service media and about combating disinformation, and they had exchanges with their Swedish counterparts. The topics covered press freedom rules and historical background in Sweden, the current state of Swedish media, journalism practices, social media strategies, and trends in public opinion, etc.

In the two workshops hosted by the Dialogue Institute, the Jordanian journalists who had been to Sweden shared their insights and experiences with colleagues. This was followed by conversations on trust building in media in Jordan and in the wider MENA region.



Online workshop held on September 6th

Detailed report

"Building Trust in Media" was a collaborative pilot project between Reporters Without Borders in Sweden (Reportrar utan gränser) and the Community Media Network in Jordan, financed by the Swedish Institute's (SI) "Creative Force". It aimed to promote transparency and trust in media through knowledge sharing and networking amongst media practitioners.

The project's main component was a visit to Sweden, during which Jordanian journalists engaged with their Swedish counterparts and gained insight into the approach by Swedish media - especially public service - in building trust with audiences. The program also included components on transparency and on combating disinformation.

The visit to Sweden took place on June 7th-9th and was carried out by three Jordanian journalists, including two reporters and a photojournalist. Coordinated by Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) in Sweden, the trip provided an opportunity for the Jordanian journalists to engage with Swedish journalists and gain insights into the Swedish media's approach to building trust with audiences and in combating disinformation. They visited various media outlets, including the Swedish Public Service (SR) and Public Education Radio (UR), and had meetings with several journalists and media managers. They also visited the Media Ombudsman, media analysts, and representatives from the academic institutions. The topics covered, among other things, press freedom rules and the historical background in Sweden, the current state of Swedish media, journalism practices, social media strategies, and trends in public opinion.

The visit to Sweden was followed-up by two informal workshops, hosted by Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa. In these workshops, the three journalists who had visited Sweden further contributed to the project by sharing their knowledge, experiences, and reflections from their visit with a wider audience of media professionals in Jordan and across the MENA region.

The overall aim of the workshops was to contribute to the fostering of trust and transparency in media, through the following objectives:

- Leverage the experiences gained from the visit of three Jordanian journalist.
- Disseminate information through the transfer of knowledge, aimed at enhancing media professionalism across media outlets in the MENA region.
- Contribute to networking and knowledge/experience sharing between participants.

The first workshop took place on June 20th and welcomed over 20 Jordanian journalists. On September 6th, the Dialogue Institute hosted a second workshop, this time online, to broaden the knowledge sharing and establish connections with different media networks in the MENA region. This workshop gathered over 25 media outlets and journalists from across the region.

Key takeaways

The key insights, reflections, and recommendations coming out of the workshop included:

Inclusivity and exchange

1. Recognizing that media content should be driven by the people and their needs, ensuring that the public interests and concerns are at the forefront.
2. Highlighting that digitalization in media can contribute to wider audience reach and accessibility.
3. Stressing the importance of actively including marginalized communities and ensure that media outlets amplify their voices and stories.
4. Recommending more opportunities for visits and meetings between journalists from the MENA region and Sweden for mutual knowledge and experience-sharing exchanges.

Combating disinformation

1. Emphasizing the vital importance of safeguarding rule of law and press freedom, fostering an environment where journalists can operate freely.
2. Highlighting the importance of independent institutions to effectively measure public opinions and monitor public concerns.
3. Underlining the importance of professional media and authentic interviews with credible sources, to effectively combat disinformation, especially at a time when many rely solely on social media, which may not always be grounded and based on facts.
4. Other ideas included increased reporting of factual information on topics of concerns for the public, e.g., broadcasting programs that clarify legislative issues and demystify complex judicial issues.

Trust-building in Public Service Media

1. Recommending introducing the function/role of an Ombudsman to investigate public complaints and enhance citizen engagement and create the conditions for accountability.
2. Emphasizing the importance of state-financed media actively participating in and enhancing public service broadcasting to foster impartiality and reduce potential bias.
3. Strengthening journalists' skills in storytelling to "humanize" news coverages, i.e., treating media as a tool for storytelling rather than just news delivery.
4. Recommending that public polls should incorporate questions specifically focused on trust in media outlets to gauge public perception.

The pilot project *"Building Trust in Media"* and the follow-up workshops have contributed to knowledge and experience sharing and to networking. It has laid the ground for possible further exchanges and collaboration between media practitioners from the MENA region and from Sweden.

"What creates media content is the people. Needs of the people should therefore be at the centre of reporting."

Comment from a participating journalist