



Empowering Media and
Voices for Public Good

Mapping Capacities, Structures and Strategic Influence of West Africa's Fact-Checking Organisations for Enhanced Collaboration



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Media Foundation for West Africa
FA678, [Aar-Baakor Street, Ogbojo, Accra, Ghana](#)
P.O. Box LG 730, Legon, Accra, Ghana

Tel.: +233 302 555327

Email: info@mfwf.org

Website: www.mfwf.org

X: @TheMFWA

Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa

Instagram: Media Foundation for West Africa

YouTube: Media Foundation for West Africa

Author:

Dr Kojo Impraim

Research Team

Melvine Enzeng

Danielle Ngoula Seignou

Fatimata Mustapha

Digital Publication Design

Korankye Nana Oduro

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AES	Alliance of Sahel States
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANIWEB	Association nigérienne des web activistes
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DISARM	Disinformation Analysis & Risk Management
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning System
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EU	European Union
FCO(s)	Fact-Checking Organisation(s)
FIMI	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference
GFC	Ghana Fact-Checking Coalition
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IFCN	International Fact-Checking Network
MDI	Misinformation and Disinformation
MESR	Media Elections Situation Room
MET	Media Ecology Theory
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NFC	Nigeria Fact-Checkers' Coalition
OSINT	Open-Source Intelligence
OTM	Observatoire Togolais des Médias
PAFF	Plateforme Africaine des Factcheckers Francophones
RTI	Right to Information
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VEO(s)	Violent Extremist Organisation(s)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides a comprehensive mapping of the capacities, structures, and strategic influence of fact-checking organisations (FCOs) within the West African information ecosystem. Recognising the critical role that credible fact-checking plays in safeguarding information integrity amidst growing digital threats, the study aims to inform targeted strategies to enhance regional collaboration and resilience against misinformation and disinformation.

Key findings revealed that, despite the increasing presence of individual fact-checking initiatives, there remains a significant gap at the regional level, notably the absence of a dedicated regional framework for collaboration among FCOs to counter digital threats. Furthermore, most existing FCOs operate with limited or inconsistent funding, which constrains their operational capacities and sustainability. Moreover, the organisational models and governance structures of the FCOs vary, leading to operational gaps and limited coordination across borders, languages, and media platforms.

The analysis discovered that the operational scope of West African FCOs covers multiple countries, diverse linguistic contexts, and a range of media platforms. This amplifies their strategic role in shaping public knowledge and countering digital harms. However, their collective impact remains constrained by inadequate formal networks, limited funding, limited resource sharing, and strategic alignment.

Understanding how the FCOs operate, coordinate, and influence public discourse is essential for developing sustainable and scalable strategies to combat digital threats. Strengthening their capacities, fostering regional cooperation, and integrating their efforts into national and regional policy frameworks are vital for addressing these threats, promoting social cohesion, and safeguarding democratic values.

Based on these insights, the study recommends the establishment of a formal regional network of FCOs to coordinate and counter digital threats. The network should align with the Vision 2050 of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), and other regional initiatives such as the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the ECOWAS and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). Such a regional framework for cooperation would

enable resource sharing, joint capacity building, and coordinated responses to information crises.

Promoting media and information literacy and advocacy is essential to empowering citizens, and reinforcing the integrity of the information ecosystem. Therefore, strengthening the collective operational, strategic, and advocacy capacities of West African FCOs will contribute significantly to information integrity and governance, resilient democracies, social stability, and informed citizenry across the region.

1. INTRODUCTION



In an effort to curb misinformation¹ and disinformation² (MDI) in the digital era, fact-checking organisations (FCOs) have emerged as vital actors in the information ecosystem. The work of FCOs has gained global significance as they strive to counter MDI with the aim of promoting trust and credibility in information sources, and strengthening information integrity.

The literature reveals a growing number of FCOs and fact-checking initiatives worldwide. It also shows that FCOs in West Africa have become central actors in countering election-related and pandemic-related MDI, while enhancing public discourse. The work of FCOs also reflects a broader regional effort to safeguarding information integrity and promoting responsible governance and democratic values.

Despite the growing prominence of FCOs and fact-checking initiatives across West Africa, threats such as digital harms³ and MDI still persist. Mis-and-disinformation is reinforced by foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)⁴ and state threat.⁵ Several

¹ Misinformation: False or misleading information shared without malicious intent, often due to a lack of awareness or understanding (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

² Disinformation: The deliberate creation and dissemination of false information with the intent to deceive or influence public perception, often for political or economic gains (Lazer et al., 2018).

³ Defined not merely as individual content, but as systemic socio-technical threats – which entrench false beliefs in society and pose risk to democratic consolidation.

⁴ FIMI: Otherwise called foreign interference entails external actors intentionally deploying information manipulation tactics for geopolitical interest. States and non-state actors leverage digital platforms to influence regional politics, sow discord, and weaken democratic institutions (United Nations, 2022).

⁵ A state threat refers to any action, entity, or circumstance that poses a significant risk to the security, stability,

dynamics and contextual factors account for the expansion of this interference. They include geopolitics, resource occupation, propaganda, internet penetration, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI). The threats jeopardise the security and sovereignty of a nation, requiring strategic defense and policy responses to safeguard national interests.

While these threats persist, there is limited understanding of the multiplicity of FCOs involved in countering them across West Africa. Empirical research examining their capacities, operations, collaborations, funding, sustainability, and strategic influence across multiple sources, media platforms, languages, and countries remains limited. Understanding how FCOs operate, coordinate, and shape public knowledge is essential to strengthening information integrity and governance.

This mapping study responded to these knowledge gaps by analysing the capacities, structures, and strategic influence of FCOs in fostering a resilient information ecosystem in West Africa. It mapped the FCOs operating across the region, analysed the challenges they face in countering disinformation, and identified opportunities to strengthen collaboration and enhance public interest in information hygiene. Drawing on media ecology and network theory, the study argued that the work of FCOs is not an isolated intervention, but an integral component of a dynamic information ecosystem that contributes to information integrity and reinforces the norms of democratic governance.

Through this mapping, the study sought to enhance policy dialogue on the role and relevance of FCOs as a strategic network and actors in strengthening information ecosystems in West Africa. This includes advancing advocacy against MDI and FIMI, and promoting media information literacy (MIL) to counter digital threats. The study also offered recommendations for strengthening FCOs' capacities, and enhancing collaborative efforts to address digital harms, while aligning these efforts with the Vision 2050 of ECOWAS, and other initiatives such as the MoU between ECOWAS and the MFWA.

sovereignty, or functioning of a state. It can originate from internal or external sources and may undermine a country's political stability, economic development, social cohesion, or territorial integrity. Types of State Threats Include: a) internal threats such as: political instability or unrest; insurgency, rebellion, or civil war; terrorism within the borders; corruption and weak governance; economic instability or crises; social divisions and polarisation; b) external threats such as: foreign military aggression or invasion; espionage or intelligence operations; cyber-attacks targeting national infrastructure; external support for insurgent or terrorist groups; and economic sanctions or coercion (Author's own construct of state threat).

1.1. The study objectives

The study objectives were in six folds. These were to:

- a. Map the number of FCOs in West Africa, their locations, operational areas, and focus.
- b. Assess the operational and technological capacities of FCOs in West Africa.
- c. Analyse the strategic influence of FCOs on information verification practices.
- d. Assess the challenges that confront the operations of FCOs.
- e. Assess the structures and networks of collaboration among FCOs.
- f. Propose recommendations for strengthening collaboration among FCOs in West Africa.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyse the capacities, organisational structures, and strategic influence of FCOs across West Africa. This approach enabled both an in-depth exploration of organisational dynamics and a broader analysis of regional trends. It also allowed for a nuanced examination of the region's complex information ecosystem.

A desk review of the related literature, policy documents, organisational reports, and regional frameworks such as ECOWAS's Vision 2050 was carried out. This foundational step situated the study within the broader regional context and identified the gaps that required further exploration. Complementing this, key informant interviews were conducted electronically with senior representatives from 11 national FCOs and media houses involved in fact-checking, media literacy, and digital information management across nine West African countries.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis of interview transcripts. This allowed for the systematic identification of recurring themes. Content analysis of policy documents and organisational reports also deepened understanding of structural frameworks. Additionally, comparative analyses highlighted variations across organisational types and countries of FCOs. The approach uncovered insights into operational capabilities, partnership opportunities, challenges, funding, and the feasibility of establishing a regional fact-checking coordination mechanism to counter digital threats.

Ethical considerations guided the research processes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in reporting. While the methodology aimed to be comprehensive, potential limitations included access constraints to some organisations' data such as project budget. In addition, three FCOs, namely Code for Africa (Senegal), NigerCheck (Niger) and the Association nigérienne des web activistes (ANIWEB) (Niger), were not included in the field data collection owing to an oversight in the sampling frame (see Table 1). Nonetheless, the research approach provided a robust framework for capturing the multifaceted landscape of FCOs in West Africa.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was grounded in a synthesis of two interrelated theoretical perspectives. That is, the network theory and network governance, and media ecology and information ecosystems. These frameworks offered valuable insights into the dynamics of disinformation, the structure of fact-checking collaborations, and the broader communication environment in which FCOs operate. Together, they provided a conceptual foundation for understanding the capacities, influences, and operational challenges faced by the FCOs in West Africa.

3.1 Media ecology and information ecosystems

The media ecology theory (MET)⁶ offered a macro-level lens to examine the broader communication environment in which fact-checking operates. The theory underscored how technological infrastructures—such as social media platforms, internet penetration, and mobile connectivity—shape communication norms, information production and dissemination.

Building upon this, Wardle and Derakhshan's model of information disorder⁷ extends the ecosystem perspective by detailing the processes through which disinformation propagates across various channels. Their framework emphasised the roles of digital platforms, audience behaviours, political contexts, and technological infrastructures in influencing the flow of information and misinformation.

This theoretical lens situated the FCOs within the broader media and communication environment. It recognised the complex interplay of online and offline media, socio-cultural factors, and media literacy levels. It is argued that fact-checkers, bear social responsibility not only to verify information, but to navigate and influence the ecosystem to reduce digital harms, foster an informed citizenry, and bolster democratic norms.

3.2 Network theory and network governance

The network theory, coupled with the concept of network governance, facilitated an in-depth analysis of the relationships among actors engaged in countering digital harms. The theories clarified how actors—such as FCOs, media platforms, government agencies, and civil

⁶ McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill.

⁷ Information disorder: Refers to the broader ecosystem of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, encompassing false, misleading, or harmful information that circulates through media systems. See Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) for a detailed discussion and conceptual framework.

society—interact within complex systems characterised by collaborative ties, resource sharing, and information exchange. They enable the identification of structural positions, such as central hub actors, bridges connecting different clusters, and isolated entities. The theory examined how these configurations influence collective efficacy in combating disinformation.

Manuel Castells' notion of the "network society"⁸ highlighted that power and influence are exercised through flexible, scalable, and resilient network structures, rather than traditional hierarchical models. In this context, communication, coordination, and influence are mediated by interconnected nodes that form a dynamic social fabric. Network governance extends this understanding by emphasising decentralised decision-making, shared accountability, and collaborative coordination within these networks.

Applying these theories to the fact-checking ecosystem, the following key questions emerged: Which FCOs occupy central or hub positions in West Africa? Which FCOs serve as bridges across countries or media platforms? Who are the isolated actors, or what gaps exist within the network? And how does the network's structure enable or constrain collaboration and strategic influence? These inquiries collectively, provided a framework for mapping the capacities, operational structures, and strategic influence of FCOs within a multi-actor and multi-country environment.

⁸ Castells, M. (2005). *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy* (pp. 21–23) for a comprehensive understanding of the concept of the network society.

4. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS



Figure 1: Map of West Africa showing the countries covered in the study

4.1 Digital harms and democratic norms in West Africa

Until 2020, West Africa was widely recognised as one of Africa's most stable democratic regions. The West African bloc was noted for steady progress in fostering democratic governance standards, economic integration, a generally liberalised media environment, and regional peace. Democratic norms and institutions were broadly consolidating across the region. From 2020 onwards, however, the image of West Africa as a steady democratic project began to change. The region once regarded as a leader in democratisation on the African continent began to lose its gloss, experiencing some of the most dramatic cases of democratic reversal and regression. Events from 2020 to 2023, including the collapse of constitutional rule following military takeovers by undemocratic actors in four countries; namely, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger, resulted in the withdrawal of these countries from the regional body, ECOWAS, and the formation of Alliance of Sahel States (AES). These developments raised concerns about democratic stability and economic integration in the region.

Besides this outlook, the region is facing an alarming surge in digital harms – defined not merely as individual content, but as systemic socio-technical threats – which entrench false

beliefs in society and pose risk to democratic consolidation.⁹ Democracy and information integrity have suffered setbacks in the region; particularly, in the coup affected countries. This manifest in coordinated digital harms through MDI, FIMI and state threat. The threats are driven by domestic and malign foreign actors who exploit the media ecosystems to manipulate information, instigate online violence and human rights violations, while silencing critical voices. These threaten press freedom, information integrity, public safety and democratic norms.

The digital threats add to the existing silage of democratic backsliding in the region. In some cases, MDI and FIMI fuel sporadic election tension and violence, political thuggery, hate speech, and affective polarisation. They also fuel legitimisation of authoritarian rule, instrumentalisation of security agencies, weaponisation of the judiciary, and identity politics to silence and marginalise opposition, dissenting voices and independent journalism.

As these threats evolve, AI is battling with the minds and hearts of citizens. It is shaping public opinion with a broader impact on information governance, regional integration and development.¹⁰ A study by the MFWA¹¹ highlights the increasing prevalence of election-related MDI that intensifies the threat to election information integrity. Likewise, empirical data from continental surveys such as the Afrobarometer¹² and the Mo Ibrahim Index¹³ highlight MDI as a threat to policy choices and decision-making by the electorate on electoral processes, peace and democratic values.

Also, gendered disinformation and online harassment contribute to constraining women's participation in politics, media, and public life. This threatens gender empowerment in Member States and contradicts ECOWAS' Vision 2050¹⁴ commitment to gender equality and women's emancipation as building blocks for an inclusive society. For example, female

⁹ See regional conference on information integrity in West Africa and the Sahel, UNESCO Conference at Cabo Verde, 2025.

¹⁰ Kojo Impraim (2026) <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.myjoyonline.com/artificial-intelligence-africa-govts-must-adopt-adapt-and-indigenise-but-dont-copy-and-paste/&ved=2ahUKEwix5dn3hOGVAxWEV0EAHf-SN3AQFnoECB0QAQ&usq=AOvVaw1iBMRtsLd8Y4O2b2acpMHmn> [Accessed on 30 April, 2026].

¹¹ <https://mfwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/The-State-of-MisDisinformation-Polarisation-and-State-Threat-to-Ghana-NEWLY-EDITED.pdf> [Accessed on 2 May, 2026].

¹² <https://www.afrobarometer.org/feature/african-insights-2025/> [Accessed on 3 May, 2026].

¹³ <https://assets.iiag.online/2024/2024-Index-Report.pdf> [Accessed on 2 May, 2026].

¹⁴ ECOWAS. (2018). *ECOWAS Vision 2050: Towards a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable regional integration*. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission.

politicians, (female) journalists, and activists are disproportionately targeted by disinformation campaigns and online violence. Such campaigns are habitually designed to fuel identity-based politics and conflict, gender stereotyping, and silence and delegitimise their voices in the public sphere.

Digital threats are exacerbated by increasing access to digital platforms, which have transformed content creation, information manipulation, and the speed with which information is produced, circulated, and consumed by state and non-state actors. These platforms amplify the speed, scale, and reach of harmful contents. The availability of internet and social media has also significantly reduced the cost of content creation and social mobilisation across national borders. Although this has strengthened freedom of assembly and citizens participation in democracy, internet and social media can also facilitate the creation, dissemination, and consumption of harmful online content by individuals, whether intentionally or not. The spread of digital harms has also become a seedbed for the new undemocratic actors. It has contributed to expand the frontiers of coup d'états and suppression of civic space. Undemocratic actors and authoritarian leaders have sought to control information flows and narratives, with the possible domino effects in the region.

The pathways of digital harms are clothed with unyielding security concerns, which represent a major setback for regional integration and security. This is largely noticeable in the Sahel region and some other countries in the littoral coast where the activities of terrorists, violent extremists, cross-border insurgence, and organised criminal networks have created a climate of fear and instability. There is over-reliance on emergency measures and securitised governance approaches, often at the expense of civil liberties. In many contexts, counterterrorism narratives have been used to justify military takeovers, prolonged political transitions, and restrictions on peaceful assembly. Altogether, the posturing has emboldened digital harms, online violence, distort information, suppress civic space and constrain freedom of expression and media freedom.

Although these threats are not necessarily new or peculiar to the region, they cumulatively converge and manifest in three major crises – political crisis, security crisis, and information disorder. The threats weaken the pillars of social cohesion, community resilience and peaceful co-existence. Additionally, they undermine information hygiene and governance. They also

create a hostile environment for freedom of expression, independent journalism, and operating space for governance. This deepens the trust deficit in political authorities and institutions. And undermine democratic norms and support for relatively stable democracies across the region.

4.2 Digital harm, disinformation, foreign interference, and information manipulation in West Africa

West Africa has experienced exponential growth in internet access and mobile phone usage over the past decade. Digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) serve as primary sources of online news and social interactions for large segments of the population, especially youth and urban dwellers.¹⁵ The proliferation of digital technologies has transformed information ecosystems as well as social, political, and economic landscapes across West Africa. This creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities.

While digital platforms have enhanced connectivity, facilitate entrepreneurship and economic growth, access to vital social services, information, communication, and social mobilisation and civic engagement, they have also become fertile grounds for the spread of digital harm, MDI and other complex vulnerabilities.

Disinformation campaigns are linked to electoral processes, social conflicts and tensions, public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation-induced panic, and attempts to undermine state institutions. For example, during elections in Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Senegal,¹⁶ false narratives and fabricated content were deployed in an attempt to discredit candidates, polarise electorate and suppress voters, and influence voter behaviour.¹⁷

Disinformation is exacerbated by manipulation of information and interference tactics by external actors which raises concern about social cohesion and democratic stability in the region. States and non-state actors such as governments, interest groups and individuals

¹⁵ Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI). (2020). *The cost of connectivity 2020: How affordability is shaping the digital future*. [Report]

¹⁶ Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2020). *Elections in Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Senegal: An analysis of electoral processes and stability*.

¹⁷ Amnesty International. (2022). *Disinformation and digital manipulation*.

exploit digital vulnerabilities to advance strategic objectives.¹⁸ External actors leverage on digital platforms to sow discord, and deploy sophisticated and coordinated disinformation campaigns such as bots, troll farms, and automated accounts to sway or shape public opinion, interfere in electoral processes and undermine democratic institutions.¹⁹

Digital threats and disinformation encompass a range of tactics. These include deepfake technology, automated fake accounts, coordinated inauthentic behaviour, synthetically generated fabricated videos or images that can convincingly depict false events or statements,²⁰ news stories and propaganda.²¹ And broad spectrum of malicious online activities such as hate speech, incitement to violence, and manipulation of public opinion through social media and messaging apps.²² Bad actors deploy these tactics and platforms to distort reality; threaten the integrity of information ecosystems; undermine credible journalism; erode fragile public trust; amplify ethnic, religious, and political divisions; and challenge authorities' ability to provide accurate information.²³ They also exploit the region's linguistic diversity and limited digital literacy to advance their course. This makes populations vulnerable to manipulation.

These threats persist largely due to weak cybersecurity infrastructure and absence of online regulatory frameworks and laws. This makes governments, institutions, and individuals susceptible to hacking, data breaches, privacy risks, and manipulation campaigns. The threat raises concerns about social cohesion, democratic stability, public trust, and information integrity.

¹⁸ United Nations (2020 – 2025 Digital Strategy. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.undp.org/digital/DigitalStrategy&ved=2ahUKEwjSpqGqjOGVAXVjZ0EAHbCoD68QFnoECBgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3T3pauit9B2ta8C8L4SSStB> [Accessed on December, 2025].

¹⁹ United Nations (2020 – 2025 Digital Strategy. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.undp.org/digital/DigitalStrategy&ved=2ahUKEwjSpqGqjOGVAXVjZ0EAHbCoD68QFnoECBgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3T3pauit9B2ta8C8L4SSStB> [Accessed on December, 2025].

²⁰ Chesney, R., & Citron, D. K. (2019). *Deepfakes and the new disinformation war*. *Foreign Affairs*, 98(1), 147–155.

²¹ Lazer, D. M. J., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., ... & Zittrain, J. L. (2018). *The science of fake news*. *Science*, 359(6380), 1094–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998>

²² <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2021.1891234>.

²³ Amnesty International. (2022). *Disinformation and digital manipulation*.

4.3 The growth of fact-checking organisations in West Africa

The formation of FCOs in the African region arguably began in the mid-2010s. The initiative was ostensibly led by the Africa Check²⁴. This was followed by FCOs such as Code for Africa, Dubawa, FactSpace West Africa, and other country-specific fact-checking initiatives such as Fact-Check Ghana, among others. Academic research on FCOs was popularised by Cheruiyot and Ferrer-Conill in 2018.²⁵ They offered one of the earliest academic analyses of fact-checking practices in Africa. Since, 2018, West Africa has seen a growth in FCOs. A report by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) corroborated by Africa Check and Dubawa, provided insights into the organisational growth, and operational impact of the FCOs in West Africa. Despite the growth of FCOs, documentation on the presence, spread, capacities, influence, cross-country collaborations, and the challenges they FCOs is limited. These gaps are addressed by the current study.

4.4 The role of fact-checking organisations in countering digital threats

The FCOs in West Africa are vital actors in countering digital threats. Their core roles include:

- a. **Detect, verify and debunk false information:** The FCOs employ journalistic rigour and technological tools to identify, verify and fact-check viral claims, images and videos by cross-referencing multiple sources to correct disinformation²⁶.
- b. **Promote skill enhancement, media literacy and public awareness:** FCOs build the fact-checking and information verification skills of journalists. They also promote media literacy through public education on how to critically evaluate information and identify false information. These public education efforts are intended to reduce public susceptibility to manipulation and enhance community resilience against digital threats.²⁷
- c. **Support policy formulation and regulatory efforts:** The FCOs provide evidence-based insights to inform policies on digital governance, hate speech, and election security. They also provide policymakers with evidence-based recommendations to develop strategies for combating digital threats.

²⁴ <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://africacheck.org/who-we-are&ved=2ahUKEwjxyv-41O6VAXWhP0HHS0LACAQFnoECBsQAQ&usq=AOvVaw3CpczNe84o0Gl9rVbttm9e> [Accessed on 7 December, 2025]

²⁵ Cheruiyot, D., & Ferrer-Conill, R. (2018). *Fact-checking organisations and their role in the media ecosystem*. Digital Journalism, 6(2), 249–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1345357>.

²⁶ Kennedy, R. (2020). *Detect, verify, and debunk: Strategies for combating misinformation*. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 12(3), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2020-12-3-45>.

²⁷ UNESCO. (2021). Promoting skill enhancement, media literacy, and public awareness: Strategies for a resilient information environment. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000376325>.

- d. **Monitoring and early warning reporting:** The FCOs serve as early warning actors by tracking digital threats to facilitate timely responses, and collaborating with authorities and civil society to counter digital threats²⁸.
- e. **Advocating transparency and ethical standards:** The FCOs uphold editorial independence and methodological transparency. This enhances public trust and credibility in information communication.
- f. **Foster regional cooperation in countering digital threats:** The FCOs collaborate with regional bodies such as the ECOWAS and media organisations such as the MFWA to enhance the skills of journalists in promoting information integrity and resilience, and coordinate responses.

4.5 The role of governments, regional bodies and other stakeholders

- a. **National governments:** National governments are responsible for implementing policies to regulate online content, protect digital rights, and collaborate with civil society, media organisations and academia to counter digital harms.
- b. **West African regional bodies:** ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) play strategic roles in fostering regional cooperation and developing digital policies, standards, and capacity building.
- c. **International organisations:** UNESCO and the United Nations provide technical assistance, funding, and frameworks for digital literacy and anti-disinformation initiatives.
- d. **Academic and civil society:** Research institutions and civil society groups collaborate with FCOs to strengthen understanding of digital threats and advocate democratic resilience.

²⁸ Africa Check. (2022). Monitoring and early warning reporting of digital threats.

<https://africacheck.org/reports/monitoring-early-warning-digital-threats-2022>

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Mapping of fact-checking organisations in West Africa: Locations, operational areas, and focus

Table 1: National Focus

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
ANGLOPHONES				
Ghana	Fact Check Ghana	Project of the Media Foundation for West Africa that seeks to enhance fact-based public discourse, debates and decision-making in Ghana's democratic governance and development processes.	www.factcheckghana.com	info@mfwf.org
Ghana	Ghana Fact	GhanaFact is a project by FactSpace West Africa aimed at curbing the spread of disinformation on traditional and social media.	https://ghanafact.com/	29
Ghana	Fake News Ghana	A nonprofit civic initiative committed to combating misinformation and disinformation in Ghana's media and public discourse, founded in 2024		
Ghana	FactSpace West Africa	It aims to promote accuracy in engagements on social media, rebuild trust in news, and journalism / media and safeguard democracy. It seeks to target and correct the spread of false or misleading claims or statements on social networks and messaging platforms and in public discourse.		rahman@factspace.org
Ghana	JoyNews Research	Accountability reporting and fact-check		isaackofiagyei97@gmail.com
Nigeria	Cable check	CableCheck is the fact-checking arm of the Cable Newspaper Journalism Foundation (CNJF), based in Nigeria. It originated from TheCable Newspaper's fact-checking desk. It aims to provide tools and resources to help readers distinguish fact from misinformation, monitoring claims across traditional and social media and tracking the promises of politicians and policymakers.	https://www.thecable.ng/	info@thecable.ng
Nigeria	Fact Check Hub	The FactCheckHub is an initiative of the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (The ICIR) aimed at combatting misinformation and disinformation in the society. Established in May 2020 with headquarters in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja	https://factcheckhub.com/	info@factcheckhub.com
Nigeria	Fact Check Africa	FactCheck Africa is an independent fact-checking platform based in Nigeria. It is operated under Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI), a non-profit NGO formally registered with Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission.	https://factcheckafrica.net/	factcheckelections@gmail.com
Nigeria	FactsMatterNg	An initiative of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) Knight Fellowship in Nigeria, focused on amplifying credible	https://factsmatterng.com/	

²⁹ Data not available for all empty spaces during data collection

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
		information, digital media literacy, and countering misinformation.		
Nigeria	Round Check	It is an independent youth-led fact-checking platform. We are set to launch different campaigns and projects to provide solutions to misinformation and disinformation within society, especially among young people.	https://roundcheck.com.ng/	
Nigeria	CDD Factcheck	CDD Fact check operates as a distinct unit within a legally registered non-profit organization in Nigeria, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).		
Nigeria	Fact Check Africa	To produce timely evidence-based reports that would help the people to know the truth so as to be able to make informed decisions and better demand accountability from the government. It seeks to uphold the values of accuracy, fairness, transparency, credibility, independence, and accountability. It is guided by the five principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).	https://factcheckaf rica.net/	factcheckelectio ns@gmail.com
Sierra Leone	iVerify-Sierra Leone	The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Independent Radio Network (IRN-SL), with support from the United Nations Development Programme and BBC Media Action fact checking initiative		
Sierra Leone	Slena-Factcheck (State Owned)	It is an initiative from the Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA), the nation's official news agency. It was established to deliver accurate and timely information through modern communication channels.	https://www.slena.gov.sl/fact-check	info@slena.gov.sl
Sierra Leone	Sierra check	A fact-checking website driven by truth, accuracy, and fostering a digitally informed society.	About Sierracheck	
The Gambia	Fact Check Centre	Youth-led NGO dedicated to countering misinformation, mis-/disinformation, and mal-information. Its mission includes enhancing access to reliable information, supporting peaceful elections, government accountability, democratic governance, and respect for human rights in The Gambia.	https://factcheckgambia.org/	factcheckgm@gmail.com
The Gambia	Paradise FM/TV	Broadcasting and Communications Consultancy		haronadrammeh@gmail.com
The Gambia	Info-checked	Counter disinformation/misinformation and promote media and information literacy		infocheckedgm@gmail.com
Liberia	Local Voices Liberia	A network of Liberian journalists established in 2015. The network came to being to counter the spread of misinformation during the Ebola pandemic and encourage responsible health journalism.	https://localvoicesliberia.com/	
Liberia	The Liberia Fact-Checking Network	Launched in 2023, the Network comprises three institutions: Campaigners against misinfo and disinfo in Liberia, The Stage	https://web.facebook.com/p/Liberia-Fact-Checking-	

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
		Media and Local Voices Liberia including other individual fact-checkers.	Network-100094200512437/?rdc=1&rdm#	
Liberia	The Stage Media	Liberia's first fact-checking media institution with the overarching vision of mitigating misinformation and disinformation.	https://tsmliberia.com/	
Liberia	Public Trust Media	It is dedicated to promoting responsible, open and frank exchange of ideas—to agree to disagree, through dialogue and not antagonism with malice to no one. Its Mission: To engage in publication of newspaper and magazine on the Liberian news stands To engage in broadcast of news items as well as providing information and education to the Liberian public To engage in broadcast of advertisements / publicity as well as other forms of information in the public's interest		newspublictrust@gmail.com
FRANCOPHONES				
Benin	Badona	Bénin Check Info est une initiative de Banouto (www.banouto.bj), un site béninois d'actualité, d'investigation, de grands reportages, d'analyses et de publicité, lancée en avril 2017. Ce média a pour mission, entre autres, de mettre fin à la manipulation de masse en offrant aux citoyens béninois en particulier et africains en général, les clés pour comprendre les défis et les enjeux contemporains.	https://www.badona.info/	
Benin	Benin Check	The first independent fact-checking organization officially registered in Benin. Founded by CESTI-trained journalist Délofon Toussaint HOUETOHOSSOU, Bénin Check is committed to combating disinformation by providing the public with verified information and raising awareness about the importance of fact-checking.	https://benincheck.org/	
Cotonou Bénin	ODEM (c'est plutôt une organisation d'autorégulation des médias)	Faire respecter la déontologie et l'éthique dans les médias au Bénin		ahotondjiulrichvit@gmail.com
Burkina Faso	Faso Check	Fighting misinformation and hate speech by making events understandable through the truth of the facts.	https://fasocheck.org/	
Togo	Togocheck	Togolese fact-checking organisation dedicated to combating misinformation. It was established around 2019 or 2020 and is currently in the process of applying to become a signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) Code of Principles. Togocheck verifies claims across various sectors, including national and international news, COVID-19 updates, and political events in Togo.	https://www.togocheck.com/	tadenoe@yahoo.fr

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
Togo	COAWEB/TOGO CHECK	Vérification des faits, formation, éducation aux médias et à l'information		contact@togocheck.com
Togo, Lomé	TOGOCHECK	Togocheck est un médias de vérification des faits basé au Togo. L'initiative a été qualifiée comme bonne pratique par l'Organisation mondiale de la santé (OMS) dans son rapport sur la pandémie à la COVID-19. De même, Togocheck a été fait "Héro" de l'information en période de pandémie par Reporter sans frontière, RSF en 2020. Togocheck est une idée de journalistes togolais spécialistes en vérification des faits et éducation web. Togocheck a reçu la certification du réseau mondial des vérificateurs (IFCN). Son objectif est de faire du fact-checking.		tadenoe@yahoo.fr
Mali	BenebereVerif (Limited Operation)	BenbereVerif is the verification unit of Benbere, an online media platform in Mali. Its goal is to counter misinformation circulating on social media in Mali.	https://benbere.org/benbereverif/aes-cinq-types-desinformation-circulent/?utm_source=chatgpt.com	bocoumaliboulou@gmail.com
Mali	Mopti check	Since 2022, Mopti Check has been the fact-checking section of the online media outlet La Voix de Mopti. *La Voix de Mopti* is an initiative of the Young Emerging Association of Mali (AJEM). AJEM is registered in Mali as a non-profit association.	Comment nous vérifions ? - La Voix de Mopti	
Mali	Wuya	An app to verify and debunk fake news, created by Tuwindi, a Malian media development organisation that aims to use information and communication technologies to support social and economic development.	Tuwindi	
Mali	Unite des Verifications des faits	Cree par L'Association des Professionnels de la Presse en Ligne du Mali (APPEL-Mali) pour aider les journalistes à éviter les pièges de la désinformation	(3) Facebook	fofanamodibo710@gmail.com
Mali	Mali Check	Rubrique du site multimédia Le Jalon, créé par un collectif de journalistes maliens en janvier 2020.	https://lejalon.com/	example@domain.com
Niger ³⁰	NigerCheck	A dedicated media entity designed to counteract the rapid proliferation of fake news, local rumours, and political or security-related propaganda in Niger.		soulbrah93@gmail.com
Niger	Association nigérienne des web activistes (ANIWEB)	A registered, non-profit civic organisation that advocates for a safe, secure and democratic local cyberspace, and runs a fact-checking website to tackle human sources of misinformation.		soumaila.hainikoye@gmail.com
Mauritania	Initiative News	Focus on tracking fake news, verifying and analysing them	https://initiativesnews.com/	

³⁰ Code for Africa (Senegal), NigerCheck (Niger) and the Association nigérienne des web activistes (ANIWEB) (Niger) were not included in the field data collection due to an oversight during the development and implementation of the sampling frame. As a result, the study does not capture their perspectives, and the findings should not be interpreted as representing these organisations. We acknowledge this as a limitation of the study.

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
Senegal	verifacts	Fact checking column of the Ouestaf media outlet	https://www.ouestaf.com/verifacts/fact-checks/	
Guinea	Guinee Check	GuinéeCheck is a citizen-led and independent initiative to combat information disorder, hate speech, and the manipulation of information in the Republic of Guinea. GuinéeCheck was created by the Association Villageois 2.0 in September 2020.	https://www.guineecheck.org/	sallybilaly@lesvillageois.org
Côte d'Ivoire	Les Benevoles de l'Education aux medias et a l'Information (EMI)	Une organisation à but non lucratif créée en 2019 dédiée à l'Education aux Médias et à l'Information à travers la sensibilisation, l'apprentissage et la promotion des outils technologiques de lutte contre la désinformation.	https://web.facebook.com/BenevoleEMI	apalocoulibaly73@gmail.com
Côte d'Ivoire Abidjan	Bénévoles de l'EMI	Building enlightened and responsible digital citizens of tomorrow through learning, the development of critical thinking, and the provision of modern tools necessary for the responsible use of media and information channels.		apalocoulibaly73@gmail.com
Guinée	GuineeCheck	GuineeCheck est une plate-forme non partisane de vérification des faits dont le but principal est de contrer la désinformation, les discours haineux, les manipulations de l'information et les rumeurs sur l'actualité telles que les élections, la politique, la santé et la gouvernance, entre autres. Nous surveillons également l'exactitude de ce qui est dit par les principaux acteurs sociopolitiques de la Guinée. Que ce soit sous forme de publicités télévisées, de débats, de discours, d'interviews ou de communiqués de presse déguisés. Notre objectif est d'appliquer les meilleures pratiques journalistiques et des technologies pour accroître la compréhension citoyenne sur les questions d'intérêt public dont le but ultime est de qualifier le débat public. Nos objectifs: Promouvoir et sensibiliser aux problèmes d'intérêt général grâce à la diffusion d'articles équilibrés et fondés sur des preuves; Promouvoir une culture de vérification des faits pour aider les citoyens à prendre des décisions éclairées et à tenir les acteurs socio-politiques responsables de leurs propos et/ou engagements.		sallybilaly@lesvillageois.org
LUSOPHONES				
Guinea Bissau	Nobaschecker: Platform Luso Fact Checking	Launched to combat fake news, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Managed by Innovalab, with the support of UNDP and UNIOGBIS.		
Guinée-Bissau	FactCheck Guinée-Bissau	Impulsionar o sector das medias na Guinée-Bissau		sanhademba@gmail.com

Table 2: Cross-border Focus

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
ANGLOPHONES				
Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and The Gambia	DUBAWA (CJID)	A West African independent verification and fact-checking project, initiated by the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) and supported by the most influential newsrooms and civic organisations in West Africa to help amplify the culture of truth in public discourse, public policy, and journalistic practice.	www.dubawa.org	
Based in South Africa. Has offices in Senegal and Nigeria	AFRICA CHECK	The first independent non-profit fact-checking organization on the African continent, founded in 2012. It was established to improve the quality of public debate and media across Africa by verifying claims made by public figures and institutions.	http://www.africacheck.org	
Ghana and Gambia	FactSpace West Africa	Independent, non-partisan fact-checking and information integrity organisation working across West Africa, especially Ghana and The Gambia, with the aim of verifying claims, tackling disinformation and misinformation, and promoting truth in public discourse.	https://factspace.org/	
Across Africa	Pesa Check	PesaCheck is an indigenous initiative that is pioneering frontline fact-checking across Africa. Initially focused on verifying the financial and other statistical numbers quoted by public figures in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, PesaCheck is now Africa's largest with full-time staff in 18 countries in both east and west Africa	https://pesacheck.org/	
FRANCOPHONES				
Senegal, Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo	Plateforme Africaine des Factcheckers Francophones (PAFF)	PAFF was founded in 2024 with the objective of fighting relentlessly against the scourge of false information.	https://paff.africa/	
Based in South Africa. Has offices in Senegal and Nigeria	AFRICA CHECK	The first independent non-profit fact-checking organization on the African continent, founded in 2012. It was established to improve the quality of public debate and media across Africa by verifying claims made by public figures and institutions.	https://africacheck.org/	
Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal	AFP FACTUEL	The fact-checking service of Agence France-Presse, active in several countries. It also acts as a third-party partner for Facebook.	https://factuel.afp.com/	
Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal	Pesa Check	PesaCheck is an indigenous initiative that is pioneering frontline fact-checking across Africa. Initially focused on verifying the financial and other statistical numbers quoted by public figures in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, PesaCheck is now Africa's largest with full-time staff in 18	https://pesacheck.org/	

Country	Organisation	Description of their Work	Website	Email
		countries in both east and west Africa		
LUSOPHONE				
Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde	Polygrafo Africa	A media outlet specialized in fact-checking and a part of the fact-checking program in collaboration with Meta in the fight against disinformation.	https://poligrafoafrica.com/	

Figure 2: Fact-checking organisations in West Africa: locations, operational areas and focus



Regional distribution of fact-checking organisations in West Africa

The analysis showed that every West African country has at least one FCO. As reflected in Tables 1 and 2, a total of 45 FCOs were identified across West Africa. However, their distribution, operational coverage and areas of focus, vary and uneven. Most of the FCOs operate within national boundaries. A relatively few organisations with cross-border operations are largely organised along linguistic lines. Anglophone countries host the largest concentration, with Nigeria and Ghana alone accounting for almost 53% of the FCOs in Anglophone West Africa (that is, six and five FCOs respectively out of 21). The remaining three Anglophone countries account for the rest. Francophone and Lusophone countries, by contrast, are home to fewer FCOs. The distribution of FCOs does not correspond with the number of countries in each linguistic group. Instead, it reflects differences in the relative size of their populations.

Another observation from the data is that, many of the West African FCOs primarily operate within national boundaries. This means they operate only in the countries where they are

based. A smaller number of FCOs operate across multiple countries through offices established in those countries. Most FCOs with cross-border operations appear to operate within countries that share the same official language. For example, Dubawa operates in the five Anglophone West African countries, while AFP FACTUEL and Plateforme Africaine des Factcheckers Francophones (PAFF) operate across several Francophone West African countries. Africa Check and PesaCheck are the only two FCOs identified in this study that operate across both Anglophone and Francophone countries.

PesaCheck particularly stands out as the FCO that operates in the largest number of countries, with full-time staff in 18 countries across both East and West Africa. Polygrafo Africa is the only FCO identified in this study that operates across borders in the two Lusophone countries, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

The FCOs address a range of complementary priorities. At least one FCO in each country focuses primarily on general information integrity and verification as well as public discourse on democratic governance, accountability and election information integrity. The organisations direct their work towards combating daily mis/disinformation circulating on social media and through traditional media. The FCOs identified in Guinea do not appear to have this as their primary focus. However, PesaCheck, which operates in Guinea and Niger as well as East Africa as part of its wider regional presence, appears to focus primarily on verifying financial and statistical claims made by public figures. In Niger, NigerCheck concentrates on countering fake news, local rumours, and political and security-related propaganda, while ANIWEB combines advocacy for a safe, secure and democratic cyberspace with fact-checking aimed at human sources of misinformation.

There are also FCOs whose primary focus is media and information literacy, and citizen education. Examples were identified in Nigeria, Gambia, Togo, Liberia, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea. The FCOs in this category empower the public on how to identify mis/disinformation and use digital tools responsibly. Another group of FCOs focus on strengthening the media industry by promoting ethical and responsible journalism, training journalists, and building journalists' capacity to avoid disinformation in their reporting.

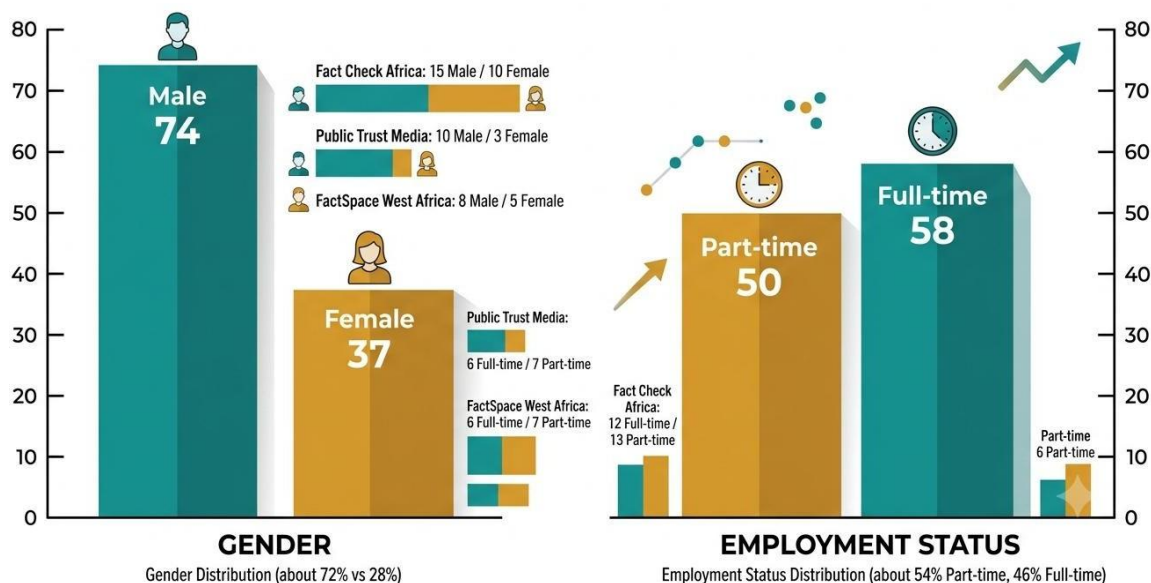
These findings indicate that West Africa has a foundation of FCOs with complementary

expertise across different thematic areas and countries. However, uneven distribution of FCOs and limited level of cross-border engagement highlight opportunities for stronger regional coordination.

5.2 Organisational capacity

5.2.1 Staffing

Figure 3: Staffing data overview: gender and employment status



5.2.1.1 Staffing distribution by gender and employment status

The data covered 11 FCOs, including media organisations across nine West African countries. Generally, the FCOs appeared to be male-dominated as can be seen in in Table 2 and Figure 4. The data indicated 74 male staff compared to 37 female staff. That is, roughly two-thirds of staff are men. Only a few organisations, such as TogoCheck, show near gender balance. Others, like ODEM in Benin and Public Trust Media Group in Liberia, have significant gender gaps.

In terms of employment, there is a slight preference for full-time staff (58) over part-time staff (50) as seen in Figure 5. However, patterns vary per organisation. For example, Fact Check Africa in Nigeria and Les Bénévoles de l'EMI in Côte d'Ivoire rely heavily on part-time workers. Others, such as TogoCheck in Togo and Joy News in Ghana, appear to operate with full-time staff.

There were notable data gaps; due to FCOs that were unable to respond to the research instrument. There were also missing gender or employment figures in some organisations.

Despite these limitations, the data suggest three key trends: a regional gender imbalance, a relatively balanced mix of part-time and full-time roles, and variation in staffing structures across countries and organisations.

Table 3: Distribution of staffing, gender and professional status

No	Country	Organisation	Male	Female	Part time	Full time
1	Nigeria	Fact Check Africa	15	10	15	10
2	Liberia	Public Trust Media Group	10	3	4	9
3	Ghana	FactSpace West Africa	8	5	7	6
4	Ghana	Joy News	5			5
5	Gambia	Info Checked	6	4	4	6
6	Cote d'Ivoire	Les Bénévoles de l'EMI			10	5
7	Guinea-Bissau	FactCheck-GB	4	2		
8	Togo	TogoCheck	3	4		7
9	Togo	COAWEB	6	4	4	6
10	Guinea	GuineeCheck	5	4	5	4
11	Benin	ODEM	12	1	1	
		TOTAL	74	37	50	58

***FCOs that responded to the interview and were willing to share information during the fieldwork

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of gender representation of FCOs

Gender *representation*

FCOs in West Africa are predominantly male staff

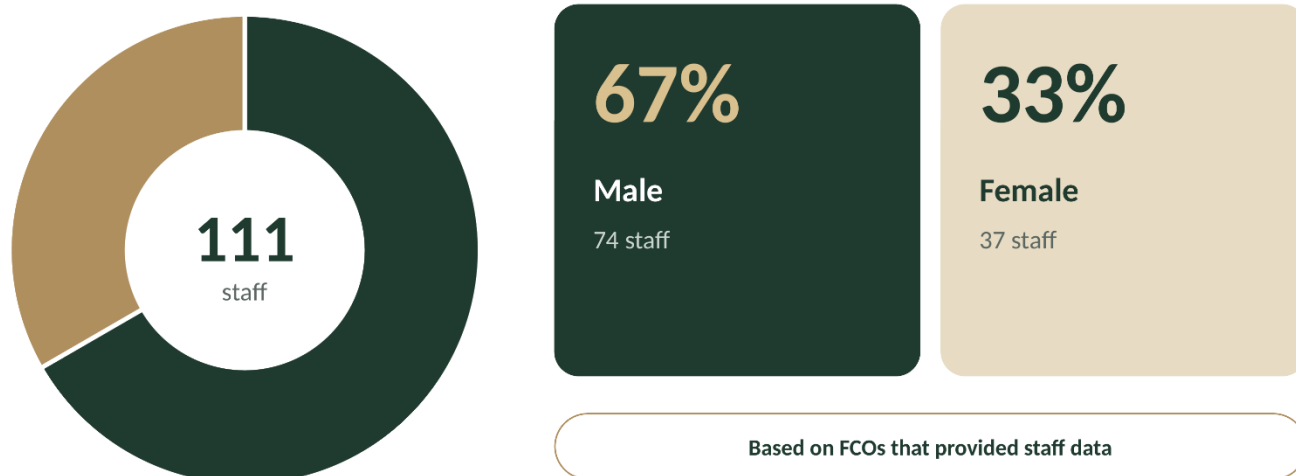
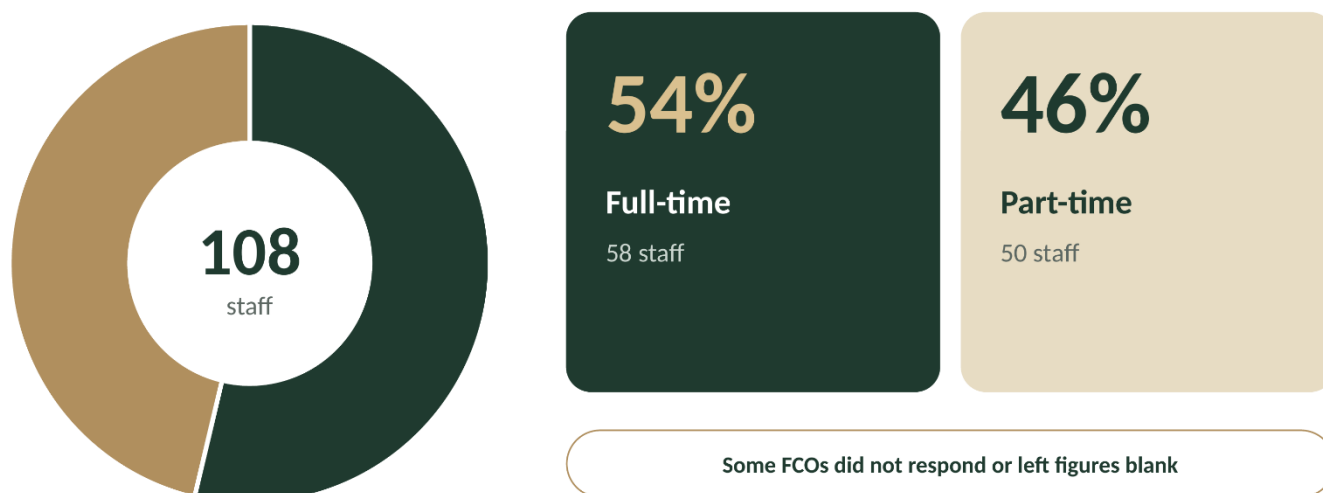


Figure 5: Percentage distribution of professional status**Staff and *employment* status****5.2.2 Financial and human resources capabilities of FCOs**

Financial resources remain unevenly distributed among the FCOs. Established organisations benefit from grants, donor support, and platform partnerships. Many smaller actors rely on ad-hoc funding, leading to operational uncertainty.

The study also revealed variation in the human capacity of FCOs across West Africa. Established organisations (such as Africa Check, Code for Africa, and Dubawa) have dedicated editorial teams, researchers, and data analysts, ranging from 10 or above and working as full-time staff. Again, the larger organisations demonstrate high levels of professional expertise; particularly, in investigative initiatives, data verification, and multilingual content production. Smaller and emerging FCOs operate with minimal staffing, sometimes with fewer than three dedicated personnel. Staff turnover is relatively low. Smaller organisations face human resource constraints that limit their ability to verify high volumes of claims and/or conduct cross-border investigations.

Additionally, capacity-building initiatives, including partnerships with tertiary institutions and international media development agencies are noticeable in large organisations. This contributes to strengthening the technical skills of FCOs in carrying out content creation and outreach. The findings align with the capacity framework of media ecology theory, which

emphasises that human capital is a critical input in sustaining functional information ecosystems.

5.3 Analysis of the strategic influence of FCOs on information verification

5.3.1 Pre-bunking and debunking effectiveness

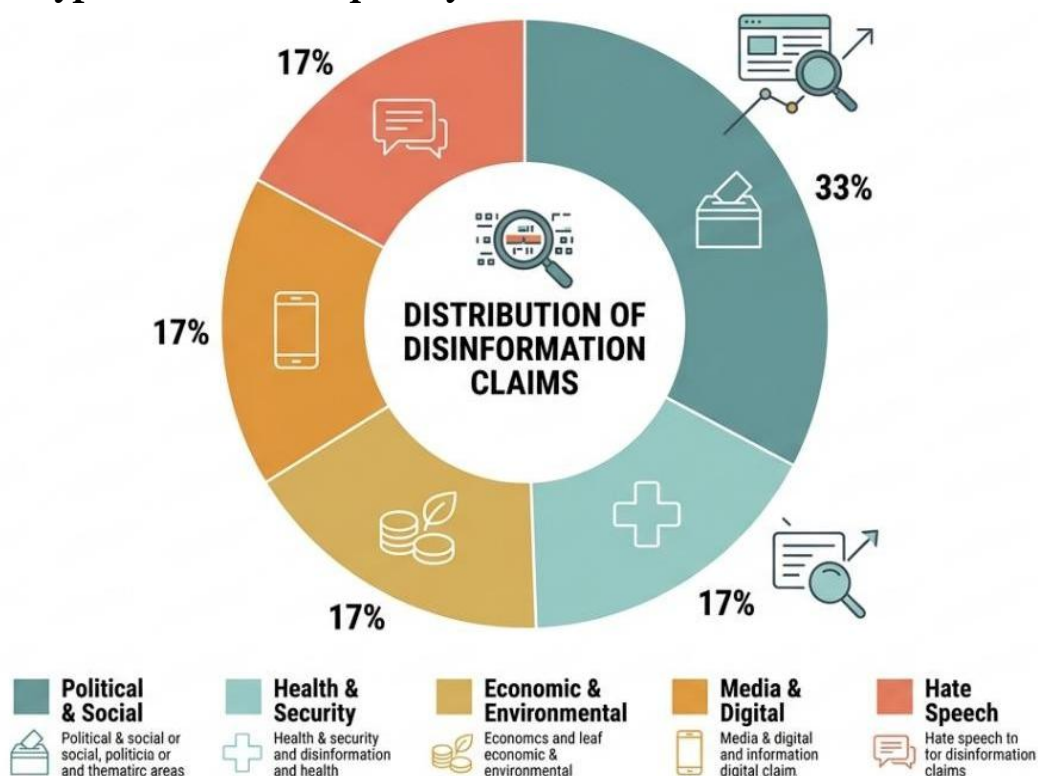
The FCOs highlight the importance of pre-debunking³¹. They undertake MIL programmes, fact-checking training, and public education campaigns for journalists, students, and the public on how to counter misleading content. This is aimed at building community resilience against disinformation tactics.

Disinformation is also debunked through technology-driven responses. In Nigeria, AI tools are deployed to reduce the time between the spread of a viral claim and its verification. Similarly, in Ghana, a “swift and accurate” approach reflects the importance placed on speed and precision in countering mis/disinformation. Again, the use of multiple dissemination channels and partnerships amplifies fact-checking efforts in the study countries.

The FCOs publish and debunk disinformation in various formats—text, audio, infographics, and social media posts – in order to reach wider audience. They also collaborate with traditional media, influencers, civil society organisations (CSOs), and community actors to extend their reach. Additionally, fact-checkers monitor and correct erroneous information from mainstream media. This reinforces their role as accountability actors within the information ecosystem. By tracking traditional media, social media, messaging platforms, and participate in public discourse, the FCOs can anticipate and respond to false claims and harmful content before they gain traction, especially during critical moments such as elections. The FCOs also predict common misleading narratives and prepare content in advance to counter them. These complementary approaches aim to reduce digital threats.

³¹ Unlike debunking, which addresses false information after it has spread, prebunking refers to the proactive provision of information and educational interventions that enable people to recognise unreliable information sources, detect misinformation early, and reduce their vulnerability to misinformation by understanding common manipulation techniques (Altay, 2026).

5.3.1.1 Types of claims frequently debunked



Disinformation types vary according to national contexts, although certain trends remain cross-border (see Figure 6). Political and social disinformation appear to be widespread, accounting for the largest share (33%). This is particularly evident in countries where the political climate remains sensitive, such as Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, and the Sahelian region. In these contexts, misleading content generally revolve around alleged political conspiracies, manipulation of electoral results, military governance, and insecurity. This understanding is reinforced by the following statement from one of the FCOs:

“In politics and elections, rumours circulate about electoral fraud, manipulation of results, the health status of key political figures, and allegations of plots targeting certain parties or leaders” (6 February, 2026).

As Figure 6 indicates, the remaining categories of disinformation are almost evenly distributed across countries. Media & digital, economic & environmental, and hate speech represent 17% each, while health & security disinformation accounts for 16%. This near-balanced spread (16–17%) shows that disinformation is not confined to one area, but cuts across multiple sectors almost equally. Security-related disinformation is particularly present in countries

facing security threats from terrorist groups and violent extremist organisations (VEOs); particularly, in Nigeria and the Sahelian countries.

The data also suggested that while political and social topics are the dominant focus of disinformation claims, other areas—such as health, pandemics, economy, digital media, and hate speech—experience significant levels of misleading content. This highlights the need for broad-based fact-checking efforts across multiple sectors.

Disinformation claims *frequently debunked*

Political and social claims are the dominant category

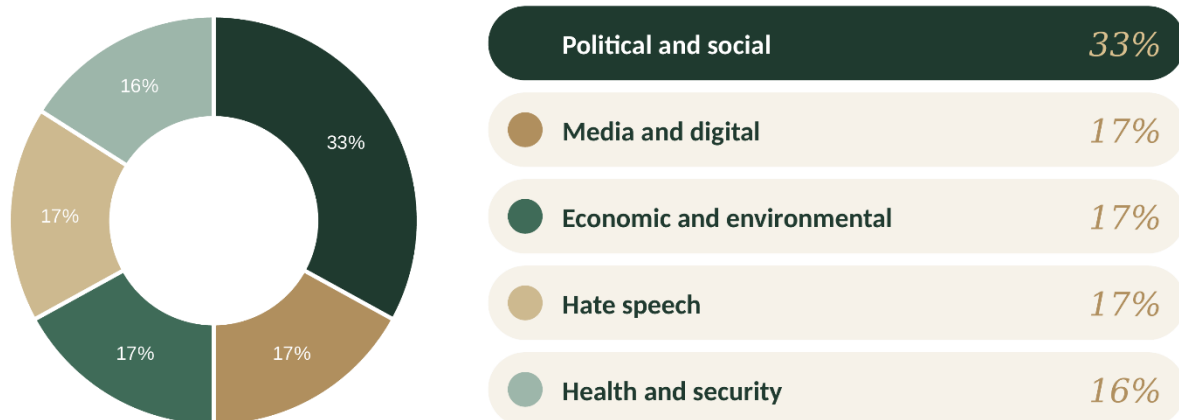


Figure 6: The distribution of disinformation claims across five thematic areas.

5.3.2 Strategies deployed by the FCOs in promoting digital literacy



A shared commitment to building public resilience against information manipulation is evident across the countries surveyed, although to varying degrees. This reflects differences in organisational capacity, resource availability, and national context. Also, audience awareness of fact-checking and utilisation of fact-check reports remains higher in urban areas, with lower penetration in rural or non-English/French speaking communities.

The FCOs adopt a variety of strategies to respond to growing digital threats. The FCOs in Nigeria and Ghana demonstrated the most comprehensive approach to countering digital threats. For example, the AI Fellowship programme by Fact-Check Africa, Kwame Karikari Fact-Checking and Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) Fellowship by Dubawa, and Fact-checking Fellowship by the MFWA represent a formal capacity-building programme through which hundreds of journalists and civic leaders receive training in OSINT and verification methodologies. Complementing this, some FCOs have developed and deployed an AI-powered verification tool (MyAIFactChecker)³² to counter disinformation. The tool helps democratise access to fact-checking by enabling the public to independently assess the veracity of information. This reduces reliance on expert intermediaries for verification.

Similarly, in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, and Liberia, MIL programmes, digital literacy initiatives and campaigns are directed at a broad constituency that includes community leaders; civil society actors; young people and tertiary and campus-based students—a demographic identified as among the most digitally active groups, yet at risk of harmful content. Fact-checkers partner with schools of journalism and high schools to deliver training that empower students on how to counter disinformation in order to promote information integrity. These actors are equipped with practical competencies in verification, image and video analysis, and identification of manipulated content.

Guinea and Guinea-Bissau similarly articulate a dual-track strategy centred on capacity building and broader public sensitisation. Structured training sessions are organised for journalists and civil society actors on the subject of information manipulation. This is carried out alongside digital campaigns designed to raise public awareness of the risks and dynamics

³² MyAIFactChecker is a multilingual, AI-powered platform designed to combat misinformation by verifying news, social media posts, and digital claims. Developed by the Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI) and FactCheck Africa. It uses generative AI and real-time search APIs to authenticate content. It evaluates claims in seven African languages, including English, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Swahili, Arabic, and French.

of disinformation. The MIL sessions are additionally conducted for young students and local communities. This indicates an effort to cultivating healthy information consumption habits from an early age.

The FCOs in Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Cape Verde describe a hybrid model that indicates an effort to bridging the gap between digital outreach and face-to-face engagements, especially in the context where digital access may be uneven. They combine skills enhancement, digital content production, public forums, and direct community engagements. They also disseminate verified information through a range of formats, including infographics, articles, and explainers, via established distribution channels. This is supplemented by in-person media education conducted in schools and at community events.

Additionally, some FCOs in Nigeria is committed to linguistic inclusivity in countering digital threats. Fact-check contents are produced in local languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo to serve populations with limited English proficiency. Likewise, in Ghana, Fact-Check Ghana produce and translates content into local languages such as Twi, Hausa, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani and Ffulde to reach local audiences. In Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry, media actors—especially radio stations—translate and broadcast verified content in local languages, ensuring outreach to grassroots and non-digital audiences. The multilingual strategy by the FCOs reflects a broader recognition that effective counter-disinformation efforts must take into consideration the linguistic diversity of the population. The strategy also reflects an understanding of the layered nature of disinformation exposure, and the need for differentiated interventions.

In The Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria, two distinct, but complementary organisational responses are observed. The first, highlights the use of traditional broadcast media formats, including panel discussions, news programming, current affairs segments, and infomercials as vehicles for public education on information integrity. The second, offered by Info-Checked and Fact-Check Ghana, details a more structured, and multi-platform approach to countering digital threats. This dual strategy targets elderly and younger audiences through both traditional and digital channels to counter digital harms.

Additional interventions include aligning public campaigns with national and international digital literacy commemorative calendars to promote information integrity. This helps FCOs situate their work within broader global advocacy frameworks. Again, the FCOs adopt a distinctly governance-oriented approach. That is, engaging in national dialogues and mobilising civic action to seek institutional responses to disinformation. This approach signals a recognition that sustainable counter-disinformation efforts may require policy-level intervention beyond advocacy by FCOs and the media.

Again, Côte d'Ivoire's response reflects a contextual and socially embedded approach. Local radio stations, television, and community platforms are deployed to disseminate educational messages to varied stakeholders; particularly, through youth-targeted initiatives aimed at equipping communities to verify sources and analyse images and videos. This approach is also shared by FCOs in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Cape Verde, with a strong focus on capacity building and public awareness campaigns designed to explain the mechanics of disinformation, its risks, and implications for social cohesion and democratic processes. For example, in Guinea-Bissau, FCOs have trained fact-checking journalists to identify, analyse, and publish verified content to inform and clarify public opinion. While this initiative appears laudable, the institutionalisation of a journalist network dedicated to verification is constrained by financial injection.

Editorial independence also plays a key role in countering digital threats. The FCOs are mindful of responsible content production and publication by verifying facts and refusing to publish or share misleading, harmful, or discriminatory content. Graves³³, in his seminal study of fact-checking institutions in 2016, highlighted the importance of editorial independence, structured workflows, and methodological transparency. Likewise, UNESCO's³⁴ 2021 curriculum reinforced the documentation of essential competencies such as verification skills, digital tools, and media literacy techniques.

³³ Graves, L. (2016). *Misleading, harmful, or discriminatory content: Challenges in digital media*. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 31(2), 102-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00903307.2016.1145020>

³⁴ UNESCO (2021). Media and information literacy curriculum for teachers. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375612>.

5.3.3 FCOs strategies for managing public sentiments and political pressure

Building trust with audiences is a key buffer against political and social pressure in fighting digital threats. As a result, the study identified a shared pattern of active engagement with the public. The analysis revealed that the FCOs generally respond to public sentiment and political pressure in similar ways, while carrying out their work of countering disinformation and harmful content. Throughout this process, they seek to remain independent, ethical, transparent, neutral, and professionally credible.

Most FCOs in the study countries, emphasised a strong commitment to journalistic ethics and non-partisanship in fact-checking. They highlighted adherence to established principles, editorial policies, and ethical charters, which ensure neutrality, objectivity, and independence from political influence.

Another approach is the prioritisation of evidence-based reporting and accuracy. The FCOs stressed the importance of sticking to facts, responding constructively to criticism, acknowledging errors, and maintaining openness in their communication. As a measure of transparency, some FCOs openly publish their methodologies and sources when need arises, so that audiences can verify their work. This helps to build public trust and credibility, even in politically sensitive context.

Additionally, the FCOs highlighted structured internal strategies for managing pressure, such as separating editorial and operational functions, anticipating risks, avoiding engagement with provocations or harassment, and protecting staff from intimidation. These approaches are complemented by practices like triangulation of sources, careful topic selection, and maintaining neutrality in partnerships. The FCOs further noted that collaboration with civil society through public education efforts and media literacy initiatives helps clarify issues, reduce misunderstanding, and reinforce independence.

5.4 An Assessment of the Operational and Technological Capacities of FCOs in Countering Digital Threats

5.4.1 Deployment of technology and tools by FCOs to counter digital threats



Overall, FCOs in the region face significant limitations in accessing advanced data analytics and automated fact-checking tools to counter digital threats. This is primarily due to financial constraints and limited technical expertise. Some FCOs have limited capacity to deploy sophisticated technologies, which hampers verification and speed. This constrains their capacity to detect and combat digital threats efficiently.

Despite these challenges, FCOs predominantly utilise a range of open-source tools and platforms to monitor, analyse, and counter disinformation. Common verification software, and social media monitoring platforms include CrowdTangle and Meltwater, as well as content management systems. They also leverage AI-based platforms like MyAIFactChecker, and video forensics tools such as InVID/WeVerify, and reverse image search engines such as Google Reverse Image Search and TinEye. Additionally, digital analysis tools like Gephi and NodeXL are used to map dissemination chains and identify influential actors. Also, social listening tools such as Brandwatch and Talkwalker track viral trends, detect coordinated campaigns, and monitor social media landscapes.

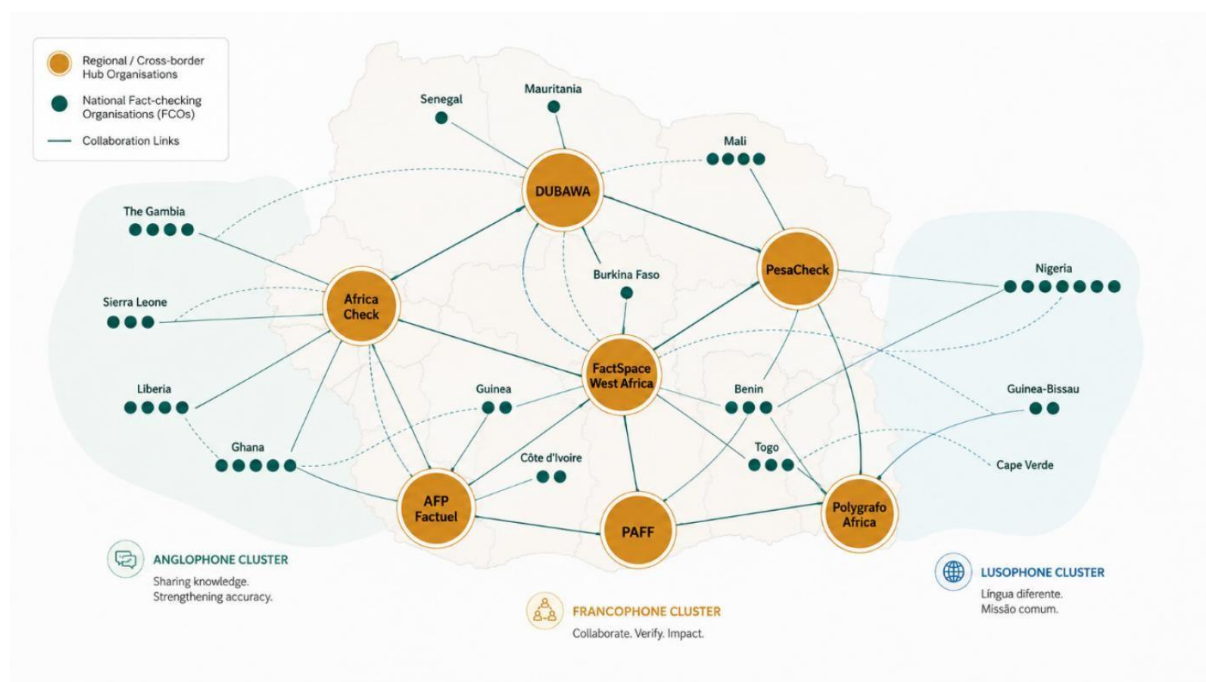
Other notable tools are Botometer and HypeAuditor, which help to identify automated or

suspicious accounts, and the Disinformation Analysis & Risk Management (DISARM) framework is used to understand foreign influence tactics. Also, WhatsApp chatbots facilitate direct engagement, and Python scripts assist in network analysis to detect clusters of coordinated accounts.

These technologies enable FCOs to monitor viral content, trace the flow of disinformation, and cross-reference claims with credible sources and fact-checking databases. Automated alerts based on keywords related to politics, security, and social crises further augment their capacity to respond swiftly to emerging threats.

The analysis of the deployment of technology and tools by the FCOs as a whole indicated that, while current tools provide valuable support in tracking and countering digital threats, their impact is constrained by resource gaps and evolving tactics among malicious actors. Given these resource and technological constraints, enhancing technical capacity, investing in emerging technologies, and fostering regional cooperation are crucial for strengthening the effectiveness of digital threat mitigation efforts.

5.5 Collaboration among FCOs in countering digital threats: Approaches and key areas



This section offered an in-depth analysis of the various forms of collaboration among FCOs across West African region. The regional cooperation landscape is diverse, spanning from

informal support to somewhat structured mechanism.

Focus areas of collaboration: Cooperation includes data sharing, joint platforms, capacity building, public engagement, technology exchange, collaborative investigations and cross-border monitoring.

Nature of collaboration: While countries like Nigeria and Ghana demonstrate relatively formalised collaborations through coalitions and networks, others such as The Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Cape Verde, and Sierra Leone exhibit minimal or exploratory engagement. Countries like Togo, Benin and Guinea Bissau engage through informal exchanges and complementary support. Largely, the FCOs lack sustained and institutionalised partnerships. The variation in collaboration reflects different levels of capacity, resources, and the nature of digital threats across the region.

Network structure and engagement dynamics: Analysis indicated a hub-and-spoke network model, with central organisations such as Africa Check, Code for Africa and Dubawa acting as hubs. These central nodes facilitate connections with national, local and smaller FCOs, as well as media outlets, independent bloggers, and civil society actors. This structure aligns with network theory principles, where influence and information flow are concentrated through key nodes that enable broader communication and coordination.

Data sharing, joint exchange and publication: Nigeria maintains a regional database, documenting cross-border disinformation and hoaxes. Guinea-Bissau, Togo, and Benin participate in data exchange, reinforcing a collective approach to countering disinformation. Ghana's role through the Africa Fact Network hub exemplifies how regional networks facilitate cross-border data and information sharing. International platforms such as IFCN enable fact-checkers to exchange reports and emerging trends, thereby working toward harmonisation of standards and responses. Also, some FCOs engage in co-publication of fact-check reports and alerts, especially in politically volatile environments. This helps to extend reach and reinforce the credibility of claims and fact-check reports.

Training and skills enhancement: This is among the most accessible forms of collaboration and serves as an entry point for regional cooperation. Workshops, both local and

international, help FCOs to share methodologies, verification techniques, and emerging practices. Training contributes to strengthening technical knowledge and skills on OSINT, AI ethics awareness, and content manipulation detection. It also promotes methodological consistency and professional growth across countries.

Mentorship programmes and small-scale funding: Ghana and Nigeria foster sustainability, skill transfer and mentorship in fact-checking and institutional strengthening. This supports the ongoing development of credible fact-checking ecosystems.

Technology and operational support: Technology sharing and data support exist, but remain limited and not so coordinated. Nigeria exemplifies technology support by providing access to AI tools and sharing databases of flagged accounts. Other countries share geolocation and verification tools and engage in technology exchanges, and operational support.

Cross-border monitoring and investigation: Cross-country monitoring is the most resource-intensive form of collaboration for tracking digital threats. It requires significant coordination and capacity. Joint investigations—especially during electoral cycles—are vital for countering disinformation. Nigeria's Fact-Checkers' Coalition (NFC) exemplifies an organised, coalition-based approach to coordinated verification efforts during elections. Ghana's Ghana Fact-Checking Coalition and the Media Elections Situation Room (MESR) serve similar function, engaging stakeholders such as Electoral Commission and National Media Commission to protect electoral integrity. Moreso, Nigeria demonstrates some coordinated efforts in monitoring disinformation related to coups and political instability in the Sahel. Guinea-Bissau, Benin and Togo report limited cross-border activities, highlighting opportunities for expansion.

Peer review: Participation in international networks like the IFCN and the Africa Facts Network enhances peer review, standard harmonisation, and coordinated responses. These partnerships facilitate data sharing, joint investigations, and the development of best practices. It fosters a stepping stone toward a cohesive regional response to cross-border disinformation campaigns.

5.6 Collaboration with other stakeholders: Forms and levels of engagements

This section analysed diverse forms of collaboration between FCOs and stakeholders within and outside the West African region. Partnerships are recognised as vital for sustaining fact-checking operations. Collaboration is often strategic and targeted. However, the nature and depth of partnerships vary, ranging from formal international engagements to minimal or informal collaborations, with limited governance structures in place. Many partnerships rely on informal agreements. Coordination tends to intensify during high-stakes periods such as elections or health crises, but diminishes during routine activities.

Key stakeholders and focus areas of collaboration: The FCOs collaborate with a broad spectrum of partners, including national and community media, journalists, social media platforms, CSOs, governmental agencies, and international fact-checking bodies. These partnerships aim to:

- Co-produce fact-checking content
- Monitor and report disinformation across digital platforms
- Disseminate verified information widely
- Strengthen journalists' capacities through workshops and training
- Promote media literacy and public awareness campaigns

Media and civil society partnerships: Collaboration with media and CSOs is central. Nigeria and Ghana highlighted partnerships with newsrooms and technology labs. This enables shared access to verification tools and wider distribution of debunked content. Both Nigeria and Ghana emphasised institutional partnerships as vital for knowledge transfer, while Senegal, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Benin note that strong collaboration enhances access to information and organisational credibility. Partnerships often focus on strengthening ethical journalism, media literacy, and community engagement. The CSOs play a crucial role in countering digital threats. They facilitate community awareness, community discussions, resource sharing, and amplify verified information at grassroots levels.

Partnerships with digital platforms and electoral management bodies (EMBs): In some cases, the FCOs work with social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X to report disinformation and share early warnings to limit its spread. They also collaborate

with EMBs and provide real-time verification support which helps to counter false narratives. Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and The Gambia exemplify such partnerships during electoral periods.

Innovative collaborations: Some countries emphasised innovation and regional cooperation. For example, TogoCheck partners with the Africa Women Journalism Project to address gender disinformation. Also, collaborations with organisations like PANOS West Africa and the Observatoire Togolais des Médias (OTM) focus on journalist training and tool development, including bot verification. Formal mechanisms such as Right to Information (RTI) requests and institutional visits, particularly in Ghana, improve access to official data enhancing accuracy and credibility of reporting.

5.7 Challenges confronting West African fact-checking organisations

This section synthesised the barriers hindering the effectiveness and sustainability of FCOs in West Africa. It emphasised the interconnected nature of these challenges. The primary categories include organisational capacity and funding, regional coordination barriers, technical and technological constraints, political pressures, socio-cultural influences, linguistic hurdles, and regulatory gaps. These challenges collectively impede the ability of FCOs to mount cohesive, timely, and impactful responses to digital disinformation across the region. These challenges are discussed in detail below.

a. Absence of a formal regional coordination framework

A significant structural gap that confronts FCOs is the lack of a formal regional institutional mechanism for countering digital threats. Without a standardised framework for information exchange, collaboration remains patchwork and dependent on individual goodwill. Also, different national policies and regulatory standards fragment cooperation efforts. Establishing regional harmonised protocols is essential for a coordinated response to digital disinformation.

b. Organisational capacity and financial constraints

A predominant challenge faced by the FCOs across West Africa is limited funding. Many FCOs rely heavily on short-term, project-based donor funding. This hampers long-term strategic planning, staff retention, and procurement of advanced verification tools. For example,

Nigeria's dependence on donor support constrains both operational effectiveness and safety of fact-checkers. Ghana highlights how the absence of multi-year funding affects remuneration, contributes to staff attrition, and limits the acquisition of sophisticated analytical platforms to counter digital threats. This limits the outreach and impact of fact-checking.

Similarly, in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Togo, Benin, Cape Verde, The Gambia and Sierra Leone, fragile local advertising markets restrict revenue generation and geographic coverage of fact-checking initiatives. Financial scarcity affects operational efficiency, procurement of verification equipment, professional training, retention of skilled staff and overall organisational performance of FCOs. Dependence on unstable funding sources also threatens editorial independence, making fact-checking susceptible to donor, political and economic pressures.

c. Technological advancement and technical barriers

The rapid evolution of AI, combined with technical barriers, represent an evolving challenge for many FCOs. Increasingly, this makes it difficult to adapt and respond effectively to emerging digital threats. Limited access to advanced forensic and verification software, inadequate infrastructural support, and the inability to keep pace with the proliferation of AI-generated disinformation further weaken operational capacities. The emergence of AI tools, such as deepfakes and automated disinformation bots, introduces a new layer of complexity. Malicious actors leverage AI generated disinformation at an unprecedented scale and speed, often outpacing manual verification efforts. The detection of AI-generated content, especially within encrypted messaging platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram, remains challenging because these platforms are difficult to monitor.

This technological deficit is compounded by infrastructural deficiencies and limited standardised tools and software. Also, the absence of harmonised verification methodologies across countries hampers cross-border collaboration and timely responses. The FCOs reported inconsistent practices stemming from disparate verification tools, which delay regional responses to digital threats.

d. Data scarcity and inconsistencies

Reliable access to authoritative sources of data is critical for credible fact-checking, yet many FCOs face significant hurdles in this domain. Limited documentation, unreliable official data, and restricted access to resource persons constrain verification accuracy and speed. Togo, Benin, Seirra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire for example, report difficulties in corroborating claims due to data scarcity, which hampers timely responses and the credibility of reports. This challenge is compounded by weak regulatory environments that vary across countries, creating additional barriers to data sharing and cooperation.

e. Political pressures and regulatory challenges

Political dynamics significantly influence the operational environment of FCOs. In many contexts, political pressures manifest in self-censorship, especially during elections or coups, delaying fact-checking activities. The FCOs noted that the absence of formal frameworks for engagement with state actors fosters mistrust and hampers collaboration.

In Nigeria, fact-checkers are sometimes targeted with reputational attacks, being labelled as partisan or biased. This undermines their credibility and exposes them to online harassment. Guinea-Bissau and Guinea Conakry, and Sahlian states—Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger experience heightened risks of political instability, which restrict investigative scope and foster an environment of self-censorship.

Legal and regulatory environments further complicate the work of FCOs. Divergent national policies on data privacy and media regulation create a fragmented legal landscape that obstructs cross-border cooperation. The FCOs highlighted how inconsistent policies and weak enforcement mechanisms diminish the effectiveness of regional initiatives. They further drew attention to what they described as the inaction or delayed response from major technology firms and platforms following formal reports of harmful content. This pattern allows disinformation actors and harmful narratives to persist.

f. Security concerns and civic space restrictions

Fact-checkers' safety is a critical concern; particularly, in politically sensitive states like Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Senegal, Togo, and coup-affected countries—Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, where political instability and authoritarian tendencies expose journalists and

fact-checkers to threats. These conditions inhibit open discourse, foster self-censorship, and restrict the scope of fact-checking activities. The erosion of civic space, driven by political repression and restrictive laws, further undermines the independence and effectiveness of FCOs.

g. Socio-cultural and linguistic barriers

Beyond structural and political challenges, socio-cultural factors significantly influence the success of fact-checking initiatives. Nigeria pointed out confirmation bias, where citizens resist corrections that conflict with pre-existing beliefs, especially when disinformation is intertwined with religious or ethnic identities. Ghana noted a general public mistrust and low media literacy, which undermine the acceptance and dissemination of verified information. Linguistic diversity also poses substantial hurdles. West Africa's multilingual landscape—comprising Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries—complicates communication and coordination. While the FCOs illustrate how language barriers delay the dissemination of fact-checked content, Guinea-Bissau's multilingual environment (Portuguese, French, and English) further complicates regional collaboration.

6. LESSONS ON THE OPERATIONAL DYNAMICS AND IMPACT OF WEST AFRICAN FCOs

6.1 Key insights on the challenges

The challenges faced by West African FCOs reflect broader issues common in low-resource and developing contexts. Organisational capacity—encompassing human, financial, technological, and infrastructural resources—are crucial determinants of effectiveness. Reliance on unstable donor funding, limited technological infrastructure, and political pressures undermines the sustainability of fact-checking efforts.

Technological advancements, especially in AI and encrypted communication platforms, present opportunities, vulnerabilities and threats. While new tools can enhance verification, they also enable sophisticated disinformation campaigns that may outpace current capacities. Addressing these gaps requires investment in advanced verification tools, technical training, and regional collaboration.

Furthermore, socio-cultural dynamics, linguistic diversity, fragile trust in institutions and political authorities, identity-based politics and resistance require targeted strategies to enhance public engagement and acceptance of fact-checking outputs. Strengthening institutional frameworks, harmonising legal frameworks, and ensuring the safety of fact-checkers are vital steps toward building resilient fact-checking ecosystems.

Overcoming these intertwined challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that combines increased resource allocation, regional cooperation, capacity building, regulation, and socio-cultural engagement. Only through such integrated efforts can West African FCOs effectively counter the evolving landscape of digital disinformation.

6.2 Lessons on the operational dynamics and impact of FCOs

The sustainability of FCOs in West Africa hinges on a complex interplay of financial stability, institutional partnerships, political independence, and regional coordination. A deep understanding of these interconnected factors reveals structural vulnerabilities and strategic pathways necessary for ensuring long-term viability of FCOs.

a. Evolving and informal nature of collaboration

Collaboration among West African FCOs is characterised by an evolving and largely informal landscape. These organisations engage with a diverse array of stakeholders—including state actors, CSOs, legacy media, and social media actors—to enhance their capacity to counter digital threats. Such collaborations encompass various activities, including joint training, coordinated investigations, data sharing, technology exchange, and cross-border monitoring of disinformation campaigns. While these efforts demonstrate a growing recognition of the importance of collective action, the lack of formalised structures limits their coherence, scalability, and strategic influence. The informal network model, though adaptable, often results in fragmented efforts that hinder the development of a unified regional response to digital disinformation.

b. Effectiveness and impact of strategies deployed by FCOs

The effectiveness of FCOs in combating digital threats presents a nuanced picture, combining promising developments with notable limitations. Their influence varies across thematic issues, digital platforms, languages, and audience segmentation. This reflects the complex landscape of digital disinformation.

Technological tools, especially AI and digital verification platforms such as Google Reverse Image Search, TinEye, and InVID, have enhanced capacity and scalability. These tools enable FCOs to process larger volumes of claims more efficiently than manual verification, as evidenced by their usage in Nigeria and Ghana. Moreover, behavioural change indicators—such as verification habits among students, capacity-building initiatives for journalists, and the adoption of fact-checking practices in some newsrooms—demonstrate a positive journalistic and societal impact.

The study also suggested that fact-checking can influence public perceptions, with observable reductions in belief in false information following exposure to fact-check reports, republication of fact-check reports by media, and heightened awareness of specific issues. Self-assessment reports from FCOs affirmed a relatively positive impact of fact-checking initiatives.

However, despite these advances, the overall impact remains low to moderate. Challenges

persist in achieving broad behavioural change, consistent platform engagement, and meaningful influence over public discourse and political narratives.

c. Persistent structural limitations

Despite the encouraging developments, the regional landscape revealed significant structural gaps. The IFCN highlights the lack of systematic mapping of collaborative structures among African fact-checkers. This limits the understanding of how these networks influence media and political spheres, and how they contribute to countering digital disinformation. There is also a dearth of comparative analyses assessing organisational capacity, resource sharing, and influence across countries, which hinder strategic planning and regional coordination.

d. Constraints on collaboration and partnership effectiveness

While informal partnerships—such as joint training, content syndication, and shared verification tools—are emerging, they are often poorly coordinated and lack formal frameworks. Empirical evidence on the structure, scope, and impact of these collaborations remains limited. Consequently, responses to MDI and digital harm tend to be scattered, reactive, and uncoordinated.

Most FCOs operate in relative isolation. They face structural and institutional challenges that hinder collective impact. These include staff inconsistencies and attrition, financial instability, dependence on external donors, infrastructural deficiencies, and difficulties in tracking and demonstrating impact. The fragmentation of efforts across the region—due to divergent strategies, resource limitations, and lack of unified standards—further diminishes the potential for a cohesive regional response.

e. Donor dependency and organisational autonomy

While donor support is vital, overreliance presents intrinsic risks to the independence of FCOs. A foundational determinant of FCOs' sustainability is their access to consistent and adequate financial resources. Across West Africa, the FCOs heavily depend on donor funding, predominantly in short-term, project-based formats such as election monitoring initiatives. For example, Nigeria and Ghana exemplify how reliance on external donors leads to cyclical operational capacity. The FCOs scale up during election periods and scale down afterward. Electoral cycles influence funding availability on one hand, and cause operational lags and

strategic vulnerabilities on the other hand. This creates significant sustainability gaps of initiatives. Moreover, the cyclical dependency impedes long-term strategic planning, institutional memory, and discontinuity of initiatives to counter digital threats.

Furthermore, the dependence on donors introduces vulnerabilities to shifting external priorities and funding climates. Reliance on short-term grants constrains investment in advanced technologies and human capital, leaving organisations reactive rather than proactive. Donor funding often comes with conditionalities that may threaten editorial independence, raising concerns about external influence on verification processes. External funding limits the capacity of FCOs for autonomous decision-making. It potentially aligns their priorities with donor interests rather than local needs. This sometimes distorts thematic focus, exposes organisations to external strategic influences and undermines their credibility.

To counteract these vulnerabilities, FCOs advocate funding diversification strategies—such as establishing endowment funds or revenue-generating activities—aimed at reducing reliance on external donors. They emphasised the importance of diversifying funding pools in order to adapt to the shifts in global donor ecosystems. This will contribute to ensuring stable and autonomous operations.

f. Institutional partnerships as a sustainability lever

Institutional partnerships are recognised as essential for long-term operational sustainability. Collaborations with media outlets, technology labs, CSOs, and state actors facilitate resource sharing, capacity building, and broader dissemination of verified content. Nigeria and Ghana cited partnerships with entities like Code for Africa and IFCN as integral to accessing expensive verification tools and scaling impact.

However, these partnerships are contingent on mutual alignment of goals, institutional stability, political stability, and resource availability. When partner organisations face resource constraints, collaboration may be weakened. Some FCOs warn against poorly structured partnerships that risk exposing organisations to undue political influence, and potentially compromise neutrality and credibility.

g. Editorial independence and navigating external pressures

Maintaining editorial independence amidst political and public pressures is a persistent challenge for FCOs. Strategies such as adherence to strong ethical frameworks, transparency, and community engagement serve as resilience mechanisms. The FCOs exemplify this through commitment to the IFCN Code of Principles, emphasising non-partisanship and methodological transparency to bolster credibility.

Also, the FCOs employ proactive strategies such as threat anticipation and deliberate non-engagement with provocations to safeguard independence. The approach of pre-emptively identifying potential challenges and avoiding reactive responses demonstrates a strategic effort to insulate verification work from political interference.

Additionally, civil society partnerships; particularly, in sensitive political contexts like Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Senegal, Togo, and the Sahelian countries provide a protective layer by broadening support networks and fostering societal resilience against external pressures. These relationships serve both operational and strategic functions, reinforcing organisational independence.

h. Regional coordination: Barriers and opportunities

The absence of formal regional frameworks significantly hampers long-term sustainability. The FCOs across West Africa highlighted that without structured, and standardised mechanisms for collaboration—such as shared databases, joint training and programmes, cross-border collaboration, monitoring and investigation, technology deployment and coordinated response strategies and mechanisms—efforts remain fragmented and less impactful. This structural gap impairs the ability to respond cohesively to transnational digital threats, and diminishes the collective influence of FCOs in shaping policy and public discourse.

i. Long-term sustainability of the FCOs in West Africa

While West African FCOs have demonstrated resilience and incremental progress in countering digital threats, their efforts are constrained by informal organisational structures, resource limitations, and fragmentation. Strengthening formal collaboration frameworks, enhancing resource sharing, and conducting systematic organisational and impact analyses are vital to amplifying their influence, ensuring sustainable, and coordinating regional

responses and mechanisms to countering digital disinformation.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCED COLLABORATION OF FCOS IN WEST AFRICA

7.1 Conclusion

The digital environment in West Africa is characterised by a dynamic interplay of opportunities and threats. While digital platforms have democratised information access, they have simultaneously become vectors for disinformation and external influence campaigns that threaten societal stability and democratic processes. Addressing these challenges require a coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach that leverage the expertise and capacities of regional institutions, national governments, civil society, and international partners. The FCOs are at the forefront of this effort, serving as vital defenders of truth and resilience in the region's evolving digital landscape. The study underscored that fact-checking efforts in West Africa should contend not only with digital information flows, but, also with sociocultural, economic, and infrastructural realities that shape information access, trust, and dissemination.

The research further highlighted the importance of a coordinated and well-resourced fact-checking ecosystem in West Africa to effectively combat misinformation, disinformation, and digital threats. Despite the presence of multiple FCOs within the region, significant gaps remain—notably, the absence of a formalised regional fact-checking framework and dedicated funding mechanisms. These gaps hinder the potential for collective impact of the FCOs' ability to address the complex, and cross-border nature of digital threats in West Africa.

The diverse organisational models and governance structures currently in place reveal a need for greater alignment and strategic coordination. Strengthening operational capacities, fostering regional networks, and establishing shared platforms for resource and knowledge exchange can significantly enhance the influence and effectiveness of the FCOs.

Furthermore, the strategic influence of FCOs extends beyond fact verification. The FCOs are vigorous actors in shaping public discourse, influencing policy responses, and fostering social cohesion across multiple countries, languages, and media environments. Recognising how these organisations operate, collaborate, and impact public knowledge is essential for designing sustainable interventions.

The findings advocate a multi-layered approach that includes establishing regional alliances, regional coordinated framework, cross-border collaboration, securing dedicated funding, and promoting media and information literacy. Such efforts will empower FCOs to better counter digital harms, support democratic consolidation, and promote social resilience.

In conclusion, building a robust, collaborative, and well-supported regional fact-checking infrastructure is fundamental to strengthening West Africa's information ecosystem. This will require strategic commitment from regional bodies like ECOWAS, continental bodies like AU, national governments, civil society, and development partners, aligned with the ECOWAS Vision 2050, the ECOWAS-MFWA MoU, and other regional frameworks and initiatives. Through these combined efforts, the region can better safeguard its democratic processes, social stability, and the rights of its citizens to access accurate and reliable information.

7.2 Recommendations for strengthening regional fact-checking ecosystems in West Africa

1. Harmonise methodologies and standards through a centralised regional framework

- a) **Develop a unified regional taxonomy and definitions:** ECOWAS in collaboration with the AU, should lead efforts to establish a common language and definitions for digital harm, misinformation, disinformation, foreign interference, and state threat. This facilitates shared understanding and consistent practices across countries.
- b) **Create standardised verification protocols and guidelines:** A regional task force comprising representatives from national FCOs, media, civil society, and international partners should develop comprehensive manuals and guidelines for fact-checking methodologies, performance metrics, and impact measurement. These standards should be adaptable to local contexts, but, anchored in best practices.
- c) **Agree on common verification tools and indicators:** Develop or adopt regional digital verification tools (e.g., image/video analysis platforms, bot detection systems) and shared indicators for impact assessment to enable consistent and comparable

measurement of effectiveness.

2. Enhance information sharing, rapid response, and capacity building

- a) **Create a shared data and alert platform:** Develop a real-time, secure digital platform for cross-border alerts, data sharing, and resource mobilisation. This platform should facilitate rapid identification of disinformation campaigns and coordinated responses.
- b) **Establish a rapid response hotline:** Establish a regional hotline and coordination team to respond swiftly to emerging disinformation threats, and mobilise joint verification efforts.
- c) **Conduct joint capacity-building initiatives:** Organise regular regional training, webinars, and workshops to harmonise skills in verification, digital literacy, and threat detection with targeted modules to bridge language gaps in (Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone).
- d) **Invest in technological capacity:** Support the acquisition and development of advanced digital verification tools, AI-powered detection systems, and infrastructure to ensure that FCOs can leverage innovative solutions.

3. Establish and strengthen formal regional collaboration and network governance

- a) **Establish a regional coordinating framework, platform or body for coordinating the work of FCOs:** ECOWAS, governments, supported by the AU and development partners should create a dedicated platform, framework or secretariat to coordinate fact-checking efforts, share resources, and facilitate rapid response to digital threats. This entity would serve as a hub for knowledge exchange, joint projects, and strategic planning.
- b) **Expand and formalise national coalitions of FCOs into regional coalitions:** Support the growth of national coalitions (e.g., Nigeria Fact-Checking Coalition³⁵, Ghana Fact-

³⁵ The [Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition \(NFC\)](#) consists of three IFCN-certified fact-checking organisations (IFCN signatories), civil societies and newsrooms working together to curb the spread of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria.

Checking Coalition³⁶) into transnational networks to facilitate cross-border collaboration, joint investigations, and resource pooling to counter digital threats.

- c) **Deepen collaboration with civil society, media, and academic institutions:** Build strong partnerships with CSOs; media organisations such as the MFWA; universities; regional media networks; development partners such as GIZ and European Union; regional bodies such as ECOWAS; and international organisations such as UNESCO to enhance capacity, outreach, and sustainability of FCOs in countering digital threats.
- d) **Leverage continental structures:** Advocate integrating fact-checking and digital threats monitoring into existing continental frameworks such as ECOWAS's early warning systems (ECOWARN) and AU's information integrity initiatives.

4. Foster policy development and institutional support

- a) **Formulate regional policies on digital information integrity:** ECOWAS, AU and governments should spearhead the development of regional policies, including a proposed "regional framework on information integrity," to guide member states' efforts and ensure coherence.
- b) **Create a specialised commission or task force:** Under ECOWAS and/or AU, establish a dedicated body to oversee digital threat responses, fact-checking standards, and policy implementation, inclusive of fact-checkers, influencers, media and civil society actors.
- c) **Implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:** Regularly assess regional collaboration efforts to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging digital threats.

5. Promote sustainable funding and institutional resilience

- a) **Secure multi-stakeholder funding for FCOs initiatives:** Encourage joint funding

³⁶ The [Ghana Fact-Checking Coalition \(GFC\)](#) is a collaborative initiative formed to counter misinformation and disinformation during Ghana's general elections. It brings together the country's three primary fact-checking organisations: GhanFact (FactSpace West Africa, Dubawa Ghana (CJID), and Fach-Check Ghana (Media Foundation for West Africa)

applications involving regional bodies, governments, international donors, and philanthropic organisations to reduce reliance on short-term project grants.

- b) **Support endowment funds and revenue-generating activities:** Diversify income and scale it regionally to promote financial independence and organisational sustainability.
- c) **Strengthen governance and autonomy of FCOs:** Develop policies and institutional frameworks that reinforce independence from external influence, with oversight mechanisms aligned with regional standards.

6. Institutional responsibilities

- i. ECOWAS: Lead regional coordination, integrate fact-checking into early warning systems, facilitate cross-border campaigns, and support policy development.
- ii. AU: Develop continental frameworks, promote harmonised standards, and support large-scale digital literacy and public awareness initiatives.
- iii. National governments: Enforce regional standards, allocate resources, and embed fact-checking within national digital governance policies.
- iv. National fact-checking networks and coalitions: Implement harmonised methodologies, share data and resources, conduct joint training, and coordinate rapid responses.
- v. International partners (UNESCO, UNDP, GIZ, EU, NDI, NED and other development partners): Provide technical assistance, funding, and capacity-building support aligned with regional standards.

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*Empowering Media and
Voices for Public Good*

Media Foundation for West Africa
Aar-Bakor Street, Ogbojo

 +233 (0) 302 555 327

 Media Foundation for West Africa

 @TheMFWA

 Media Foundation for West Africa(MFWA)

 info@mfw.org

 www.mfw.org