



Challenges & Support Needs of Exiled Journalists from Sudan, South Sudan & Ethiopia in Kenya

July 11, 2023

Preface

This report is a testament to the courage of journalists from Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, who, despite being exiled, continue to uphold the principles of their profession amidst immense adversity. Their resilience and commitment to fostering transparent, inclusive, and fair dialogue in the face of violent conflict and suffering are truly inspiring.

The current violent conflict in Sudan has forced many journalists to seek refuge in Kenya. Their plight is a stark reminder of the threats to press freedom, exacerbated by an environment rife with disinformation and biased reporting. Yet, these journalists remain undeterred, their resolve unbroken, embodying the vision of informed societies that thrive.

Our recent focus group discussions in Nairobi offered a platform for these brave individuals from Sudan, Ethiopia and South Sudan to share their experiences. Their harrowing and enlightening insights will guide MiCT's efforts to extend its Fellowship for Critical Voices Programme to the East African region. We owe a debt of gratitude to these journalists for their invaluable contributions.

We thank our partners, the International Press Association of East Africa (IPAEA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the Hannah-Arendt-Initiative. This initiative, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Commissioner for Culture and Media of the German government, is dedicated to protecting and supporting endangered journalists worldwide.

At MiCT, we are committed to facilitating transitions in collaboration with our partners. We work towards supporting audiences to adapt to changing circumstances caused by the climate crisis, conflict, health emergencies, disasters, ever more arbitrary systems or challenging economic circumstances. Cooperation is vital as we work with our partners towards financial viability and creating contextually relevant, valuable content and platforms.

In the face of violent conflict and suffering, the role of journalists becomes even more crucial. They are the bearers of truth, the voices that refuse to be silenced. At MiCT, we are committed to supporting these voices. This is how we strengthen our partners and co-create and enrich spaces where societies can thrive.

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1 / Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from two focus group discussions held with exiled journalists from Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, organised by MiCT/IPAEA. The workshops took place at the Baraza Media Lab in Nairobi, Kenya, on the 5th and 7th of July, 2023. The aim was to understand the unique challenges and needs of these journalists living in exile, with the ultimate goal of identifying ways to support them more effectively.

Key Findings

Legal Challenges

Journalists face significant legal hurdles, including difficulties with visa renewals, obtaining work permits, and achieving refugee asylum status. Systemic corruption and security issues exacerbate these challenges.

Language Barriers

Sudanese journalists, who predominantly speak Arabic, and East African journalists face language barriers that hinder their integration into Kenyan society and limit their ability to work effectively.

Financial Constraints and Accommodation Issues

High accommodation costs in Nairobi and limited income opportunities place a significant financial burden on journalists.

Lack of Equipment and Workspace

Many journalists lack essential journalism equipment and secure workspaces with reliable internet access, hindering their ability to work effectively.

Healthcare Access and Psychological Support

Access to affordable healthcare and insurance is a significant challenge for many journalists. There is also a clear need for psychological support to help journalists cope with trauma and stress.

Capacity Building

Journalists expressed a need for capacity-building programmes and training opportunities to enhance their skills and improve their work.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges, including advocating for legal support, establishing language classes, exploring financial assistance schemes, securing funding for essential journalism equipment, partnering with healthcare providers, implementing psychological support programmes, and developing capacity-building programmes. These recommendations provide a roadmap for supporting these journalists more effectively in their crucial work.

2 / Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report synthesises insights gathered from two focus group discussions facilitated by MiCT/IPAEA involving exiled journalists from Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia currently residing in Kenya.

The focus group discussions served as a platform for these journalists to share their experiences and identify the key challenges they face in their professional and personal lives. These challenges, spanning legal, financial, accommodation, language, access to information, health, workspace and equipment, capacity building, and psychological support, are outlined in the report.

The participants' suggestions for improvement have been incorporated into recommendations to address these challenges.

The findings from these workshops will be instrumental in shaping the support offered by MiCT's Fellowship for Critical Voices East Africa, not just to journalists from the three countries represented in the focus groups but to all journalists from the region and beyond.

Current Situation in Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia

As of 2023, the situation in Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia is marked by violence, political instability, conflict, and human rights issues.

Sudan is currently at the epicentre of a large-scale violent conflict that erupted in the spring of 2023. The hostilities between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia have led to a mass displacement of over 2.2 million people and claimed more than 2,000 lives since the battles started in April, according to the United Nations.

The intensely violent conflict has heavily impacted key areas such as Khartoum, Omdurman, and Darfur, disrupting government infrastructure, hospitals, and other vital services. The resistance committees and other groups advocating for peace, civilian rule, and a security sector overhaul continue to face hurdles in their efforts due to ongoing violence.

This unrest has been particularly detrimental to Sudan's journalists and media makers. Many journalists affected by this violent conflict have been forced to seek refuge in safer areas within the country, such as Port Sudan, or have been compelled to go into exile. This situation often makes their mission to provide impartial and critical reporting incredibly challenging and risky.

“ The situation for journalists to freely and safely do their job won't get easier.

The widespread violence, forced bias, threats from conflicting parties, and attacks on media facilities have created a dangerous environment for journalists. They struggle to maintain neutrality while disseminating essential information amidst damaged facilities, inconsistent power and internet access, lack of personal protective equipment, and significant physical threats.

Against this backdrop, the necessity to safeguard journalists' rights and ensure their safety has reached a critical point. It is crucial to provide protective measures for journalists and media makers in general and, most urgently, to those facing acute physical, psychological, or digital threats and those injured or severely traumatised.

South Sudan continues to face a humanitarian crisis due to the protracted civil war, which has resulted in widespread displacement, food insecurity, and human rights abuses. The peace agreement signed in 2018 has not fully achieved its objectives, and the country remains politically unstable.

Reporting on subjects such as state violence, civil war, corruption or human rights abuses, or reporting that is otherwise critical of the government or public officials leaves journalists in South Sudan the most vulnerable to various forms of attacks, violence and trauma.

In Ethiopia, the conflict in the Tigray region has escalated into a humanitarian crisis, with reports of war crimes and human rights abuses. The government's crackdown on opposition groups and the media has led to a deterioration of the political situation in the country.

Many reporters whose coverage did not toe the government line have been detained on serious charges such as 'promoting terrorism'. Some media outlets, such as the monthly Addis Standard, have been arbitrarily suspended. The Awlo Media Center website announced that it was ceasing operations because of threats and harassment," writes Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in its 2022 Press Freedom Index.

General Situation in East Africa

The outlook for the East African region, already stifled by significant limits to freedom of expression, indicates that the situation for journalists to freely and safely do their job won't get easier. Floods and droughts, environmental degradation, violent conflict, swelling populations, competing interests, and stressed water resources, all compounded by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, have whipped up turbulent seas.

In some cases, journalists are also targeted because of their identities, such as their race, minority status, sexual orientation or gender. Women journalists are often at an increased risk of attack for breaking the dominant rules of gender inequity and stereotypes. Additionally, journalists reporting on feminist issues are threatened with legal action or abuse because of the subject matter of their stories.

Reporting on these issues while upholding journalistic standards like truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability becomes ever more critical yet more challenging.

Repercussions like censorship, political pressure, intimidation, job insecurity, arbitrary arrest and violent attacks are rising. These threats affect the targeted journalists and society across

East Africa as a whole, as intimidation, denigration, and violence against journalists have implications for freedom of expression, democratic norms and access to information at large.

Context of Exiled Journalists

The journalists from these countries have been operating in a context of political instability, conflict, and restricted press freedom. Many have been forced to flee their home countries due to threats to their safety and persecution for their work.

In Kenya, they face numerous challenges, including legal issues related to their refugee status, financial difficulties, language barriers, and limited access to resources and opportunities for their work. Despite these challenges, they continue to strive to report on the situations in their home countries and hold the powerful to account.

Against this backdrop, journalists in and from the region (living in exile) urgently need professional and personal support – assistance the MiCT Fellowship for Critical Voices aims to provide in East Africa.

3 / Methodology

Conduct of the Focus Group Discussions and Data Collection

The focus group discussions were conducted in the form of two workshops, one with Sudanese journalists and the other with journalists from South Sudan and Ethiopia. Each workshop was held at the Baraza Media Lab in Nairobi, Kenya, and lasted for several hours.

The selection of journalists for these workshops was mindful of identity considerations, including minority status, sexual orientation, and gender. However, it's important to note that due to various constraints, not all identities could be represented in these discussions. For instance, the majority of participants in both workshops were male.

The workshops began with an introduction by MiCT, providing an overview of MiCT's work and purpose. Each participant then introduced themselves, sharing their background, current work status, and the most pressing challenges they currently face in exile in Kenya.

The discussions were structured around the most pressing challenges these journalists face in exile in Kenya. These challenges were grouped into several categories.

Data was collected during the workshops through note-taking and the use of flipcharts to visually represent the challenges faced by the participants and the support needed to overcome these challenges. The notes were taken by a dedicated notetaker, who documented the discussions, insights, and recommendations shared by the participants.

Data Analysis and Next Steps

The collected data was then analysed by categorising the challenges and support needed into several themes, such as legal documentation, financial matters, accommodation and language, access to information and audience reach, health and healthcare, working space and equipment, capacity building, scholarships and support, and psychological support. This thematic analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by the journalists and the potential solutions to address these challenges.

The analysis of the data led to the identification of the next steps, including compiling this detailed report, exploring collaborations with Kenyan journalism institutions and professionals to support the journalists, seeking partnerships to provide capacity-building programmes and training opportunities, and advocacy efforts to address the challenges faced by the journalists in Kenya.

4 / Findings

Detailed Findings from the Focus Group with Sudanese Journalists

The Sudanese journalists identified several unique challenges and needs:

Legal Documentation

Journalists face visa renewal, work permits, and refugee asylum difficulties. The visa renewal process is particularly challenging when the visa has expired. The collapsing passport system in Sudan adds to their uncertainty.

Financial Matters

The journalists highlighted difficulties in receiving payments through banking systems and opening bank accounts with short-term visas. They also expressed financial challenges in covering stories in Sudan due to limited funding.

Accommodation and Language

The cost of renting an apartment in Nairobi is a significant financial burden for many journalists. Additionally, as most Sudanese journalists predominantly speak Arabic rather than English, the language barrier limits their ability to communicate effectively within Nairobi's English-speaking context.

Access to Information and Audience Reach

The lack of press freedom in Sudan, with control over traditional media outlets by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), was a significant concern. Movement difficulties within Sudan, both in Khartoum and other regions, were also noted.

“What do we do if the passport expires?”

Health and Healthcare

Access to healthcare in Kenya is a challenge due to the high cost of services, especially for those without citizenship or work permits.

Working Space and Equipment

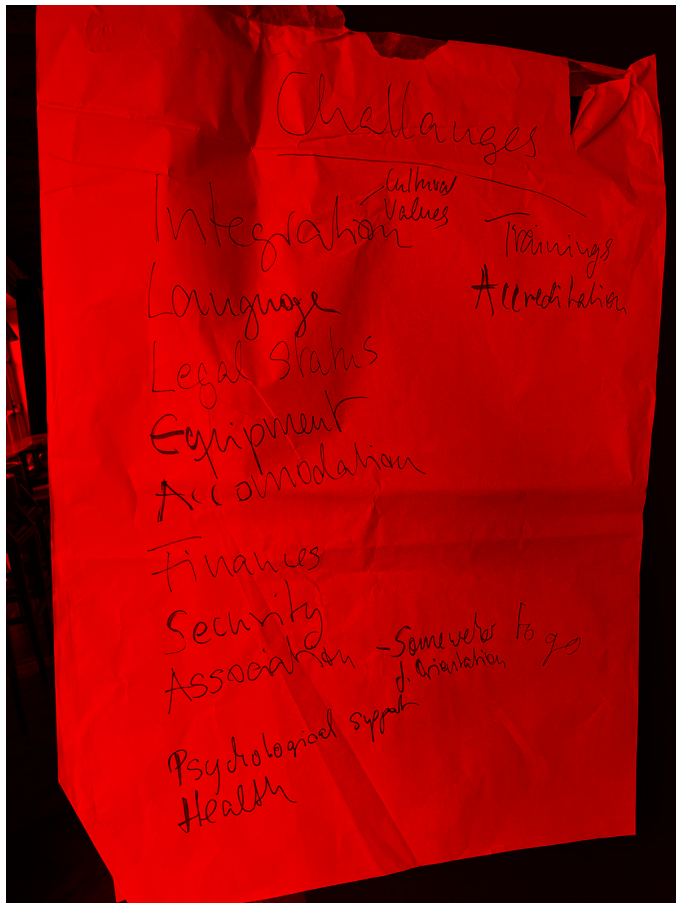
The journalists expressed a need for essential equipment, including smartphones, laptops, and audio recorders. They also raised concerns about potential targeting by the Sudanese Embassy in Nairobi, leading to a call for safe working environments.

Capacity Building, Scholarships and Support

The journalists highlighted the need for networking opportunities, training programmes focused on digital security and other journalism skills, and support for those accepted into Kenyan schools for higher education.

Psychological Support

The profound impact of their experiences necessitates psychological support programmes. Addressing their emotional needs is essential for their overall well-being and professional growth.



Detailed Findings from the Focus Group with East African Journalists

The East African journalists, in these focusgroups from South Sudan and Ethiopia, identified several unique challenges and needs:

Security

Ethiopian and South Sudanese journalists risk covert deportation to their home countries, where severe prosecution or worse awaits them. It's essential to facilitate their relocation to a safe third country, potentially within Europe.

Legal Status

The journalists face challenges in obtaining work permits and achieving refugee asylum status, largely due to systemic corruption. They also faced difficulties getting SIM cards or opening bank accounts without an ID card. Unique security challenges were reported due to the strong diplomatic ties between South Sudan and Kenya.

Language Barrier

The journalists unanimously agreed on the importance of learning Kiswahili for their integration and security in Kenya.

Accommodation

Housing is expensive in Kenya, with rents posing a burden given their limited income.

Financial Issues

Only two participants reported having paid work, with the rest doing voluntary work as journalists.

Equipment

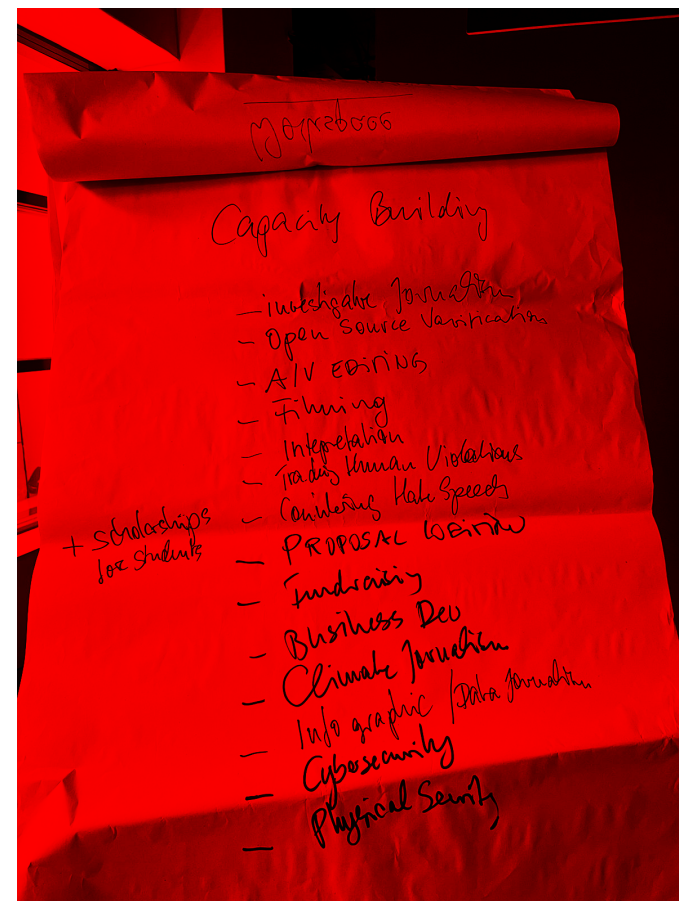
The journalists agreed that having journalism equipment, including VPN, editing software, computers, and mobile phones, would enable them to work and increase their income.

Health and Psychological Support

Obtaining health insurance is a significant challenge, especially for refugees, largely due to the high costs involved. Many South Sudanese participants reported facing trauma issues and needing psychological support.

Capacity Building and Training

The journalists expressed a need for training in various areas, including web design and development, digital and physical security, journalism and investigative journalism, infographics and graphic design, and VR/AR techniques. They also reported that school fees are expensive, especially for non-East African community members.



“ Obtaining asylum is challenging and the registration process is quite difficult.

5 / Comparison of Findings

Similarities

Legal Status

Both Sudanese and East African journalists face difficulties with visa renewal, work permits, and refugee asylum. They also face challenges obtaining SIM cards or opening bank accounts without an ID card.

Language Barrier

Both groups identified language as a significant barrier. Sudanese journalists predominantly speak Arabic and feel the need to learn English, while East African journalists feel the need to learn Kiswahili for their integration and security in Kenya.

Accommodation

The high accommodation cost in Nairobi is a common challenge for both groups.

Financial Issues

Both groups highlighted economic sustainability as a major issue, with many journalists doing voluntary work due to limited income opportunities.

Equipment

Both groups expressed the need for essential journalism equipment, including VPN, editing software, computers, and mobile phones, as well as a working space with reliable internet.

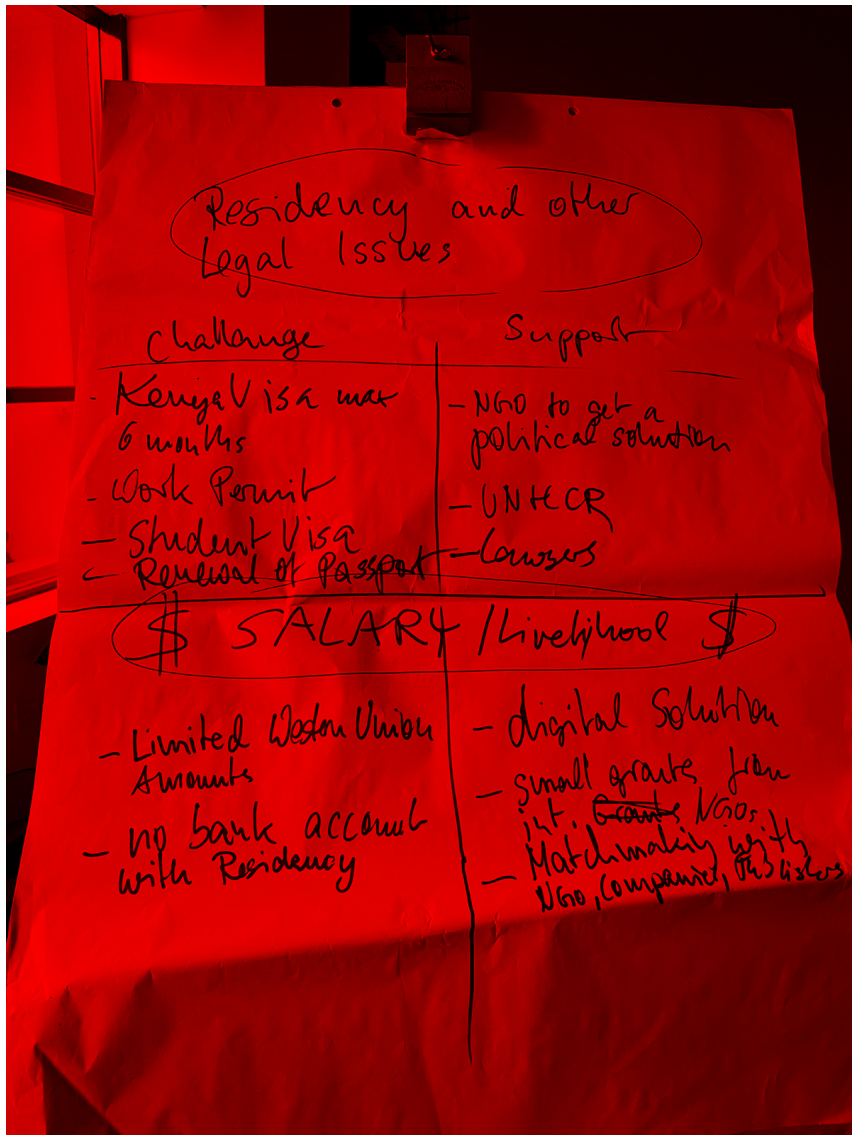
Health and Psychological Support

Both groups raised concerns about the high cost of healthcare and the need for psychological support, particularly due to the traumas they have experienced.

Capacity Building and Training

Both groups expressed a need for training in various areas, including digital security, investigative journalism, and web design, among others. They also highlighted the high cost of education for non-East African community members.

“Opening a bank account and receiving money is challenging with a three-month visa.



Differences

Security Concerns

While both groups face security issues, the nature of these concerns differs. Sudanese journalists raised concerns about potential targeting by the Sudanese Embassy in Nairobi. In contrast, South Sudanese journalists reported unique security challenges due to the strong diplomatic ties between South Sudan and Kenya, leading to several journalists abandoning their profession due to insufficient protection.

Access to Information and Audience Reach

This was a significant concern for Sudanese journalists, who highlighted the lack of press freedom in Sudan and control over traditional media outlets by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This issue was not prominently discussed in the East African journalists' group.

Integration with Society

East African journalists highlighted the challenge of integration with society in Kenya, which was not a prominent issue among Sudanese journalists.

Corruption

East African journalists identified systemic corruption as a major challenge in achieving refugee asylum status, which was not a significant issue highlighted by the Sudanese journalists.

Accreditation

This challenge was identified by the East African journalists but not by the Sudanese journalists.

6 / Recommendations

Based on the challenges and needs identified in the focus groups, the following recommendations can be made:

Legal Support

Establish partnerships with lawyers, legal organisations and NGOs to assist with visa renewals, work permits, and refugee asylum applications. This would also include support for obtaining necessary documentation and opening bank accounts.

Language Training

Implement language training programmes to help journalists overcome language barriers. For Sudanese journalists, this would involve English language classes and exams. For East African journalists, Kiswahili classes would be beneficial.

Affordable Accommodation

Collaborate with local housing organisations and NGOs to provide affordable accommodation options for journalists. This would include shared housing options or subsidies for rent.

Financial Assistance and Job Opportunities

Develop programmes that assist journalists financially, particularly those doing voluntary work. This would also involve creating job opportunities within local media organisations or facilitating connections with international NGOs for potential employment.

Equipment Provision and Workspace

Provide essential journalism equipment, such as laptops, smartphones, VPNs, and audio recorders. Also, establish safe and secure co-working spaces with reliable internet access for journalists.

Healthcare and Psychological Support

Advocate for affordable healthcare options and insurance for journalists. Establish partnerships with local healthcare providers or international health organisations to provide these services. Additionally, provide access to psychological support services to help journalists cope with trauma and stress.

Capacity Building and Training

Implement training programmes in areas identified by the journalists, such as digital security, investigative journalism, web design, and more. This would be done in partnership with local educational institutions or through online courses.

Security Measures

Advocate for protecting journalists, particularly those facing unique security challenges due to political ties. This would involve working with local authorities, international organisations, and NGOs to ensure the safety of journalists, including to facilitate their relocation to a safe third country, potentially within Europe.

Promoting Press Freedom

Increase efforts to advocate for press freedom and document where journalists face significant restrictions. This would involve raising awareness of these issues on national, regional and global platforms and forums and lobbying for change and support.

Integration Support

For East African journalists, provide support to help them integrate into Kenyan society. This would involve cultural training or social events to foster connections within the community.

Accreditation Support

For East African journalists, provide support in obtaining the necessary accreditation to practice journalism in Kenya. This would involve partnerships with local journalism institutions or advocacy efforts to simplify the accreditation process.

7 / More

Stay Connected MiCT, generously supported by UNESCO, is currently conducting a needs assessment of Sudanese journalists within Sudan. We invite you to join our Signal Group to stay connected, share insights, and discuss the evolving situation in Sudan. Connect with us:
[Signal Group](#) ↗.

Watch Since 2009, MiCT has been actively collaborating with a diverse array of stakeholders in Sudan, including journalists, political parties, musicians, environmentalists, academics, civil society activists, and Wikipedians. One of our notable collaborations was with the talented Sudanese musician, Majzoub Onsa. Together, we created a music video advocating for free and fair elections during Sudan's 2010 elections, a significant event marking the country's first democratic elections in 25 years. We invite you to watch and enjoy:
[MiCT's first music video from Sudan](#) ↗.

“ So far, MiCT works with over 400 journalists and media makers, offering support to maintaining critical voices in crisis regions.

fellowship.mict-international.org ↗

Imprint

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To maintain the utmost level of security and confidentiality for all individuals involved in creating this report, MiCT chose not to disclose the names of any facilitators, translators, participants, or other contributors. This decision has been made to recognise the sensitive nature of the topics discussed and the potential risks associated with public identification. We deeply value the safety and privacy of all those who have contributed to this report and have taken this measure to ensure their protection.

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