

BBC Media Action has an established presence in fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS) through different operating models. Most of our countries of operation are FCAS including high risk countries. We have long-established offices in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Zambia), Asia (Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia) and a regional office in North Africa in Tunisia from which we run projects in Libya, Algeria and Tunisia. We are seeking registration in Pakistan and Lebanon, and a proportion of our programming in Eastern Europe, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan is currently managed remotely from London by teams with in-depth understanding and experience of the country contexts for which they are developing programming.

Where new projects would be delivered from established offices, BBC Media Action uses existing registrations, resources, systems and policies and leverages pre-existing relationships with key stakeholders such as national and local governments, civil society and networks of development organisations. We invest in building constructive relationships with political stakeholders and use our reputation and strong track record to seek buy-in for new work when this is necessary and appropriate. We are registered with relevant ministries and agencies in all countries of operation. Together with well-established operational systems and processes, our long-term presence in many countries positions us for rapid start-up of new projects. This includes employing a nuanced understanding of both the context and experience in order to manage relationships with necessary stakeholders including government, and local media partners. All our offices run several programmes simultaneously and are accustomed to managing complex workstreams and flexing in size according to the requirements of the work being delivered. We have established procurement channels, policies and procedures in place and country-specific HR manuals that ensure we are compliant with local legislation as well as ensuring we are applying BBC standards. BBC Media Action also has considerable experience, particularly in our Middle East and Europe region, of remote delivery from HQ in London of projects in complex settings. This work is facilitated through a network of robust partners on the ground who provide administrative and logistical support as needed and is managed by experienced leaders who have in-depth knowledge of the contexts, relevant language skills and, crucially, are well-connected with relevant stakeholders.

Understanding and managing risk is an overarching priority for BBC Media Action's delivery and as such, a live risk register has been developed as part of the initial business case for each new programme. This includes risks to the organisation, to long-term operations and most importantly Duty of Care to personnel. As a new country initiative is green-lit, the delivery team uses the risk register to develop a business continuity plan in consultation with headquarters and other country programmes with similar risk profiles, to be activated during a major incident. A staff contingency and evacuation plan would also be developed to ensure access to MEDEVAC services and/or hospital access are commonly understood, and routes and modalities for extraction or conditions for "hibernation" prepared. We would develop this with support from the wider BBC's High Risk Team (HRT), security professionals with decades of security /military experience in FCAS. BBC Media Action has a dedicated HRT Adviser who would ensure critical risk related factors and questions are considered from the outset. This includes helping to set a tolerance threshold, above which staff are evacuated. The BBC's global footprint means that HRT is plugged into local security networks in countries across the globe and has procured access to sophisticated digital security tools that provide real-time information to advise on unfolding security incidents swiftly.

When setting up a new project, attention focuses on priority functions needed within the initial delivery team. A senior manager e.g. Project Director would be appointed as country lead, accountable for delivery and for leading a process of building a local team. Consultation with organisations in the media and INGO sector on the labour market and from third party HR expertise helps to benchmark salaries and develop an in-country salary scale, as well as unpick requirements under local labour law for recruiting a local staff base beginning with key operational functions. With fiscal responsibility affecting all operations, recruitment would start with an in-country Finance lead. While the country lead drives recruitment, our central Finance team would lead assessment and testing of technical competencies. We would then recruit an experienced procurement function, ideally with expertise working in the relevant country.

To navigate the operational context and register legally as an INGO in countries where we do not have a long-standing country office, we review published guidance for INGO operations, as we have recently done when establishing a presence in Pakistan. We also consult internal legal advisers and local lawyers, and develop relationships through formal and informal networks to tap into local experience of state and non-state organisations, into how practical and effective these systems and processes are, and how others have negotiated common pitfalls. These networks could for example, be official INGO fora in the target country, or media networks. We also understand how to establish day-to-day operational mechanisms, including opening a bank account, securing office space, and understanding tax liabilities for our organisation. The operational context would directly affect whether or not we decide to set up a country office. In Iraq, the situation was so dangerous we concluded that pursuing the option of a country office was not viable. Over time, working remotely with a modest profile was deemed the most risk appropriate, yet still effective approach and we have been working continuously there using that model since 2004.

Where we have offices, establishing a local finance and procurement function is the basis to catalyse a range of operational activities to establish a presence. We would develop local procurement and finance manuals based on our global policies and offering practical, contextual guidance for ensuring financial and procurement compliance. This would include thresholds for financial authorisations at country level, and thresholds for different types of procurement. The procurement function would also work with the country lead to develop an initial country admin manual and travel policy. Where we deliver projects from London we work through our established UK systems with contracting of services, particularly freelancer expertise taking place in the same way. Where we do not have a permanent local office, we are able to mobilise at speed given these establish systems at HQ, and experience in relevant countries.

While such policies are being developed, initial operational activities would be underway, especially the securing of office space, of international staff accommodation, and the procurement of office transportation or transport vendors as relevant. To ensure work is not delayed, existing organisational templates for compiling an asset register and vendor lists would be populated during this initial operational process. Overseen by the country lead, office space, and accommodation for international staff would require HRT consultation, including a security assessment of all prospective premises and vehicle policy which may be conducted through a third party security provider with follow-up visits by BBC Media Action's dedicated HRT Adviser. Any necessary security upgrades would be identified, and factored into budgets.

Recognising the importance of developing and managing external relationships with authorities, donors and partner networks, we ensure such requirements are well resourced in the delivery team. This includes leadership by the country lead, but also ensuring one of their direct reports has formal focus on external engagement. Depending on the scale of initial activities we may seek to build a small team around this function from the outset, applying a conflict sensitive approach by ensuring it is guided by national staff who understands the cultural specificities on how business is conducted. Experience has shown that such sensitivities can help to negotiate difference in approach, cultivate relationships with national and local actors, and mitigate offence. We would simultaneously be aware of and make efforts to minimise risk of co-option in line with the BBC Media Action's Anti-Bribery policy. When setting up new community-based conflict resolution and girls' education listening groups in communities across South Sudan we took a conflict sensitive and gender transformative approach by recognising that to avoid unintended harm, buy-in was needed informal customary structures. We engaged with paramount chiefs, taking the time to build their understanding of, and through negotiated discussion in some communities, their support for the equal and meaningful participation of local women. Where we have a different approach to donors or international partners we would ensure the benefits of our approach are clearly understood, and well-conceived for the context to justify a decision to proceed. While the above outlines our typical approach to setting up projects in FCAS, we remain flexible and open to considering alternative approaches (subject to legal or ethical standards), and do so by ensuring regular and open communication with donors and operational partners, particularly in relations to shifting operational conditions and risks.