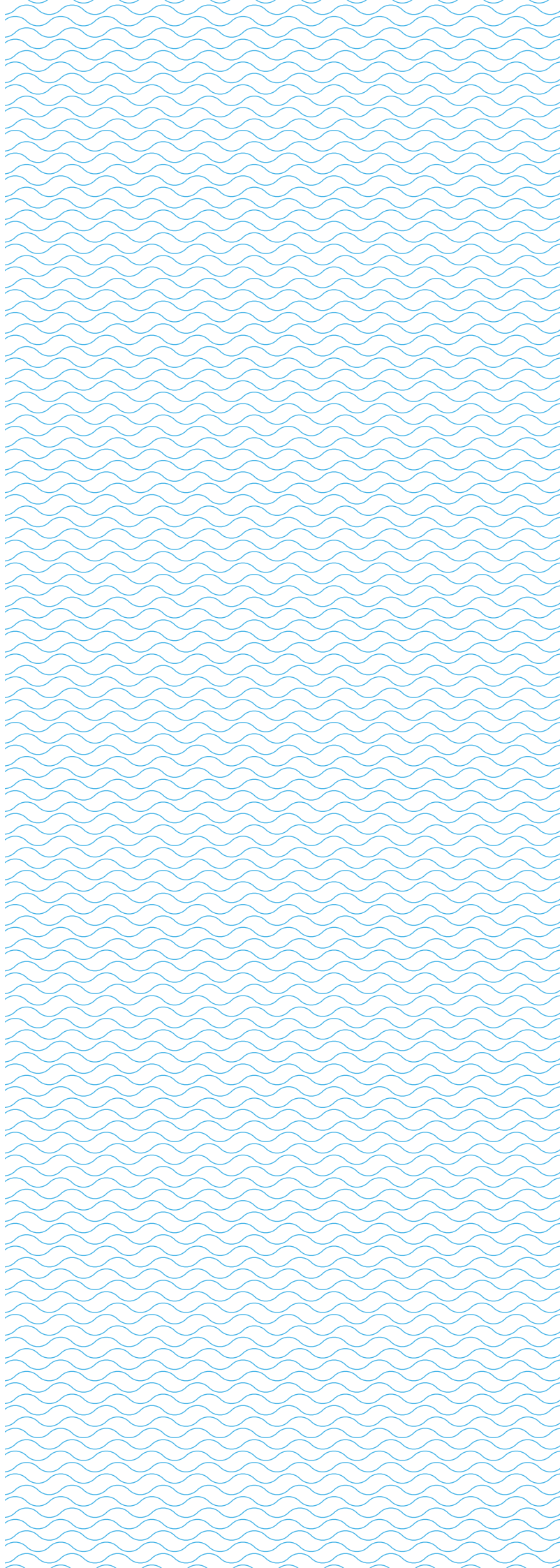# Constructive water reporting in the Middle East

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Media strategy for the Blue Peace Middle East Initiative

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Countries that jointly manage the water resources they share do not start wars with one another. The same applies for different interest groups competing for scarce water resources within the same country. Access to relevant, balanced and reliable information about competing interests and causes of unsustainable water management is one key condition for fair decision-making on water allocation.

It provides the foundation for objective negotiations and builds trust – two key conditions to move towards cooperation instead of conflict. And finally access to information facilitates transparency and accountability in water management.

Against this background, this strategy document gives a brief background analysis of water reporting in the Middle East – with a particular focus on the target countries Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey – and it identifies challenges and opportunities to foster water-related journalism.

The suggested strategic interventions are threefold. One set focuses on the public sphere in general and suggests how an enabling environment for water-related journalism in the region could be promoted. The second one centers around the media landscape(s) in the project countries and how media can be engaged to invest in and dedicate resources to water-related journalism. The third set of interventions focuses capacity building for media workers, enabling them to adequately cover water issues in a conflict-sensitive way.

In concrete terms the strategy document identifies and recommends a set of activities for each of the three areas and outlines how they feed into the overall strategy, link to the Blue Peace Initiative and contribute to its overall objective of achieving sustainable water cooperation and management in the region.

Constructive water reporting in the Middle East

1
Introduction
and background

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he Blue Peace Initiative builds on the assumption that countries that jointly manage shared water resources do not start wars with one another. It can be assumed that the same applies to different interest groups competing for scarce water resources within the same country. At all levels – local, national and regional – access to relevant, balanced and reliable information about competing interests and causes of unsustainable water management is one key condition for fair decision-making on water allocation. This information provides the foundation for objective negotiations and builds trust – both essential in moving towards cooperation instead of conflict. Access to information facilitates transparency and accountability in water management. And finally, the chances of forging a political solution to water-related conflicts can be enhanced by conflict-sensitive journalism.

Within the framework of the 'Blue Peace Middle East Initiative', the Communications and Media Training on Water in the Middle East Region seeks to enable journalists to report on key water challenges in a way that encourages more sustainable water management as a means of conflict prevention and enhancing the quality of life. It complements and supports the efforts to build peace in the Middle East through water diplomacy in two ways. First, it makes information on water challenges accessible, increasing awareness for more sustainable water management and providing a level playing field for better water-related negotiation. Second, it raises awareness about solutions to water challenges in the region, facilitating replications of successful initiatives and making a common vision for the future more tangible.

Journalists and the media have a mandate to inform the public about developments in the water sector that will have an impact on citizens. At the same time, media are sufficiently neutral to scrutinize decisions, highlight governance challenges and raise concerns about conflicts of interests over contested water resources. Hence, media could play a vital role for the improvement of water governance in several respects:

(i) Agenda-setting:
By focusing attention and public debates on the reasons for water scarcity and water pollution, media can urge policy makers to include related issues on their agenda.

(ii) Watchdog function:
As the 'Fourth Estate', journalists have the mandate to scrutinize the powerful and conduct in-depth investigations wherever public goods are affected. Media coverage can help to reveal cases of abuse and hold those responsible to account. In the long term, investigative journalism can help to decrease corruption and foster good governance in general.

(iii) Awareness-raising:
To enable meaningful public contributions towards sustainable water management, it is essential to create awareness and establish a sufficient understanding of water-related challenges and decision-making processes.

(iv) Empowerment and encouragement:
Increased coverage of water issues can embolden residents – encouraging them to question decision makers and demand action. Here the role of socially responsible media must be to provide access for these residents and to amplify the voices of those affected by water scarcity and water pollution.

Journalists can tell stories that resonate with the public and access channels that convey information to a broad audience. However, the complexity of water governance and the multitude of underlying reasons for water-related challenges need to be duly understood in order to convey the right messages that contribute to more sustainable water management. If engaged effectively, the media can create new pathways to effectively disseminate water news, facts, and community perspectives.

Finally, access to water and questions of ownership have the potential to trigger violent conflict. As in all conflicts, media can escalate or mitigate the situation based on the nature of their coverage. By highlighting the complexity of underlying structures, while refraining from simplistic accusations, the media can play a positive

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role in conflict resolution in line with the Blue Peace approach.

Within this context, this document provides a brief background on water-related reporting in the Middle East and identifies challenges and opportunities to foster water-related journalism. The document further outlines possible ways of achieving these objectives, including activities under this project as well as complementary interventions.

2.1

Main challenges reporting on water in the region

While each of the six project countries has its particularities and specific context, in general journalists reporting on water face similar challenges across the region. These can be broadly summarized in four categories:

Repressive political contexts and lack of cooperation between actors:
In all Middle Eastern countries, water is seen as a strategic resource that pertains to national security and that is therefore 'sensitive'. Journalists are not barred from reporting on water, but they are certainly obliged – to varying degrees – to stay on the right side of vaguely defined and frequently shifting 'red lines'.

Lack of access to reliable water-related information:
The problem of inaccurate, incomplete and contradictory data related to water is widespread and forms a huge challenge across the Middle East – not just for journalists, also for scientists and policy makers. Official data are often incomplete, outdated or skewed to reinforce the government narrative. Because of growing pressure in the media sector to publish news 'as it happens', journalists often do not have the time to delve deeper into these figures to uncover discrepancies or inaccuracies.

Lack of awareness of the topic on the media's side, lack of willingness to invest resources:
If editors allocate limited budgets and time journalists will always struggle to produce relevant and high-quality water stories and if editors are not supporting the topic, even excellent water reporting can get lost in the abundance of other coverage.

Lack of understanding and skills on the journalists' side:
To write/produce a solid water report, journalists must understand often complicated concepts (ranging from analysis of hydrogeological data to details of desalination processes), be able to place data in a wider context to relate it to issues such as economic growth, energy and

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8 food production, geopolitical questions, etc. and finally, translate information into an accessible, easy-to-digest format that will capture the attention of not just editors, but also audiences.

As a result, coverage of water issues is either complex, dry, and unengaging or veers to the other extreme to become excessively alarmist, divisive or pessimistic. There is little space for human stories or for positive messages about solutions or new approaches to regional and local water crises. The result is that audiences generally consider water and its management too complex, too political or simply too depressing to pay attention to. This leads to a distinct audience apathy, thereby reinforcing the lack of motivation on the media's side to invest in the issue.

2.2
The long term strategy: tackling challenges and realizing opportunities

While there can be no easy, "one size fits all" approach to this issue, there seem to be some common, overarching fields of intervention in response to the problem areas identified above. It may be worth considering these approaches as a way of contributing to an environment that is more conducive to meaningful water-related journalism and helping enable local journalists to fulfil this role.

The overall goal of the media strategy can be phrased as: Media coverage and audience interest and attention around the various aspects of water in the Middle East contribute towards sustainable water cooperation and management in the region thus influencing policy dialogue in the Middle East.

The objective from a media / public sphere perspective will then be: The quality of coverage on water issues in the project countries has improved to deliver clear, comprehensive and balanced reporting in accessible formats to audiences across the region.

To work towards the achievement of the objective, the mid/long term strategy should focus on three outcomes:

1   Water-sector stakeholders and the public sphere are sensitized to the importance and need for high-quality critical journalism about water.
a   Activities focus on promoting an enabling environment for water-related journalism in the region. There is a need for concerted lobby and advocacy efforts towards government and non-government stakeholders to foster a broader debate around the connection between freedom of speech, media, and water management.

2   The media is willing to invest resources to develop water-related journalism.
a   Activities focus on engaging the media landscape to enhance reporting for sustainable water management. To foster water-related journalism, perhaps most importantly, publishers and editors of large (and small) media outlets need to be 'brought on board.' To develop buy-in from editors and media houses for the water topic beyond sporadic articles, it will be essential to link the topic to existing formats, news sections and target groups of the different media houses in each of the target countries.

3   Media and journalists are able and eager to produce suitable high-quality journalistic pieces on water-related topics.
a   Activities focus on enabling adequate coverage of complex water challenges and solutions. To raise awareness of journalists in the region and increase their understanding of water challenges and solutions, journalistic skills need to be raised and thus quality and quantity of balanced journalistic contributions, applying a mix of capacity building and networking activities.

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2.3
Chain of effects

Overall goal	← Objective	← Outcomes	← Outputs
Media coverage and audience interest and attention around the various aspects of water in the Middle East contribute towards sustainable water cooperation and management in the region thus influencing policy dialogue in the Middle East.	The quality of coverage on water issues in the project countries has improved to deliver clear, comprehensive and balanced reporting in accessible formats to audiences across the region.	Water-sector stake-holders and the public sphere are sensitized to the importance and need for high-quality critical journalism about water.	Promoting an enabling environment for water-related journalism in the region.
		The media is willing to invest resources to develop water-related journalism.	Engaging the media landscape to enhance reporting for sustainable water management.
		Media and journalists are able and eager to produce suitable high-quality journalistic pieces on water-related topics.	Enabling adequate cover-age of complex water challenges and solutions.

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2.4
Getting concrete: target groups, challenges, and activities

Having identified the core challenges and defined the chain of effects, the next step was to link the challenges, goals, and objectives to concrete activities. The following table gives an overview of the extensive set of activities being proposed to tackle the outlined challenges.

Those activities that are already part of the current project are highlighted. The other form part of potential follow-up interventions.

Objective: The quality of coverage on water issues in the project countries has improved to deliver clear, comprehensive and balanced reporting in accessible formats to audiences across the region.

Outcomes:
- Water-sector stakeholders and the public sphere are sensitized to the importance and need for high-quality critical journalism about water.
- The media is willing to invest resources to develop water-related journalism.
- Media and journalists are able and eager to produce suitable high-quality journalistic pieces on water-related topics.

Outputs:
- Promoting an enabling environment for water-related journalism in the region.
- Engaging the media landscape to enhance reporting for sustainable water management.
- Enabling adequate coverage of complex water challenges and solutions.

Activities (● = black dot; 🔵 = blue dot, part of the project activities)

1. Conduct networking workshops, conferences, and meetings with journalists, experts, government and non-government stakeholders	2. Initiate and fund competitions for water-related journalism	3. Produce and distribute high quality publications on water issues	4. Invite local government and non-government stakeholders to international environmental events	5. Capacity building for state / parastatal officials and spokespeople	6. Lobby publishers and editors: Identify incentives and selling propositions for coverage of water-related stories	7. Establish a platform to engage with journalists, editors, experts, NGO scene	8. Lobby for more media coverage and investments in high-quality articles both with water sector, media and development actors	9. Sponsor internships for local media / journalists with media outlets internationally	10. Sponsor local media / journalists to introduce water stories into international journalistic competitions	11. Capacity building programs for local media / journalists, social media actors, bloggers	12. Develop platforms to facilitate networking and regional community building among water and environmental journalists	13. Develop high quality training and resource materials ('Handbook of Water Reporting in the Middle East', supported by video [YouTube] tutorials, etc.)	14. Create 'tandem' programs with local science editors or water experts	15. Provide ongoing editorial support and on-the-job training for water-related journalism in the region	16. Work with journalists in exile to address topics that are too sensitive locally (corruption etc.)	17. Sponsor international 'mentorship' programs between local and international science editors / water experts	18. Sponsor local journalists to paticipate in international environmental events, and international media projects with a focus on water / environment	19. Fund scholarships for local water-related journalism and investigative research	Direct target groups of activities	Main challenge categories
●			●	●															State actors, institutions	Repressive context and lack off cooperation between actors
●			●																Companies	
●	●	●																	Media outlets	
●	●	●																	Journalists, social media actors, bloggers	
●			●																NGOs, experts	
●		●	●	●															Institutions	Lack of access to reliable information
●		●	●																Experts, NGOs	
●		●	●																Media	
					🔵	🔵													Media outlets: owners	Lack of awareness of the topic, lack of willingness to invest resources
					🔵	🔵	🔵	●	●										Media outlets: editors, chief editors	
						🔵	🔵	●	●										Journalists	
						🔵	🔵												Water experts	
						🔵	🔵												NGO sector	
						🔵		●	●	🔵	🔵	🔵	🔵	●	●	●	●	●	Journalists, editors	Lack of understanding and skills
						🔵		●	●	🔵	🔵	🔵	🔵	●	●	●	●	●	Bloggers, social media actors	

3
Project framework

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his project supports the Blue Peace Process from a media and audience perspective. It aims to overcome the problems identified in the previous chapter. The public sphere in the project countries is characterized by professional, critical, yet conflict-sensitive water-related journalism that is appreciated by water stakeholders and the general audience.

To achieve the objectives and work towards the overall goal, the project will deliver outcomes and outputs as follows:[1]

The project will....	Refers to objective
1 engage in awareness-raising in the public and among (young) media professionals	A
2 expand the Blue Peace media network and involve a new generation of journalists, bloggers and online/social media reporters in covering water	A and B
3 provide media workers and opinion makers with the knowledge and skills to effectively communicate water issues	B

To achieve these outcomes, the project will engage in the following main activities as discussed in more detail in the following chapter, "Activities":

Main activities	Refers to outcome
1 Five capacity building workshops with 60 journalists from the project countries	1, 2, 3
2 Create an online platform as a primary source for capacity building and information on water issues in the region	2, 3
3 Create a publishing and distribution strategy in traditional and online media	1, 2

1 These are also reflected in detail in the project log frame, see outcomes, outputs, and activities.

4
Activities: towards constructive water reporting

4.1
Workshops

4.1.1
Approach and method: constructive news / journalism

From a journalistic point of view, it seems appropriate to put an emphasis on the concept of "constructive journalism" (or "constructive news") as a response to the sensationalism and negativity bias of the news media today that is specifically virulent in water-related reporting in this region. Constructive news aims to provide audiences with a fair, accurate and contextualized picture of the world, without overemphasizing the negative.

While in the past there have been several campaigns around water/journalism – notably, of course, in the framework of the Blue Peace Initiative – there has not been an approach to specifically utilize the concept of constructive news. Employing this concept will thus also help to create an "antithesis" to the often too complex and depressing nature of water reporting – thereby working against audience apathy. Additionally, it seems that most previous interventions have focused on traditional media. This stresses the importance of including stakeholders/participants from traditional as well as online/social media in this project.

Constructive journalism or constructive news is a response to increasing tabloidization, sensationalism and negativity bias of the news media today. It is an approach that aims to provide audiences with a fair, accurate and contextualised picture of the world, without over-emphasising the negative. While a healthy dose of pessimism in the press is undoubtedly necessary, the chronic over-exposure of negativity constitutes a hidden media bias that has an erosive effect on the societies we live in.

The aim of constructive journalism is to combat the trivialisation and degradation of journalism by media that often is more interested in entertaining and creating controversies than informing the public. Constructive journalism is calm in tone, as it is less focused on scandals, conflicts and outrage. It reports on important societal issues, setting them in the bigger picture and in their

relevant context. This approach seeks to facilitate public debate not only around important problems, but also around possible solutions, ultimately improving the quality and tone of public discussions. It is "two-eyed journalism", balanced reporting on both the good and the bad in society. Constructive journalism takes journalism's democratic function seriously, building on the idea that journalism is a feedback mechanism that helps society self-correct.

Constructive journalism is therefore especially apt when it comes to topics like health, water, agriculture or other important social issues as an adequate technique to change the angle of typical reporting, which tends to focus on the problems concerning these topics (e.g. Water shortage in.., Drought in..., Crop failure in..., Flood in...). Instead of following the old journalist saying, "If it bleeds, it leads", constructive journalism teaches how to find stories that show a solution for existing problems.

Surveys in many countries have proven that the implementation of constructive journalism helps to regain the audience's trust in the media. The method is easy to learn and to adapt for journalists from all levels of experience and will make a significant difference in the quality of water reporting in the Middle East.

4.1.2
Selection of participants

While traditional media still plays a central role, online/social media[2] hhave become very important in engaging audiences in the project countries, particularly young audiences. It therefore seems appropriate to advocate a mix of traditional and online/social media (particularly the latter) and to find creative and engaging ways of telling the story of the regional water crisis. Syria's media landscape is very fragmented at the moment, but media organizations operating in regime-held areas are subject to strict censorship. Lebanon is

2 The term "online media" usually refers to digital media (incl. text, photo, audio, and video) that is distributed over or available on-demand over the Internet. The term "social media" usually refers to technologies that facilitate the interactive exchange of information and the creation of communities or networks. Some of the most commonly known examples of social media are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. It should be noted, however, that there is no universal definition of "online media" or "social media".

14 freest in terms of media censorship, but all media out-
lets are strongly affiliated to political parties and therefore
biased to an extent, or at least perceived as such by the
other side(s), making it complicated to team up with one
particular media outlet. On the other hand, audiences
in Lebanon and Jordan are probably the most open and
aware of environmental and water issues. In Lebanon,
there are many environmental NGOs working to improve
environmental management, as well as frequent cam-
paigns. In Jordan, the government, media and NGOs are
focused on environmental and water issues and there
is space to report on this (though as mentioned before,
within government lines). In Syria, audiences are currently
(understandably) not focused on the environment and
water, as topics like human rights are of greater interest.

In Iraq, the most powerful media genre is social
media; Facebook is the most popular, followed by local
television. However, trust in these sources is low because
TV is known to be controlled by political parties and social
media are increasingly used to spread extremism and
political propaganda. Radio reaches significantly fewer
people in Iraq, but is also less controlled by political
parties and hence enjoys higher credibility among media
users. Newspapers target mainly elites from academic
and political professions. Circulation is very low: the
average print run does not exceed 10,000 copies. None-
theless, like in Turkey, the most important opinion
leaders write highly influential columns in newspapers.

Despite tight state control over media in Iran,
social media activism amongst ordinary citizens has
lately forced state-run media to cover a variety of social
issues, ranging from drug abuse to homelessness,
to environmental challenges faced by people in some
regions of the country. Interestingly, the popular use
of hashtags on social media such as Twitter, Instagram
and Telegram has proved very effective in elevating the
relevance of environmental challenges to the official
media realm. Due to the restriction of organized civil
society activism, Iranians tend to use social media in
a sophisticated manner by running #hashtag-campaigns
in Persian. Many professional journalists also use social
media to push for topics that are relevant to them.
Traditional media pay increasing attention to popular
topics on social media.

Media mix: traditional and online media

Against the backdrop of the observations discussed
above, we suggest a two-step strategy to engage stake-
holders from online media/social media – who take more
creative approaches and reach young people – as an
effective way of placing water at the centre of public
debate, particularly to reach a broad and young audience.
The engagement of social media stakeholders should
be complemented by strategically-selected participants
from traditional media outlets.

Making water a more prominent topic on TV would
be a safe way of reaching audiences. It has to be consid-
ered, however, whether this would be a realistic objective
in the framework of this project and whether it would
be possible to make water a discussion point without
descending into divisive political debate. A possible solution
would be to work with TV journalists engaged in the social
media activities of their TV channels

To reach political and academic elites it seems
reasonable to work with selected newspaper journalists.
In this respect, one would possibly aim for influential
journalists – well known columnists and commentators –
and encourage them to write on water issues. In print/
online, it would also be interesting to engage younger,
up-and-coming cartoonists and caricaturists as well
as media artists to tackle to the topic of water by using
cartoons and visually appealing content such as GIFs,
360 degree photos/videos, aerial and drone photography,
and data visualizations (example: http://interactive.webkid.
io/who-is-fighting-whom-in-syria/). This would be a way
to (i) bridge the gap between traditional and new media
and (ii) feed into the notion of making the topic lighter and
more entertaining.

Before launching, the communication activities and
crucial parts like the hashtag or claims will be pre-tested
with a sample group to make sure its effect is as intended.

Three step selection strategy

A threefold approach in engaging traditional as
well as new media and bridging the gap between them
will also be reflected in the overall selection strategy.

The tender strategy will be an effort to specifically
engage established journalists from traditional media
houses (print, radio, TV), particularly younger journalists/

citizen journalists[3] who are "online-savvy". Workshops will be advertised through existing partners and media networks in the partner countries as well as through the Swiss and German embassies.

One part of each of the five workshops (Amman, Erbil, Beirut, Istanbul, Tehran) will be to define a country-specific, water-related hashtag. All participants will agree to use this country-specific hashtag in their future water-related work. Furthermore, these hashtags are a consistent part of the project's communication, meaning they will be included in the workshops' handouts, e-mail signatures, leaflets, etc.

In the run-up to the workshops, journalists/citizens and online journalists will be invited to apply with their hashtag suggestion. From the applicants, a small jury consisting of the consortium and steering committee will select female and male participants for the workshop.

a)   Individual approach
•   In addition to the tender process, the consortium will approach media outlets and media workers directly. Preference will be given to journalists and media outlets, which are already known to the consortium or that we have worked with in the past. Also, we will specifically try to include participants who were recommended to us by project stakeholders, including DEZA, Strategic Foresight Group/ Blue Peace Initiative,[4] and the local implementation partners.

b)   Identification of digital influencers through monitoring
•   Identification of digital influencers will be achieved through monitoring tools such as BuzzSumo[5]. In regards to the other above-mentioned target groups, digital influencers have the following characteristics:
◦   Authentic and highly trusted by their audience. The trust level of a digital influencer is often well above that of established media and journalists

3 "Citizen journalism" (sometimes also referred to as "grassroots journalism") refers to the concept of reporting by members of the public who are not trained journalism professionals – usually through online media / social media.
4 The Blue Peace Media Network includes journalists in five of the six project countries who focus on environmental/water reporting, many of whom are very experienced journalists with an established name and a respectable potential reach.
5 Buzzsumo is an service that offers an easy identification of topic trends and digital influencer. After inserting keywords in the search mask Buzzsumo displays a list of relevant influencer or articles.

◦   Large audience and vast reach. Often reaching an audience which is hard to reach through other media outlets

As a result of the combination of these strategies, each workshop will have a balanced group of participants equally consisting of (i) journalists, citizen journalists, new media journalists/activists (i.e. representatives of traditional and new media, (ii) younger and more established media personalities, (iii) male and female participants, (iv) digital influencer.

4.1.3
Online platform

The project will develop a water and media online platform that will contribute to disseminating information on water issues in the region to the interested public through different formats and stories produced by workshops participants. The platform also provides a basis to publish stories on social media channels. This will help in sensitizing the public regarding water-related issues in each of the target countries.

The platform will further provide relevant information to journalists, to enable them to better report on water issues. It will support the participating journalists in producing water-related stories in the follow-up to the workshop. Moreover, it is assumed that providing information and guidance on water and journalism will enable other interested journalists to improve their work on the topic.

To help journalists establish contacts with water experts, we will have a section introducing local thematic "ambassadors" who have either high credibility or popularity in a specific target group in order to raise awareness. By using their testimonials, further visibility outside the expert and scientific scene can be reached.

The website will be structured with resource sections to support journalists and a blog for publishing relevant stories.

This resource section of the website will contain practical information as well as tools on basic journalistic approaches and tools. It will also feature guidance on publishing stories and other media products in different formats. Moreover, the website will provide water-related

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content, including information on water sector govern-ance, related assessments, the identification of service-delivery options and approaches specific to service provision in emergency situations. The final selection of relevant topics will be based on the feedback from the journalists participating in the workshops.

Participating journalists will be engaged in the curation of the platform's content to build ownership and encourage them to contribute to the promotion of the platform within the media community in the region.

The online platform will have a separate blog section, featuring articles by participating journalists in Arabic, Farsi and Turkish and thus will provide updates on ongoing developments. This section will be hosted on the same domain but will have a separate navigation from the website targeting journalists, to facilitate better use for interested readers of water-related articles. For this purpose, articles will be clustered e.g. along guiding questions or thematic sub-sections that will allow intuitive search engine optimized (SEO) site content, which gener-ates more qualified traffic and outreach. Easy to implement and comprehensive guidelines enable editors to apply according techniques, keywords and site architectures. Partnering with related sites, mainly in the form of promoting each other's content through link sharing, "article of the week" formats etc., is also an easy way to widen the platform's reach. Many of the relevant sites will be delivered by the stakeholder mapping at the beginning of the process and through to the involved journalists and media representatives.

It is suggested to initially host the online platform on a sub-domain of the "Sustainable Sanitation and Water Management" Website (sswm.info) with a dedicated design. This website is globally the most used knowledge platform in the water sector and will help draw attention to the articles produced by the participants. The articles that get uploaded to this section of the website will also be disseminated through social media. For this purpose, a social media editor will compile regular updates and publish them on various channels (Facebook, Twitter) and will also contribute to communicating the project strategy to online audiences.

4.2
Publishing and distribution strategy

4.2.1
Workshops and follow-up

As previously discussed, the workshops will include hands-on practical training during which the participants will develop ideas and concepts for their "own" water-related stories together with the trainers and experts. In other words, every participant completing the work-shop will have his/her story lead ready to work on it towards publication.

While it was not foreseen in the activities or the budget to give editorial support to the participants after the workshops, the experts/trainers and the consortium will be available for (i) editorial support and (ii) follow-up after the workshops. The first follow-up (a gentle remind-er combined with an offer to assist) will be one week after each workshop, the second one about one month after the workshop, the third one about three months after the workshop. The water experts and journalism trainers will also be available to help the participants with specific questions and problems.

4.2.2
Incentive to publish:
"The Open Eye Award"

The consortium will introduce an award[6] for the best work of journalism for each of the project countries. Every participant who has published at least one water-related article after the workshop will automatically participate. A jury consisting of the project's trainers and the steering

6 The "Open Eye Award" has been awarded by MiCT since 2012 in recognition of outstanding journalistic achievements. Laureates include journalists and citizen journalists from Iraq, North Africa, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. While in the past there was no financial award, winners were invited to participate in an award ceremony.

committee will select the best pieces at the end of the project period.

Leading up to the overall award an "article of the month" will be prominently featured on the online platform as well as on the social media channels.

4.2.3
Lobbying and networking with relevant stakeholders in the media

The consortium will, through their existing contacts and networks, try to lobby key media houses in the region to not only suggest potential participants but also to recognize the importance of water-related journalism. In particular, the consortium will lobby relevant media stakeholders to also join the water journalism network being built around the project's online platform and the corresponding social media channels.

In addition to social media, a bi-annual newsletter will be sent to all media houses in the network containing information and links to the most interesting water-related journalistic pieces in the project countries. The consortium will also seek to recognize synergy effects with other existing projects and activities in the partner countries.

This can be also carried out by public social media use involving key stakeholders. For instance, by using these two relatively affordable formats:

- **Expert interviews via Facebook Live:** The consortium will host one expert interview on Facebook using the Facebook live stream option (called Facebook Live). Facebook Live is especially popular amongst young people and Facebook Live sessions can be planned and scheduled beforehand to raise viewership and awareness.

- **Twitter chats:** A Twitter chat (see http://www.tweetreports.com/twitter-chat-schedule/) will be hosted under a specific hashtag. The chat will be hosted by an influential Twitter user (to be selected) and discuss water-related topics with other relevant stakeholders. Users can join the dialogue, ask

questions, using the hashtag and therefore raising awareness.

4.2.4
Distribution of content in online / social media

The training activities will be complemented by the above-mentioned online platform,[7] which will provide practical journalism learning materials, key water knowledge and tools for journalists. The online platform will be complemented by a Facebook group that will function as a communication tool, networking and community platform for the participating journalists and others.

A content strategy will be implemented, ensuring that the right content will be published by the right person at the right time:

- **Long form content:** In-depth pieces will be featured on the online platform

- **Short form content:** small infographics and third party content teasers will be published on the online platform as well as on a corresponding Facebook page and Twitter account

- **Snackable content:** GIFs, short statements and links to long and short form content will be published on a corresponding Facebook page, Twitter account and Instagram account

All three content forms can be mixed or interchanged. for example, snackable content can be extracted from short and long form content and vice versa. It is important to note that social media should not only be used to distribute content from the online platform but that rather original content for channel such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram is created. This ensures high engagement rates and a broader overall reach in these channels.

Additionally content for social media should focus on visual content such as videos, infographics and animation

7 Suggested URL: Bluepeacemedia.sswm.info

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Conclusion and
way forward

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as these content forms gain substantially more traction as text. The "Open Eye Award" winner pieces will be promoted on social media platforms accordingly as well as other user-generated content to give them value and increase the community feeling among the followers. Also, maps comparing "Before/After" photography, which emphasize the worsening water situation (see example here: http://newsderwoche.de/uploads/posts/2016-01/1453268338_6asp8nw.jpg) work effectively on social media channels.

Further online content (online platform + social media) should be created with a "mobile first" approach, as online content consumption is primarily with mobile devices. A selection of picture formats (portrait rather than landscape) and short text lengths ensure good "scrollability".

A newsletter will sum up the recent publications and efforts of the platform, feature certain stakeholders and journalists as well as promote related content in the mainstream media. With the use of mailing systems like Mailchimp oder Cleverreach offer cost effective but nevertheless appealing workflow designs.

Relevant third party content will be integrated into the overall distribution strategy with content from participants as well as third parties available on the online platform.

With the use of a unifying hashtag, content from the project will be easy to identify and raise awareness.

In addition, all participants will be strongly encouraged to publish water-related pieces online via Facebook and Twitter using the agreed hashtags. Since a significant percentage of the participants will be online-savvy the consortium will specifically encourage them to not only work towards a wide online distribution of their own water-related material but also to possibly assist and support the other participants.

n summary, the core of the capacity building effort is a series of five workshops in five of the partner countries during which time a total of 60 journalists, online journalists, and bloggers will receive capacity building in water reporting from a constructive news perspective.

This capacity building initiative will be complemented by an online platform, which will provide practical journalism learning materials, key water knowledge and tools for journalists. In addition, there will be editorial support for the online platform throughout 2018.

While the scope of the project at hand is limited it will yield additional insights into the challenges and opportunities in the target countries to report on water topics. This will help to "fine-tune" future interventions.

Based on the analysis outlined above future interventions should strategically focus on the three areas:

a) Promoting an enabling environment
b) Engaging the media landscape
c) Enabling and capacitating adequate coverage

Speaking from a media perspective future interventions should keep a strong focus on media workers and media outlets as primary target groups (areas B and C). Water experts should be engaged to support them in developing a sound understanding of the scale and scope of problems at hand. In addition, to tackle the challenges and realize the opportunities from all angles a component should be added (area A) that focuses on water-sector stakeholders in a broader sense and tries to sensitize the public sphere "in general" on the importance of and need for critical water journalism.