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**Research Report**

## Media Training for Africa: Is China Exporting its Journalism?

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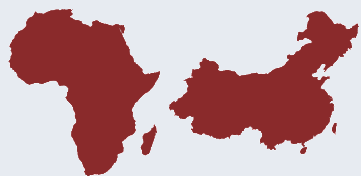
## POLICY POINTS

Chinese media training programs for Ugandans focus on (1) members of the state media, and (2) members of the private media, and are sponsored by the Chinese government.

China's media training is part of both its foreign aid program and its soft-power strategy aimed at shaping public perception of China in Africa.

Trainings for state and private media members differ in their approach to public diplomacy. For the former, lectures aim to promote understanding of China from a Chinese perspective, while training for private media journalists focuses on fostering a positive impression of China by inviting them to cover high-profile events.

The limited sample and inability to survey participants before and after their training were constraints for this pioneering study, which nonetheless can serve as a starting point for future research.



## MEDIA TRAINING FOR AFRICA: IS CHINA EXPORTING ITS JOURNALISM?

BY JÁKUP EMIL HANSEN

As part of its growing engagement in the African media sector, China leads training courses for African journalists. This has sparked debate in recent years. Noting that China is ranked at the bottom of press freedom indices,<sup>1</sup> some researchers have charged that China is “...exporting a form of journalism that resembles their own, far less free and independent than media in democracies.”<sup>2</sup> Others have pointed out that we do not yet have any evidence of what happens in China’s media training courses or how African journalists view these courses.<sup>3</sup> This policy brief reports the results of a one-month field study in Uganda involving interviews with local journalists who attended Chinese training programs for African journalists. These interviews provide insight into the purpose and goals of the training programs, their possible impact on African journalistic practices, and the overall implications on freedom of the press and democracy in Africa.

### CHINA'S MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Chinese training courses for African journalists should be examined in the context of China’s overarching media engagement in Africa, which can be divided into three related components: training programs, technical assistance (which is primarily focused on infrastructure assistance for state broadcasters and communication equipment), and China’s media presence in Africa.

China’s media engagement in Africa is generally part of its foreign aid program or its soft power effort (see Figure 1). Technical assistance and training programs are both part of China’s foreign aid program through the categories: complete projects, goods and materials, and human resource development cooperation. Training programs also fall under “people-to-people exchanges,” which is regarded as an effective public diplomacy tool and is part of China’s soft power strategy, along with its media presence. Through expanding its media presence in Africa, China has increased its ability to shape the media agenda in Africa, with the goal of promoting a favorable narrative of its people and culture.

Chinese leaders are widely believed to be dissatisfied with the monopoly of Western media outlets in Africa, which Beijing sees as biased, and a negative influence on the Sino-African relationship.<sup>4</sup> One of China’s main interests in media expansion in Africa is thus to counter the unfavorable narrative of China propagated by Western media. China’s ambassador in Kenya, Liu Guangyuan, expressed this aptly in a speech in 2013, stating that Chinese and African media “...must break the monopoly of the current international discourse.”<sup>5</sup>

### RESEARCH METHODS

This study aimed to explore the context of China’s media engagement and its training programs for Africans. There is a gap in current research and literature on this topic, especially when it comes to understanding training participants’ experiences.

Using Uganda as a case study, I conducted 14 qualitative semi-structured interviews—12 Ugandan journalists and media officers that have received training in China, one

## THE EXTENT OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMS

There are no official numbers on how many African journalists have received training in China, but there are some indications. The first time training of African journalists was directly mentioned was in the 2009 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)<sup>6</sup> action plan. The most recent FOCAC action plan for 2016-2018 states that 1,000 African media professionals will be trained each year.<sup>7</sup> According to FOCAC 2012, the aim was to train 30,000 African professionals from 2012-2015;<sup>8</sup> in reality, some researchers estimate that 65,000 African professionals received training in China from 2003-2012.<sup>9</sup>

editor from the *Observer*, and one Ugandan journalist from the Xinhua bureau in Kampala—over the course of one month. The interview participants were chosen using a snow-ball sampling technique, as the target population was difficult to identify.

### CHINESE TRAINING COURSES FOR UGANDAN JOURNALISTS

#### Structure of the Training Courses

My research findings suggest that the training of Ugandan journalists can be divided into two groups:

**Members of the state media:** Trainings for media officers from Uganda Media Centre and journalists from the state media Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, which is often referred to as a mouthpiece of the Ugandan government.

**Members of the private media:** Trainings for journalists from private media houses, such as the Daily Monitor, Nation TV (NTV), and New Vision, owned by Vision Media group, which is 53 percent government owned.

All interviewees mentioned that their training expenditures (travel, accommodation, food, etc.) were covered by the Chinese government. For members of the private media, the Chinese embassy in Kampala played an active role in selecting the participants, while participants from the state media were chosen by Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UBC's management.

China's training courses focus primarily on journalists from the major media houses, which are in responsible for daily news production. Additionally, training participants are usually high-ranking journalists with significant decision-making power in the newsroom. The study sample included four editors, two senior reporters, one head of investigation, and two business reporters.

#### Content of the Training Courses

Both trainings for state and private media members include tours around China. For members of the private media, the tours are typically combined with an event in

China that they are supposed to cover. State media members attend classroom lectures in addition to the tours.

#### Lectures for State Media Members

Classroom lectures are described as being fairly unpractical in that they are not focused on improving journalistic skills. Instead, the focus of these lectures is on teaching participants about China's history, culture, politics, and economic development. Many interviewees pointed out that the lectures emphasized the relationship between China and Africa as being based on equality, friendship, and solidarity, particularly because of their shared "developing country status."

Lectures also focused on conveying Chinese beliefs of the role of the media in society. However, there is no sign that the trainings attempted to persuade the participants to transfer the Chinese model of media to Uganda. Instead, the interviewees interpreted the lectures as being aimed at encouraging African journalists to present positive coverage of China. As one described it, "They want to win the hearts of Africa...They are fighting for their image." In this way, China is indirectly challenging Western ideals of the media's role in society.

### CHINA'S MEDIA EXPANSION IN AFRICA

- Xinhua moved its regional editorial office from Paris to Nairobi in 2006
- Growing number of Xinhua bureau offices in Africa, which in many cases has become primary source of information – competing with news agencies such as Reuters and AP
- In 2012 CCTV launched CCTV Africa, which is an African news hub located in Nairobi
- *ChinAfrica Magazine* launched in 2012 – located in South Africa
- In 2012 *China Daily* launched a weekly edition called *China Africa Daily*

## Private Journalists: Coverage of Significant Events in China

During their training courses, members of the private media participate in events that they are expected to cover. These events aim to strengthen the China-Africa relationship. Events covered by Ugandan journalists include:

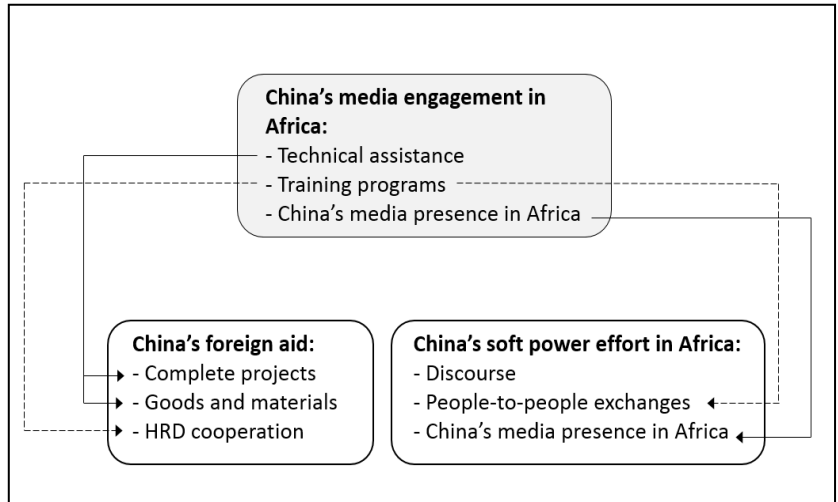
- **2010 World Expo, Shanghai:** Transmitted on NTV in commemoration of Uganda’s Independence Day on October 9th. The Ugandan stall at the expo was the center of attention as many Chinese media outlets focused their coverage on Uganda.
- **Chinese Communist Party’s opening ceremony congress (2013):** One interviewee estimated that a total of 4,000 journalists, 24 of who were from Africa, attended the event. He emphasized that African journalists were given special treatment compared to their foreign counterparts.
- **50 years of China-Uganda diplomatic relations (2012):** To mark “50 years of China-Uganda diplomatic relations,” a reporter from NTV and three other Ugandan colleagues explored economic development in China.

The journalists that were brought to China to cover and observe these and other similar events and were free to report their findings as they wished. However, one of the interviewees noted that the Chinese organizers directly encouraged African journalists to cooperate with Chinese media in order to counter Western media influence.

### Tours Around China

Tours for both private and state media members typically involve visits to Chinese media houses, which are guided by Chinese officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There, the organizers brief the journalists on how the

**Figure 1: How China’s media engagement relates to its foreign aid and soft power efforts**



media houses are run, but they are not given an opportunity to interact directly with Chinese journalists.

The tours also involve visits to cultural and historical sites in China like the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Olympic Stadium in Beijing, among others. The primary purpose of these tours is to showcase China’s long history, culture, and economic power. Most of the interviewees took tours in the provinces in Eastern China, which is the most developed part of China. There the Ugandan journalists visited various production companies and industries such as car production, steel industries, mobile phone companies (Huawei).

At the same time, most of the interviewees were also taken to poorer rural settings such as the North-Eastern province of China, Ningxia, and Shaanxi Province, where they visited different agriculture companies. One interviewee explained: “...so the point with the trip was to say to Africa, or Uganda in this case, it is possible to transform it. Every part of Uganda can be transformed in to world class status. That was their point.”

**Table 1: Differences between programs for government and non-government media members**

	State Media Members	Private Media Members
Length of training	1-2 months	10-14 days
Number of participants	Usually 20 - 30	Usually 10 or less
Participants’ country of origin	Typically from different sub-Saharan African countries	Typically all are from Uganda
Selection of participants	Chosen by Uganda’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UBC’s management	Chosen by the Chinese Embassy in Kampala and media management
Main characteristics of the trainings	Lectures in classrooms; tours around China	Covering a specific event, or reporting on the economic development in China; tours around China

## THE PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING COURSES

This research demonstrates that training for members of the private and state media is not focused solely on journalism, but instead tends to focus on currying favor among the participants by stressing the cultural, historical, and economic ties between China and Africa, with an emphasis on the core values of friendship, solidarity, and equality. This can be seen as part of China's broader soft power effort, through which it is attempting to influence the Ugandan media in order to improve public perception of China in Uganda.

Although trainings for state and private media members are both part of China's soft power effort, they differ in their approach to public diplomacy. For state media members, training is aimed at promoting understanding of China from a Chinese perspective through classroom lectures. Trainings for private media journalists are focused more on fostering a positive impression of China by inviting them to cover high-profile events highlighting the economic development of China.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR UGANDAN MEDIA

Although the Chinese do not appear to be directly or overtly attempting to influence journalists through their training programs, it is clear that the courses are intended to indirectly influence participants by promoting the Chinese vision of media's role in society. However, the extent to which the trainings succeed at this is unclear.

Many of the interviewees stated that they were impressed by China's economic development, suggesting that the tours around China are a powerful source of public diplomacy. However, many interviewees in this study have also attended journalism and media trainings in Europe and the U.S. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the ideals promoted during Chinese training courses simply counterbalances the participants' prior experiences, or actually shifts their perspectives.

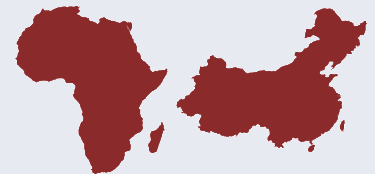
Additionally, because trainings for members of the state media are much longer than those for members of the private media—one to two months compared to 10 to 14 days—it can be expected that they have a greater impact for members of the state media. Yet, the extent of this influence should again be questioned. Because UBC is under government control, media officers are usually already aware of and exposed to Chinese views of the media's role in society before participating in the training programs. As such, it is hard to differentiate the impact of the training programs from the effect of sustained and consistent exposure to Chinese ideals.

Overall, further research is necessary to investigate the extent to which the Chinese are aiming to, or succeeding in, indirectly influencing Ugandan journalists' view of the media's role in society. Sociological research conducted over a longer time period, and including observations focusing on newsroom practices and processes, is recommended to better understand the impact of China's training programs for African journalists.

### NOTES

1. China is ranked number 176 out of 180 countries in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index. / 2. Douglas Farah and Andy Mosher, "Winds From the East: How the People's Republic of China Seeks to Influence the Media in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia," report to the *Center for International Media Assistance*, 2010, p. 11. / 3. Deborah Brautigam, "Comments on 'Winds From the East,'" in *Emerging Powers in Africa Programme*, ed. Sanusha Naidu, 2011, Issue 5, p. 9. / 4. Yu-Shan Wu, "The Rise of China's State-Led Media Dynasty in Africa," Occasional Paper no. 117, South African Institute of International Affairs, 2012. / 5. Guangyuan H.E. Liu, "Deepen China-Africa Media Cooperation and Enrich the China-Africa Community of Shared Destinies," speech at the seminar on *China-Africa Media Cooperation*, November 18, 2013, <http://www.theafricadaily.com/29/post/2013/11/deepen-china-africa-media-cooperation-and-enrich-the-china-africa-community-of-shared-destinies.html> / 6. FOCAC / 7. FOCAC Action Plan, 2015 / 8. FOCAC Action Plan, 2012 / 9. Kenneth King, "China's Aid & Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education and Training," (Woodbridge, Suffolk, James Currey Publisher).

The **CHINA-AFRICA RESEARCH INITIATIVE (CARI)** at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C. was launched in 2014. Our mission is to promote research, conduct evidence-based analysis, foster collaboration, and train future leaders to better understand the economic and political dimensions of China-Africa relations and their implications for human security and global development.



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