

Written evidence submitted by BBC World Service (INR0092)

Introduction

1. **BBC World Service** provides trusted news to radio, TV and digital audiences around the world in 42 languages including English. It is chiefly funded by the UK Licence Fee with additional funding of £86m a year coming from Government in the form of a Grant channelled via the FCO which has enabled the biggest expansion of the World Service since the 1940s.
2. Commercially-funded **BBC Global News**, with a global 24 hour TV news channel (World News) and website – BBC.com, is a vital part of the international news offer, giving the BBC increased impact and reach overseas.
3. The World Service's expansion (known as the World 2020 programme) included the **launch of 12 new language services** aimed at Nigeria, Ethiopia & Eritrea, India, Serbia and the Korean peninsula, enhanced programming in English, Arabic and Russian and the opening of new bureaux in Nairobi, Lagos and Delhi.
4. Government funding has been confirmed up until September 2021 – funding beyond that point will be decided as part of the **Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)**.
5. BBC World Service has submitted proposals to the CSR to **further expand and transform services** to make them fit for the digital age and with the aim to reach a billion people worldwide by the end of the decade. It is also contributing to the Integrated Review to illustrate the investment opportunity this affords HMG in terms of the benefit the World Service brings to the UK.
6. This evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the Integrated Review sets out the **impact of the Government's investment** in the World Service in terms of audience growth and editorial enhancements which have boosted its work in holding power to account, helping audiences decipher fact from fiction, offering insight and fresh perspective during conflicts and delivering important health information during the pandemic. The evidence also outlines the opportunity for future growth and provides **supporting evidence on disinformation and media investment by China** in the Appendices which may be of interest to the Committee.

Impact of Government investment – editorial

7. The World Service is an essential part of the BBC's global offer as one of the leading sources of trusted international news for audiences around the world. BBC World Service's mission is to provide impartial, accurate and independent news wherever there is such need due to either restrictions on media freedom or lack of means of accessing news and information.
8. The government's investment into the World Service has enabled the BBC to expand to new languages and regions, support high quality journalism, undertake more

collaboration with local media, and continue digitalising its services so they are fit for serving modern audiences across the globe. This has had particular impact across our work producing **investigative journalism, fighting misinformation**, on the **expertise and insight** the BBC can offer as a truly **global organisation**, and our ability to respond to audiences needs during the **coronavirus pandemic**.

Investigative journalism

9. The investigations series ***Africa Eye***, which was enabled through the government's investment in the World 2020 programme, has been a particular success story.
10. Its high quality programming employs **best in class open source investigative journalism techniques**; their investigation into the massacre in Khartoum, in June 2019, used geolocation technology to verify deaths and perpetrators, countering the narrative from the military leadership of Sudan.
11. The series has also had **impact across society and legislature**; their investigation into sexual harassment by lecturers at some of West Africa's top universities has had a global impact. This was the culmination of a year-long investigation and more than 55,000 words of testimony. It led directly to a change in the law in Nigeria in July 2020.¹

Fighting Disinformation

12. Investment has also enabled the BBC to continue its work **fighting harmful disinformation** as the acceleration of digital increases the speed and scale at which misinformation can cause harm across the globe. An analysis compiled by BBC Monitoring of the state influence exerted by China and Russia during Covid-19 is included in Appendix I.
13. In a significant period for news - from the Indian elections to countering the Coronavirus "infodemic", the World Service has challenged misinformation through its journalism, fact checking services, and media literacy programmes. There has been a **special focus on issues of misinformation across democracy and health**, as two areas where this can have the most harmful consequences for societies around the world.
14. The BBC is also working in partnership with other content publishers and platforms including Facebook, Google/YouTube and Twitter to tackle the problem and promote trusted sources of news and public information through the **Trusted News Initiative**.
15. **Media literacy** programmes have included a global version of ***BBC Young Reporter*** which offers resources to school children and educational institutions in countries such as India, Kenya, Brazil, Nigeria, Serbia and Myanmar, ***My World***, a global news show for young audiences to help them understand the issues behind the news and special programming on BBC Africa TV including ***What's New?*** which gives 13-15 year olds the tools to tackle disinformation and ***Factfinder*** which analyses disinformation.

¹ Premium Times Nigeria, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/401609-just-in-senate-passes-anti-sexual-harassment-bill.html>, 7 July 2020

16. World Service's long term **Beyond Fake News project** also included a season of programming and outreach events in India, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Brazil and Serbia, a new website for staff, audiences and journalists to help improve media literacy and original research into what makes people share false stories, working in partnership with other news and tech organisations.

Global expertise

17. The extension in language services has also built upon the BBC's strength as a truly global news organisation, which can cover stories and **provide insight on the issues that cross geographies and languages** like few others can.
18. This year coverage of Kashmir illustrated the BBC's **rare access to both sides of the conflict**, with reporting from both the India and Pakistan correspondents who worked in difficult circumstances under severe restrictions and hostile administration to deliver reports on how Kashmiris were reacting to the move to end the area's special status. The BBC's coverage stood out because the Indian media relied entirely on the government's version of events, choosing often to completely ignore what was happening on the ground.
19. In April 2019, teams in Delhi were able to work closely with BBC Monitoring's Jihadist Media Team to bring regional audiences **distinctive coverage of the Easter bombing attacks in Sri Lanka**, including first reports of IS supporters sharing images that allegedly show the attackers, and the IS claim of responsibility. The team also produced a report about the little-known Islamist group National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), who were allegedly linked to the attacks.
20. In January there was huge interest in BBC Russian's coverage of the killing of Qasem Soleimani, for **a different perspective to Russia's state-controlled channels**. BBC Russian collaborated with colleagues from BBC Persian and Arabic to inform audiences on the whole picture. The team also collaborated with BBC Monitoring to produce a piece about how Russia's State controlled TV channels changed their official line after Iran's announcement.
21. This matters not just for the BBC's global audiences, but also for those at home. **UK audiences benefit from the breadth of experience across the World Service** to help UK citizens understand what is happening in world events, and how it affects them. The news of the killing of General Qasem Soleimani in January highlighted the crucial access BBC offers to global events. This was also top story across the BBC's domestic services, all of which benefited from the unique access BBC Persian offered on the story.²

Covid-19

² 63% of domestic audiences closely followed the story between w/c 30th Dec – 27th Jan; it was the third most popular story behind the wildfires in Australia and news on the outbreak of Coronavirus.

22. By late February 2020, BBC World Service's role became framed by the **coronavirus crisis** as audiences across the world turned to the BBC, especially in countries where governments and regional media were slow to respond to the crisis, to learn about the impact of the virus on the health and livelihood of their societies.
23. During the pandemic the BBC created a **dedicated team covering and debunking misinformation daily** – bringing together *Reality Check*, BBC Monitoring and *BBC Trending* and its expert correspondents around the world. The team were central in combatting myths and rumours ranging from 5G mast causation to the protective properties of garlic and drinkable silver.
24. The World Service adapted coverage to provide a core news service, including a focusing on vital health explainers, how-to guides on prevention and countering harmful disinformation through fact-checking pieces. A daily podcast ***Coronavirus Global Update*** was introduced and broadcast on World Service English which featured the latest on the spread of the virus around the world, up-to-date medical information and news on the global impact on health, business, sport and travel.

Impact of Government investment – audience growth

25. The BBC's annual audience measurement announced in July 2020³ showed that the BBC is now reaching 468m people a week - its **highest audience ever** and a step closer to reaching the target of 500m in 2022.
26. BBC News (including the World Service and World News) accounts for 438m of the total with an **increase of 13% over the last year**. BBC World Service's audience increased by 11% to 351m. These figures demonstrate that at a time when accurate, trusted and reliable news and information is hard to come by more people than ever across the globe are turning to the BBC.
27. The success of the FCO investment programme in the World Service has played a major part in this growth, helping it to target new audiences and adapt and serve its audiences on the platforms they prefer to use. **BBC News digital audiences have nearly doubled** since the start of the funding four years ago (from 80m in 2016 to 151m this year). For the first time, digital platforms are now the most popular means of accessing BBC News - surpassing syndicated TV and radio.
28. Across the year World Service Languages rose by 13% with a big increase in digital engagement among audiences aged 15-24 who now make up a third of the total. **New language services performed well** with sizeable percentage increases: Serbian audiences were up by 327%, Yoruba increased by 166% and Afaan Oromoo by 143%. BBC Arabic is the most popular service with an audience of 42m, up 67%, followed by BBC Hindi with 25m. BBC Chinese saw an increase of 141%, Russian was up 32% and BBC Mundo increased by 40%.

³ BBC global audience measurement 2020 [press release](#)

29. In addition, **new content funded by the initiative has attracted new audiences.** *Africa Eye* has quickly become the 'Panorama of Africa' with its high-impact journalism that has broken new ground in open source investigations. *Sport Africa* with extensive English Premier League coverage, and *What's New* for young African audiences have also performed particularly well.
30. BBC World Service English audiences rose by 8% to 97 million. The Global News Podcast remains the BBC's most popular with audiences approaching 1 million a week.
31. As the Coronavirus spread across the globe in early 2020 and trusted sources of information were in demand, there was **a huge surge in visits to World Service languages digital services** with BBC News recording the highest reach of any international media organisation in the world. 310m people accessed coverage across 42 languages as the place to find essential information and comprehensive coverage.
32. The BBC World News channel also made significant gains reaching an audience of 112m and an increase in the Americas of 50%. This followed the publication in June 2020 of a **Reuters Institute report⁴ that showed BBC News is the most trusted news brand in the US** ahead of all major US news brands. The annual study of media consumption is one of the most rigorous and influential reports on global attitudes towards journalism.
33. Meanwhile Chinese and Russian state funded services with no commitment to impartiality are building large audiences across Africa, Asia and beyond. The BBC's research⁵ shows that audiences are **starting to rate China's CGTN and Russia's RT highly** in Nigeria and it is a similar picture in India. The CGTN website also saw sharp growth during the Covid crisis.

The future opportunity for World Service

34. These results, particularly from countries where there is a democratic deficit and lack of reliable and trusted news, underline the important role that the World Service plays in audiences' lives across the globe.
35. This matters now more than ever. Long term structural changes in advertising spend, now accelerated even more by the Covid-19 crisis, have put financial pressure on many global news outlets, and as such some of **the biggest growth is now from state sponsored actors who are exempt from commercial pressures.** Authoritarian states such as China have been investing heavily in global news services, platforms and infrastructure in order to exert international influence – an analysis of China's media investment in Africa is included in Appendix II. The financial pressures created by the Covid-19 pandemic are now set to exacerbate this picture; cuts across trusted journalism are being reported around the world.⁶

⁴ BBC press release and [link](#) to Reuters Institute 2020 Digital News Report

⁵ BBC global audience measurement 2020 surveys: based on those who are aware of each brand

⁶ For example, in August 2020 it was reported by the FT that Comcast have shelved plans for create their global news channel NBC Sky News as the pandemic has made their business model unviable.

36. There is now an opportunity to build on World Service's important role as a trusted news provider across the globe by **doubling audience reach to a billion people and finding new ways to deepen the impact of its services**. To this end the BBC is currently exploring a new vision for the World Service which builds on the current World 2020 programme, with more investment in digital and editorial to grow reach in the areas that will matter most for audiences of the future.
37. Moreover, at a time when Britain is forging new relationships with the world, a **global BBC is a powerful asset to a Global Britain**. The BBC's fifth Public Purpose is to *'reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world'* and through its reach with audiences across the globe the BBC is one of the most recognised British brands globally, and known for British values of quality and fairness. Independent surveying shows there is an exceptionally high association between awareness of the BBC globally and thinking positively about the UK. The BBC's strength in the world is the UK's strength in the world.

Conclusion

38. This year's audience figures show very clearly how the World Service can deliver audience reach growth **as a direct result of investment** in its services ultimately delivering tangible returns for the UK. A strong World Service makes other objectives – a Global Britain, economic growth through trade, and the promotion of open societies sharing UK values – easier to achieve.
39. The BBC has an ambitious plan to reach a much larger global audience in the coming years. If the BBC does not step up, others will. The UK has a **globally recognised and respected media brand** in the BBC to build on which – with Government investment - can help ensure that the UK's voice and values will continue to resonate powerfully around the globe in the next decade and beyond.
40. The government's CSR, carried out in parallel with the Integrated Review, will determine how much direct investment will go into the World Service and consequently whether these plans can be realised.

Appendix I – BBC Monitoring analysis of Chinese and Russian state-run media narratives on Covid-19

Chinese state-run media narratives on Covid-19

A campaign to promote the idea that Covid-19 may not have originated in China

- There have long been speculations amongst Chinese social media users, propagated by populist media, that the virus originated in the US.
- On 12 March, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said in a tweet: "It might be the US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan".
- A day later, he tweeted an article by the website Global Research headlined "Further evidence that the virus originated in the US", and urged users to read and share it. The article has since been deleted.
- Mr Zhao is known for being an outspoken figure - particularly on social media - he

has a different persona within mainland China and does not necessarily always represent the view of the leadership.

- Founded in 2001 in Canada, Global Research is the website of the Center for Research on Globalization. According to PolitiFact, a US-based independent fact-checking website, Global Research "has advanced specious conspiracy theories on topics like 9/11, vaccines and global warming".
- China's media then began highlighting a number of examples of when US officials had been unable to give full transparency about the number of cases they had in the country.
- In early May state-run newspapers and television all promote stories about potential cases having originated outside of China in November 2019. Particularly highlighting reports in other countries' media.
- The official People's Daily reports that a US Mayor in New Jersey, Michael Melham, "said he was infected with the novel coronavirus in November last year". It added that "he had only been to Puerto Rico in recent months and lives alone".
- Overseas broadcaster CGTN says that "Sweden could have had coronavirus cases as early as November 2019".

China presents itself as a saviour in the international fight against Covid-19

- Extensive media coverage publicising teams of medical specialists leaving airports and arriving in hard-hit countries, to help the international fight.
- China has also been able to find spokespeople for its own soft power aims. For example, Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio made national news on 26 March, after he praised China's global Belt and Road infrastructure strategy on Italy's national broadcaster RAI, saying "Those who mocked us... now have to admit that investing in this friendship has allowed us to save lives in Italy."

Russian state-run media narratives on Covid-19

Promotion of Russian vaccine

- Russian media outlets and officials have been talking up the prospects of a Russian-developed Covid-19 vaccine to both domestic and international audiences.
- It dovetails with a wider effort to present Russia as leading the world more generally in coping with the coronavirus outbreak, in particular by highlighting official statistics suggesting the country has seen a remarkably low death rate from the virus.
- Domestically, the story of Russia's vaccine has been an important part of presenting the government's handling of the virus as world-beating.
- A search on media monitoring tool Medialogiya shows that Russian state TV offers regular updates on the leaps forward apparently being made by Russia's vaccine.
- The UK allegations that Russian hackers targeted British, US and Canadian vaccine programmes have been widely spun by Russian state media as a tactic designed to diminish and undermine Russia's success in creating its own vaccine.
- A search of the recent output of the English-language news websites of the Kremlin's main international media outlets - the broadcaster RT and the news agency Sputnik - reveals that Russia's vaccine efforts have been covered in great detail.
- The German- and French-language pages of RT and Sputnik showed similar coverage.

- Many of the reports cast the Russian vaccine project as world-leading.

Kremlin revives 'US biolabs' claims for virus crisis

- Russia has repeated its longstanding narrative of the alleged danger posed by US-linked research laboratories in former Soviet countries and updated it for the coronavirus epidemic.
- Several Kremlin-controlled media outlets - mainly domestic-facing but also some international ones - have reported on the existence of 15 such facilities allegedly run by the US in Ukraine.
- The story fits with two narratives promoted by Moscow: its longstanding hostility to Ukraine and the US, as well as its recent siding with China in that country's exchange of conspiracy theories about the origins of the novel coronavirus with the US.

Underreporting of coronavirus-related deaths

- A July report by Russia's national statistics service, Rosstat, suggests the number of coronavirus-related deaths in the country in May 2020 was significantly higher than the total reported by the government's coronavirus HQ.
- The official death toll, which is updated daily on the HQ's website, is based on the official daily figure published on the website, the Health Ministry website, and the HQ's Telegram channel.
- As of 15 July, the official death toll stood at 11,770. However, the data Rosstat reports for April and May suggests it should be revised significantly upwards.

Appendix II – China's media investments directed towards Africa

Introduction

China's media presence in Africa dates back to the 1940s and 1950s, however, their approach has shifted significantly since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. In 2014 he called on Chinese media to give "a good Chinese narrative" and "better communicate China's message to the world."⁷

Since then, engagement in Africa appears to have moved from a focus primarily on editorial partnerships to now include technical assistance and the provision of content distribution platforms.

Editorial and media

Chinese state-owned media are present in the continent either as separate news hubs or transmissions. By 2018, the Chinese state news agency Xinhua has established 28 bureaux across Africa in addition to a regional HQ in Nairobi, Kenya.

China's English-language news outlet, CGTN Africa, operates from Nairobi with offices in Lagos, Cairo and Johannesburg. The station is available on all digital TV packages of StarTimes, and this includes both terrestrial as well satellite TV. It can be picked up in most

⁷ China Daily <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201802/23/WS5a8f59a9a3106e7dcc13d7b8.html>

of the African continent thanks to being transmitted on several satellites covering Africa.

China Radio International (CRI), meanwhile, is setting up transmission sites in some African countries. In March 2019, CRI resumed broadcasting content in Africa on shortwave in few languages, including English, while the station is available on FM in several African countries, such as Kenya.

China's digital TV distributors, such as StarTimes, with around 26 million subscribers, are now competing against historically big players, such as South Africa's the MultiChoice Group. StarTimes provides content on digital TV as well as satellite set top boxes. This includes a variety of Chinese news, entertainment and sports content.

Opera Inc, a Chinese-Norwegian company that runs the Opera browser, launched a new news application (Opera News) in 2019 that is said to be the fastest-growing news application in Africa, with 20 million users.

Editorial has also grown across existing local platforms; for example, in 2019, Nations Media Group (NMG), which provides content in East Africa and the Great Lakes region, signed a partnership deal with the Chinese government to carry Chinese content and receive capacity building in return.

New local editorial partnerships appear to have failed to land, however, and have been discontinued.⁸

Outside of news, some Chinese productions such as soap operas and martial arts films appear to be making inroads in some African countries. This could potentially be a growth area for Chinese Soft Power as it focuses on cultural output rather than news and commentary.

Technology

One key trend is the development of Chinese 5G technology partnerships. Since mid-2019, through a partnership with the African Union, China's Huawei has been working with a number of mobile phone operators in South Africa, Morocco, Gabon, Guinea and Mozambique, to test and rollout 5G.

China is also currently working at the UN and ITU on a new internet protocol, called "New IP", to replace the current TCP/IP system. Although global in nature, "New IP" is likely to build on China's growing influence in Africa and other parts of the world. Its initial design may make it easy to filter content and therefore might be detrimental to human rights, especially the right to access independent sources of information.

China also offers technical assistance, mainly in terms of training, grants and equipment support. An annual training programme is held in China targeting thousands of African journalists with the aim of "build[ing] deeper understanding and cultural ties with China".

⁸ For example, these included a mobile newspaper in Kenya <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/xinhua-mobile-newspaper-launched-in-kenya/>

Conclusion

China has a significant media presence in Africa however they do not seem to have won “the hearts and minds” of their African audiences, perhaps for a combination of historical and geographic reasons. For one, China’s history in the continent is more recent in comparison with other international media outlets, such as the BBC and Radio France Internationale, and even CNN.

The promotion of Chinese soaps and film may point to a changing direction in terms of editorial content, away from news and opinion. This was a strategy adopted successfully by Turkey through its regionally-famous soaps and focus on culture.

Their focus on infrastructure and technology investments in Africa will likely improve the general attitudes towards China in the medium- and long-term. Whilst China’s Soft Power investments in Africa are likely to need some time before showing any impact on market size or audience share, their investments in terrestrial television and mobile phone infrastructure place the Chinese in a position, should they so wish, to influence and control the channels available to the population in many countries. Their plans for a ‘New IP’ standard would if implemented and operated in Africa, (as is quite possible with a Huawei provide 5G system) allow total control and censorship of the media available to these populations.

September 2020