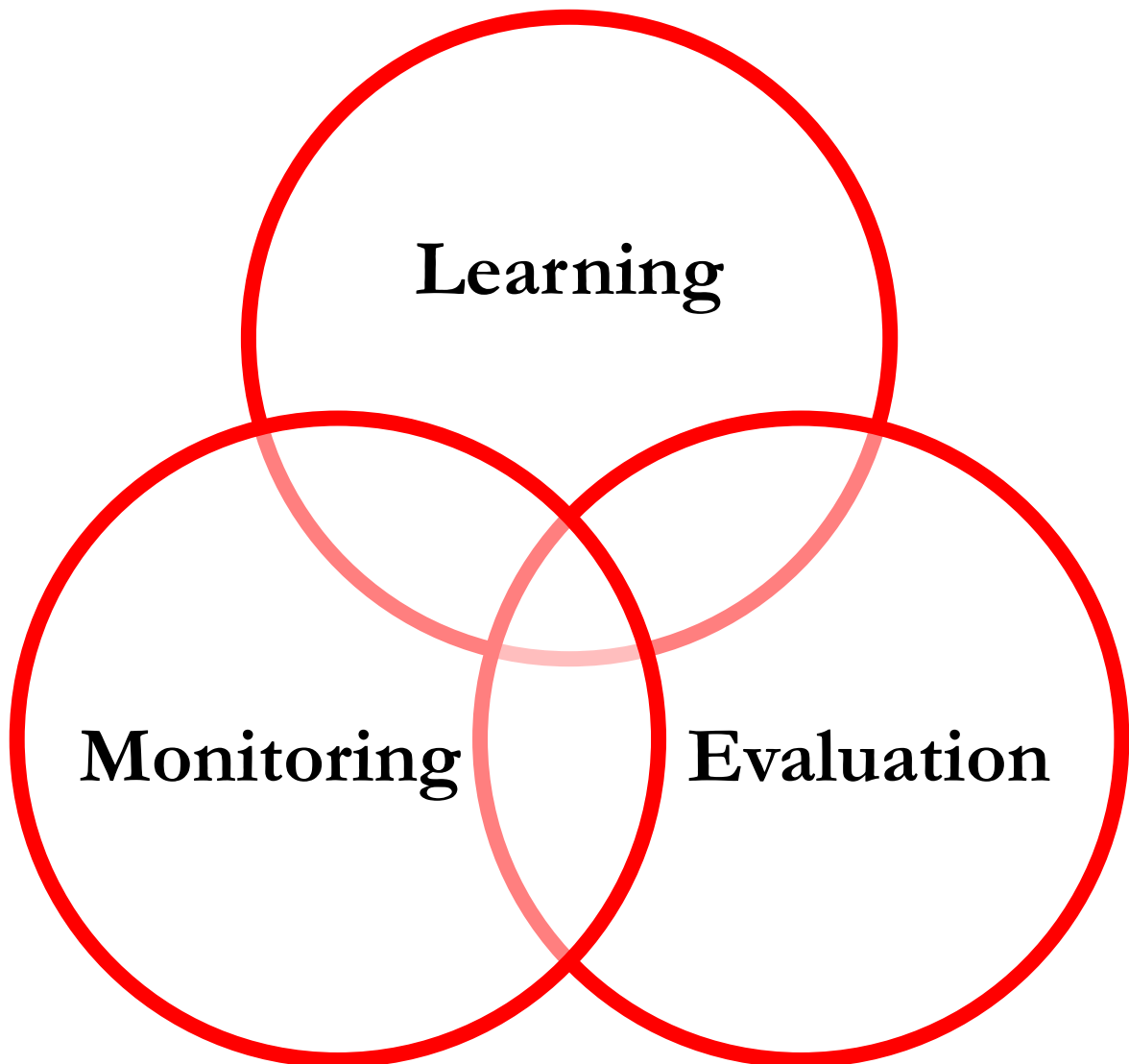


# 2017 Learning Report

A summary of Media Legal Defence Initiative's 2017  
evaluation activities



## Introduction

MLDI values the role learning and improvement plays within the organisation. MLDI dedicates time and resource into the monitoring and evaluation of its projects and programmes in order to learn, improve and grow. MLDI is committed to being a transparent organisation and wishes to share these lessons and findings with its supporters, but due to the sensitive nature of many of its evaluation reports, MLDI is not able to share the full reports externally, but instead has created this Learning Report to share key highlights and findings.

This report includes a summary of the following programme and project evaluations carried out in 2017:

1. Strategic Output and Outcome Indicators
2. Partner Grants
3. Journalist Impact Survey
4. Training Grants
5. East African Litigation Surgery
6. MLDI's 2015-20 Strategy

## MLDI's Strategic Output and Outcomes Indicators

### What were we evaluating?

Throughout the year, MLDI keeps a close eye on a number of key performance indicators (KPI's) which monitor its performance in achieving its targets and measuring progress against the following strategic outcomes:

- Facilitate high quality legal defence for journalists, bloggers and free media
- Journalists are able to defeat abusive legal challenges and continue to report on issues of public interest
- Ensuring high impact of MLDI litigation, partnerships and training
- Build partnerships with key organisations and individual lawyers where media freedom is under legal threat
- Provide support in all regions where media freedom is under legal threat
- Ensure sufficient enablers (the internal resources that underpin MLDI's work)

### How did we collect data and information?

The nature of monitoring indicators predominantly track our performance on an output level. This output data is collated and stored in an online database of cases and projects for easy analysis. As a live database, this information is continually updated.

Longer term outcome and impact level indicators are collected through reports from the lawyers and partner organisations that we fund as well as surveys, interviews and document analysis.

### What did we find?

We had a successful 2017 and achieved most of our targets, some key indicators and results are detailed in the table below.

Target	Result	Notes
Provide support to 80 new cases	82 new cases were approved for support	This is more cases that MLDI has ever supported in one year
Approve all requests within 10 days	Our yearly average was 13.3 days	Although we did not hit our target, considering the increase in grant requests, we are satisfied with this result and plan to continue to review and improve our speed.
Provide financial support to at least 6 partner organisations	MLDI provided grants to 9 partner organisations	These were in Turkey, Kenya, Macedonia, Ukraine, Colombia, Italy and Hungary.
Maintain a 70% case success rate	MLDI's success rate to date remains at 70%	We have maintained our strong success rate.
70% of supported journalists are reported to continue their reporting after their case	72% of those supported are reported to have continue reporting.	Recent impact survey results suggest this result could be even higher in the long term.
Ensure 90% of our cases are in 'partly free' or 'not free' countries	Over 96% of our cases in 2017 were in 'not free' and 'partly free' countries	This helps to ensure MLDI is targeting its support to the areas which need it most

### What did we learn?

We learned that both MLDI's reputation and the need for its services is growing, requiring us to increase our capacity and ability to respond to the increase in demand for its support.

Breaking our KPI's down by regions also helped us to identify where we needed to increase our presence, such as Latin America, MENA and Asia Pacific.

### What have we done differently as a result?

We have already increased our headcount to help accommodate for the increase in supported cases and partners and hope to continue to increase the size of the organisation in 2018.

We have also prioritised the development of specific strategies for Latin America, Mena and Asia-Pacific to ensure we have a strategic and targeted approach to growth in these regions.

Our communications KPI's also told us that MLDI's digital and online presence has not been growing at the same speed as the rest of our work – MLDI has since developed a new communication strategy and plans to commit further resources to communications in 2018.

## National Media Defence Partner Grants

### What were we evaluating?

MLDI's partner grants are financial and technical assistance to support organisation to establish or increase their capacity to provide legal defence in their home countries. We wanted to know:

- How effective our partner reporting processes were.
- The impact we have on the partners that we support.
- The impact of our partners in their home countries.

### **How did we collect data and information?**

We collected data through different evaluation projects throughout the year which included analysis of all partner reports received between 2012 and early 2017 as well as site visit evaluations of our partners in Ukraine, Uganda and Kenya.

### **What did we find?**

Historically, 73% of our partners were successful in achieving their case targets – our partners in Central Asia and Europe had the highest rate of success in meeting case targets.

Funding cases via our partners provides very good value for money, helping to ensure our funds reach more journalists, especially in countries where the demand is high. The value (cost per case) has also increased over the last five years.

The most commonly reported impact was that our partner projects led to decrease in fear of journalists and emboldening them to do their work.

### **What did we learn?**

Some key learnings from these evaluations were:

- The importance to consider trends in historical data and regional trends when assessing new grants and setting outputs and targets with our grantees.
- That our partner reporting forms need to be made easier to use, and collect better impact level data.
- That we needed to collect more data on the impact MLDI's support on the partner itself.
- That it is more cost effective to provide defence through partners, and we should be strategic when considering where we should select new partners.
- We learned more about the specific legal challenges faced by journalists, bloggers and media in Ukraine, Uganda and Kenya and how we can best collaborate with our partners to face these challenges.
- We gained confirmation that our partners in the visited countries are filling a niche and meeting a need.
- We better understood the financial challenges some of our grantees had, and learned how we can better support them.
- Connecting our partners to one another, especially when working in the same region can be impactful.
- We need to be more proactive in offering added value and technical support.
- MLDI and its partners should not wait for reporting periods to communicate and communicate thorough the project period.
- MLDI needs better defined agreements and outputs so all parties are clear on what is expected within the partnership.

### **What have we done differently as a result?**

We have already begun more strategic thinking around our partners to further identify key regions in which partner grants would complement our work most.

We reviewed and updated our reporting forms and templates in attempt to make them easier to use and also to collect more outcome and impact level data.

We are being more proactive in the offering of additional added value support, especially in the areas of financial support and monitoring and evaluation. We have used the knowledge and information gained from site visits to better inform our country actions in the countries we visited.

## Journalist Impact Survey

### What were we evaluating?

The objective was to gather data and insight on the outcomes and impact that MLDI's Emergency Defence Fund has had on those that it supports as reported directly by the journalists, bloggers and media outlets themselves 1-2 years after their case had come to an end.

### How did we collect data and information?

We sent a survey in English to all of the journalists we supported (and had contact details for) that had a case close in 2015 and 2016.

### What did we find?

- 93% of survey respondents were male.
- The majority of people supported were referred or recommended by a third party.
- 65% did not receive financial support from anyone else.
- Many reported that without MLDI they think they would have lost their case and that the financial burden would have been too much to bear.
- 95% of the respondents stated they would recommend MLDI's support.
- 85% were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their lawyer.
- 66% were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the outcome of their case.
- 87% have continued to report on matters of public interest.

### What did we learn?

- That our international networks of NGOs, lawyers and journalists are crucial to ensure we are reach those that need us.
- It added weight to our theory of change, proving that MLDI is providing a lifeline to many that it supports, who could not have defended themselves otherwise and ultimately allowing them to continue reporting.
- That we are not reaching enough female journalists.
- MLDI's support and role is more than just financial. It is valued for providing technical legal support and international attention.
- Our sample size was smaller than we would have hoped, and we learned MLDI needs to take steps to increase this for such research to be more meaningful.
- We need to address language barriers more effectively.

### What have we done differently as a result?

- We have continued to strengthen and grow our networks through an active presence at conferences, collaborative meetings and events.
- We have improved our data capturing processes to ensure we have more accurate contact details of those we support.
- We are planning a repeat survey in 2018 to track changes and will also provide the survey in other languages to increase response rate.
- We are looking to identify how we can better meet language barrier challenges.
- We will develop gender and diversity indicators to monitor our reach more closely.

## Training and Capacity Building Grants

### What were we evaluating?

In the past MLDI has provided a number of grants to partner organisation to deliver training projects to lawyers – however we were unsure of the results that these grants were achieving. We wanted to better understand the impact of these projects as well as better understand how we could best administer these types of grants to produce results in line with our wider strategic goals.

### How did we collect data and information?

This evaluation used a number of mixed methods to collect data:

- A data review of training grant requests received
- A staff survey exploring perceptions of the training grants and alignment with our strategic priorities
- A review of the reports and evaluations from past training grants that were supported as well as follow up interviewees with grantees
- Case study comparisons with other organisations administering training projects through partners
- An in-depth evaluation of a current training grant with the Bloggers Association of Kenya (including a site visit and observation of trainings).

### What did we find?

- We declined 78% of the training grant requests received.
- The concept of providing training grants did align well to our strategic objectives but the current structure of the grant and the trainings we supported made it difficult for the training grants outcomes to successfully align to our strategic outcomes.
- The grantees training project delivery plans, including planning, participant recruitment and evaluation, were often not robust enough to yield effective outcomes, or measure them.
- Our assessment criteria for training grants was not thorough enough to truly assess the capacity of training grant applicants.
- In order to successfully meet both MLDI's and our partners' objectives, training grant projects would require significant support from MLDI, requiring additional financial and human resource from MLDI and close collaboration.
- We lacked meaningful outcome and impact level data from grantees to truly assess if their trainings were impactful in the long term.
- The value for money of past training grants has been low.

### What did we learn?

- Partners delivering training need to have a solid recruitment and selection plan for participants to attend the training, this is key for success.
- Due to the resource commitment, any future training grants provided by MLDI need to focus around MLDI's strategic priorities and regions.
- The timing for training activities needs careful consideration, ensuring that the context and the press freedom landscape is 'ready' for this type of intervention.
- We need to develop more thorough assessment processes for these types of grants.
- Past training grants have made little measurable progress against MLDI's wider aims.
- Any future training grants will need a more robust monitoring and evaluation strategy to be executed in partnership with the grantee.
- One-off training sessions were less likely to result in the trained lawyers continued engagement with the grantee and application of training learnings.

- The networking aspect of training is effective and powerful, providing a space for likeminded individuals to come together.
- Our training grants could be more cost effective.

### **What have we done differently as a result?**

We have decided that any future training grants will be more strategic, making sure they align to our regional strategies and complement MLDI's wider training programme activities.

A more thorough application will be sought to better assess the suitability and capacity of the partner to deliver effective training and their plans.

We will ensure a more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan is developed with any partner delivering a training project funded by MLDI so we can better assess the results and outcomes of such projects.

## **MLDI's East African Litigation Surgery**

### **What were we evaluating?**

MLDI directly delivered a lawyer training project (East African Litigation Surgery) in August 2016. One year on, we wanted to evaluate the longer term outcomes and impact of the project. We wanted to gain an understanding of how the lawyers have implemented the learnings from the training and of the results this was yielding.

### **How did we collect data and information?**

- A review of cases supported by MLDI which were handled by training participants.
- A follow up survey to participants (sent approximately one year after training).
- In depth interviews with willing participants to explore their experiences in more depth.

### **What did we find?**

- Since the training, the trained lawyers have been very engaged and active in the freedom of expression related cases and research, both in new and ongoing cases and projects.
- Although the trained lawyers have been active in this area since the training, this has not led to a notable increase in the number of cases MLDI has supported in the region.
- The trained lawyers are working on approximately 17 freedom of expression/protection of journalist related cases, however we are unclear on how many originated before the training.
- Participants feel the training manual has been a valuable resource for them and is often a 'go-to' resource for any freedom of expression issues that arise.
- An increase in skills, knowledge and understanding of freedom of expression law, resulting in more persuasive filings, better use of freedom of expression arguments and awareness of regional laws and courts are all attributed to the training (self-reported by participants).
- Some trained lawyers have been collaborating with one another on freedom of expression cases since the training.

### **What did we learn?**

- The training has been effective in improving the skills, knowledge and confidence in freedom of expression law and litigating at international courts.
- It has effectively created a network of freedom of expression lawyers in East Africa but has been less effective in creating collaboration between trained lawyers.
- The training has not had an impact on number of cases we have supported in the region.

- Most of the trainees are still active in freedom of expression cases and apply the knowledge to litigation, research and providing advice to journalists in need.
- Our training manual is a quality and useful resource.
- Future training should include more on digital rights.
- We could play a more active role in facilitating the network of training graduates and encouraging follow up and collaboration.
- Our recruitment and selection strategies were effective.

### **What have we done differently as a result?**

As this research was carried out towards the end of 2017, we have not yet begun to translate these learnings into practise, however we plan to:

- Use our 2016 EALS recruitment methods as a starting template for future regional trainings.
- Due to the positive reception and reported usefulness of the training manual, we will use our EALS training manual as a building block for other regional trainings.
- When planning future trainings, we will consider how it can better promote collaboration and ongoing engagement both with MLDI and between participants, possibly through follow ups, newsletters and other activities.
- Review our data collection methodologies for tracking new cases handled by trained participants to ensure more accurate data is collected.

MLDI is running a number of training activities in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2018-19 and this research will provide useful insight for developing these activities. Future training activities will also provide a way for MLDI to build on this research.

## **MLDI's 2015-20 Strategy**

### **What were we evaluating?**

In 2017, MLDI was half way through its 2015-2020 organisational strategy and wanted to take the opportunity to 'take stock' of how far it has come in relation to its strategic objectives as well as ensure the strategy is still fit for purpose.

It hoped that the review and evaluation would provide valuable learnings on what has been achieved, what areas of the strategy need more attention, what areas are no longer relevant and identify any gaps in the strategy as a result of organisational change or external/contextual changes.

We had three core questions to address:

- To what extent has progress been made so far in meeting the objectives and goals as outlined in the strategy?
- What changes need to be made to the strategy to ensure it is able to ensure it can accurately guide the next two years of programme delivery; and
- How will MLDI measure success and achievement in 2020 at the end of the strategy?

### **How did we collect data and information?**

MLDI commissioned an external evaluator to independently collect and analyse data. Their research method consisted of:

- Document review
- Review and analysis of programme data
- Desk research
- Key informant interviews with an array of important stakeholders



**What did we find? (As described and concluded by the independent consultant)**

- Based on the evidence gathered as part of this evaluation, MLDI has met and gone beyond expectations set in the strategic plan.
- MLDI demonstrates significant performance against its six strategic outcomes for which it is tracking key performance indicators.
- While the term “high-quality” needs to be better defined, MLDI is maintaining a significant case load with a perceived high success rate.
- MLDI has achieved case successes (62 successful cases since 2014). KPI data tracks 72% to 85% of journalists who continue to publish during cases or return to work after cases.
- MLDI has a good record and recognition for its litigation and training activities. There is, however, further clarity is required about what “high impact” litigation means beyond “winning cases”.
- MLDI partners benefit from the knowledge and associations with key firms, lawyers and networks gained through the partnership but staff note a need to better assess the quality of the work of these partnerships.
- MLDI is reaching important areas of the world under media threat but has significant gaps in the MENA, Latin America and Asian regions.
- Staff are effective enablers and their work shows results but they are also overloaded, and missing capacity in communications, fundraising and coordination. Communications is identified as an area by staff that needs additional attention.
- The strategic plan continues to be relevant but requires more specific targets and goals in order to better track and understand organisational impact.

**What did we learn?**

- We are making good progress and achieving growth in our planned outcomes.
- Our partners and stakeholders view us as flexible, organic and responsive.
- The 2015-20 strategy needs some fine tuning (more specific objectives) to make it a living and breathing document to guide the remainder of the strategy period.
- Although a significant proportion of our litigation relates to digital rights issues, we need to include more detail on these issues in our strategy to reflect current threats to press freedom.
- We need to prioritise developing more detailed regional strategies to ensure we are reaching all regions and growing our presence across the world.
- We need to develop better defined goals if we are to truly measure our progress in 2020, and these need to be regionally specific.
- Our communication plans and training programme as outlined in our strategy have not grown at the same pace as our other work.
- We need to improve the collection of diversity indicators data and also data for longer term outcomes and impact measurement
- We need to increase our staff capacity.

**What have we done differently as a result?**

The evaluation helped to reassure us that we are on the right path to achieving our strategic goals and that we need to continue to increase our capacity and reach to maximise our impact.

In early 2018 we will be fine tuning the strategy to make sure it can guide us through to 2020 and we have also prioritised the development of regional strategies and corresponding targets.

We will also be developing better defined goals and indicators, and trial new evaluation methodologies which will help us to measure the outputs, outcomes and impact of our core activities in 2020 when the strategy period is over.

Additionally, we have begun plans to increase our headcount to provide additional resource in key areas addressed in the evaluation, including communications.

## Closing remarks

Our various evaluation activities in 2017 yielded many lessons and prompted various ideas for MLDI to improve its performance which we are committed to putting into practise.

We look forward to learning more in 2018 and have ambitious plans to trial new evaluation methods to explore the impact of strategic litigation, dig deeper into the impact of work on the journalists we support and trial more participatory evaluation methodologies.

If you would like to know more about any of MLDI's monitoring and evaluation activities and reports, please email MLDI's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer on: [Patrick.Regan@mediadefence.org](mailto:Patrick.Regan@mediadefence.org)