Research Summary
Exploring governance in the Palestinian Territories

BBC MEDIA ACTION
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD

Summary

- BBC Media Action, with funding from UK's Department for International Development through the Global Grant, is working in the Palestinian Territories on a project to deliver a political debate/ discussion programme on TV, radio and social media platforms.
- In April and May 2012, the BBC Media Action research team in the Palestinian Territories, in association with a local research agency, conducted formative qualitative research to explore behaviours and attitudes around governance, media and accountability in order to inform programme development.
- Participants expressed a strong desire for trustworthy programming covering local issues. The debate programme will need to employ traditional media (TV and radio) and social media platforms to fully engage the largest audience and encourage interaction.
- The programme should reflect the importance of perceptions towards, and interactions with non-governmental organisations and individuals (non-state actors) in relation to accessing services and conflict resolution and the role this plays in how citizens hold the state accountable.

Context

The Gaza Strip

The Palestinian Territories (PT) is the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. Since the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in 1988, some 130 UN member nations have recognised the state of Palestine. However, these efforts to create a Palestinian state have been restricted by the ongoing conflict with Israel and disagreements over the status of Diaspora Palestinians.

Parts of the West Bank are politically under the control of the Palestinian National Authority, while the Gaza Strip is under the control of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). East Jerusalem, which is part of the West Bank, is under full Israeli control, with the Palestinian National Authority maintaining an unofficial presence through a number of civil society organizations and other institutions. Alongside government actors, there is a growing presence of non-state actors in these areas that continue to shape the ways that citizens access services and process conflicts.

The project

BBC Media Action is working in the PT to deliver a monthly political debate/ discussion program on TV, radio and social media platforms. Programmes will be produced quarterly by the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) in partnership with BBC Arabic. PBC will also be independently producing eight similar debate programs per year, to be accompanied by a follow-up programme, focused on exploring in more depth issues covered in the main programme and targeted primarily at a youth audience. Formative research with audiences was required to inform the development of this programming.

Research methodology

The research consisted of 54 in-depth interviews (individual and paired) and six focus groups among men and women of different ages, in urban, rural and refugee areas. Three governates (regions), two in the West Bank and one in Gaza, were selected for the research to ensure a diversity of participants. A variety of research techniques were used. These included free listing (where participants are asked to list all words and concepts related to a specific question/topic), conflict diagrams and historical event charting

(both tools which support the exploration of personal experience) and photo narratives, to give a more in-depth understanding of governance, accountability, conflict processing and general media habits in the PT context.

Findings

Participants reported similar issues and concerns affecting their daily lives. These included: unemployment, access to water, electricity and healthcare, corruption and difficulties resolving conflicts. However, there were key differences between and even across the territories. For example, participants reported greater restrictions on men and women interacting in public enforced on citizens in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas government, compared to the less restrictive situation in the West Bank.

The research investigated both the experiences of interacting with state and non-state actors as well as the motivations behind the interaction. Participants reported a dependency on non-state actors for resolving issues, particularly those relating to conflict resolution. This dependency can be a barrier to citizens accessing services typically provided by state actors. For example, perceptions relating to state-provided justice systems (that they are ineffective and not to be trusted) often mean that Palestinians will first turn to non-state actors and informal institutions for the resolution of issues.

Participants relied on a range of sources and platforms for local news and varied in attitude towards the trustworthiness of these sources. However, the desire for local coverage of local issues was strongly expressed. Many viewed social media as having growing relevance and playing a role that goes beyond entertainment. It is clear that a great deal of dialogue and interaction between citizens, particularly young Palestinians (42% of the total population is under 15 years of age), now takes place online. Participants felt that social media can bypass both cultural limitations (young men and women are able to interact more openly online) and physical barriers (restrictions on movement).

Implications

Although there are similar issues that affect those across the PT, there are differences by locality that need to be acknowledged. In order to reach and achieve an impact with an audience across all areas, the programming will need to give careful consideration to how it speaks to those living in different places. While an issue (i.e. access to water) may affect those across the PT, how someone goes about resolving it and who they hold accountable varies depending on location. Making the programme's panel and discussion relevant to all will require a careful balance.

The discussion/debate programme is recommended to explore the reasons for the informal nature of service providers, as well as the impact this has on how citizens access services provided by state actors. There is an opportunity to explore whether this informal sector can be strengthened and standardised by supporting citizens to demand accountability from non-state actors, in a similar way to state actors.

Participants of all ages reported that they value trustworthy programming which covers local issues. To best serve the audience the debate programme will need to employ traditional (TV and radio) and social media platforms to fully engage the largest audience and encourage interaction.

Contact

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