Background Note
Lahore Consultation, Strengthening Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Policy Framework in Pakistan

Introduction

Like many countries, Pakistan has experienced a significant rise in the use of digital media. According to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, there are currently 193 million Mobile Cellular Subscribers in the country.[1] According to DataReportal, in early 2024, 45.7 percent of the population had internet access, with 29.5 percent of these users being active on social media.[2] The rise of social media has fundamentally transformed the way information is shared and consumed, creating unparalleled opportunities for communication and global connectivity. However, it has also introduced a major challenge - the rapid spread of disinformation, which threatens societal cohesion and undermines democratic processes.

Intensified volumes of disinformation have further led to an increase in harmful rhetoric, often leading to incitement to violence, polarization and distrust in public institutions. The case in Pakistan is no different, the recent research by the Coalition against Disinformation (CAD), an alliance comprising academia, digital media, and civil society organizations, found that 63 percent of university students in Pakistan are regularly exposed to disinformation online. Furthermore, 62 percent of these students believe that disinformation poses a significant risk to democracy and electoral processes. Disinformation can also significantly impact Pakistan's economic growth, investor confidence, and consumer behavior. Renee Hobbs, an American expert on media literacy, argues that merely using media technology does not equate to the ability to critically evaluate its messages.[3] Rather effective interpretation and understanding of media information require specialized skills and knowledge.

Concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

To address these issues and to curb disinformation and hate speech online, UNESCO has introduced the concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL), that empowers citizens and stakeholders to develop necessary skills to foster a culture of knowledge, peace, and tolerance. MIL is a set of competencies to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate and use, to create as well as share information and media content in all formats, using various tools, in a critical, ethical and effective way, in order to participate and engage in personal, professional and societal activities.[4]

Alignment with National Priorities

The introduction of a composite concept like Media and Information Literacy (MIL) plays a critical role in addressing the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation online. By equipping individuals with the skills to critically analyze and evaluate the information they encounter, MIL fosters a more informed and discerning public. It empowers users to identify credible sources, understand the nuances of digital content and engage responsibly in online

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[1] Telecom Indicators, Pakistan Telecomunication Authority, https://www.pta.gov.pk/category/telecom-indicators

[2] Digital 2024: Pakistan. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-pakistan

[3] Media Literacy for the 21st Century: Interview with Renee Hobbs, EdD. https://www.apadivisions.org/division-46/spotlights/renee-hobbs

[4] UNESCO, Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework: country readiness and competencies, 2013. Accessed from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000224655.

discourse. ultimately strengthening societal resilience against the spread of false information and reinforcing the integrity of democratic processes.

UNESCO in collaboration with Media Foundation (MF) 360 has launched an initiative to Strengthen Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Policy Framework in Pakistan, this initiative robustly supports the Digital Pakistan Policy vision, which seeks to enhance connectivity and digital skills across the population. Promoting social inclusion, harmony and peaceful coexistence are critical areas where this project aligns with national priorities. In the realm of education, the project aligns with the National Education Policy, emphasized on integrating technology and fostering critical thinking skills. It is also in line with the objectives of the National Action Plan (NAP) and the National Security Strategy, both of which prioritize combating extremism, addressing hate speech, and countering misinformation.

By empowering marginalized groups with the skills to access and evaluate information, the initiative helps create a more inclusive and informed society. Furthermore, the project supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), fostering critical thinking, reducing inequalities and promoting peace and justice through informed citizenry.

The Media and Information Literacy (MIL) strategy is a critical step toward building an informed and resilient society in the face of digital challenges such as misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. Its aim is to align the government's priorities in education, digital transformation, and social cohesion with MIL principles, ensuring that all citizens particularly marginalized groups, have the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

The strategy will be formulated through a comprehensive consultation process involving policy makers, duty bearers, government officials, civil society organizations and academics. These consultations will be conducted across all provincial capitals, as well as in key locations such as Sukkur, Bahawalpur and Swat. The process will conclude with a National Dialogue in Islamabad, ensuring that the final strategy is enriched by a broad spectrum of regional perspectives, capturing the unique needs and insights of diverse communities across the country. The purpose of these consultations is to gather a wide range of perspectives and insights on the current needs and gaps in Media and Information Literacy (MIL). Participants will share their experiences, challenges and recommendations related to digital literacy, media consumption, and information evaluation. This valuable input will be synthesized to generate actionable insights on how MIL can be effectively incorporated into policy frameworks, educational curricula and community programs. By doing so, the strategy will be holistic, inclusive and reflective of national priorities. This participatory approach ensures that the MIL strategy is not only responsive to existing challenges but is also aligned with Pakistan's broader goals of sustainable development, peacebuilding, and social cohesion. It will create a blueprint that addresses the evolving digital landscape, strengthens democratic values, and empowers citizens through critical thinking and digital literacy, fostering a more inclusive and informed society.

Objectives

I. To help key stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society, youth, media professionals, and academics, understand the importance of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in creating informed and responsible societies.

II. To gather inputs from key stakeholders for developing the Strategic Framework for MIL in Pakistan ensuring inclusivity through diverse representation.

Expected Outcomes

I. Stakeholders will be well-informed about the importance of media and information literacy (MIL) for building an informed and responsible society.

II. **Valuable feedback will be collected from stakeholders on the MIL framework to ensure it is**

practical and relevant to Pakistan's needs.

III. **Challenges and opportunities for integrating MIL into education, media, and policy systems will be identified to shape the strategy.**

Time	Session	Guest Speakers
Lahore Consultation – Programme Agenda **Date: Nov 6, 2024 (Wednesday)** **Time: 10:00 AM- 4:15 PM** **Venue: Department of Digital Media, School of Communication Studies,** **University of the Punjab**		
9:30 – 10:00	Registration of Participants and introduction	Team, Media Foundation 360
10:00 - 10:10	Approaching Media and Literacy Discourse in Pakistan	**Prof. Dr. Savera Mujib Shami,** Expert Lead MIL, Chairperson, Department Digital Media, University of the Punjab
10:10 - 10:20	UNESCO Co-shaping Digital Transformation	**Mr. Hamza Khan, Swati,** National Professional Officer, UNESCO
Inaugural Session – Building Knowledge Based Societies		
10:20 – 10:35	Building Resilient Societies - Media and Information Literacy as a Pillar of Social Cohesion	**Mr. Mujib ur Rehman Shami** Chief Editor, Daily Pakistan
10:35 -10:50	Integrating Media and Information Literacy policy in building a knowledge-based society	**Mr. Syed Tahir Raza Hamdani,** Secretary, Information and Culture Punjab
10:50 - 11:05	Connecting the Dots - Academic Insights on Media and Information Literacy Integration	**Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ali** Vice Chancellor, University of the Punjab
11:05 - 11:30	**Group Photo & Tea Break**	
11:30-12:30	**Session 1** (Moderator) - **Mr. Mubashar Bukhari,** President Media Foundation 360	
	Blurring of Information Lines: Media's Influence Demands Empowerment or Protectionism Followed by Discussion with Participants	**Mr. Mansoor Ali Khan** Senior Media Analyst/Anchor **Ms. Mehmal Sarfraz** Media Analyst GEO Tv, Co-founder The Current (online) **Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen** Vice Chancellor, Government

		College University for Women, Faislabad
12:30-13:15	**LUNCH BREAK**	
13:15 - 14:00	Session II (Moderator) **Ms. Durdana Najam,** Journalist, Express Tribune	
	Building a Comprehensive Framework: The Convergence of Media, Information and Literacy Followed by Discussion with Participants	**Mr. Muhammad Noshad Ali,** Group Executive Editor, Daily Pakistan **Mr. Ahmed Bilal Mehboob,** Executive Editor, PILDAT **Ms. Shazia Rizwan,** Parliamentary Secretary for Information, Government of Punjab
14:00-14:45	SESSION III (Moderator): **Ms. Amina Ali, Cultural Expert,** Media Foundation 360	
	Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: A Cornerstone for Shaping MIL Policies Followed by Discussion with Participants	**Ms. Naveed Shehzad**, Writer, Director, Actor Academic Advisor & Director Resource Centre, Lahore Grammar School **Ms. Moneeza Hashmi,** Media and Culture Expert **Mr. Yaseer Hashmi,** Assistant Professor, Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore.
14:45 – 15:30	**BREAKOUT SESSION WITH PARTICIPANT** **Group A** (Policymakers): Developing Collaborative Strategies for Implementing Media and Information Literacy Policies **Group B** (Media Professionals): Developing Effective Media Literacy initiatives to address emerging challenges hindering fundamental rights **Group C** (Academia): Integrating Media and Information Literacy into Academic Curricula & Reshaping formal and non-formal education	**Prof. Dr. Savera Shami**, Expert lead MIL, Chairperson, Department Digital Media, University of the Punjab, Lahore **Ms. Amina Ali**, Cultural Expert, Media Foundation 360 **Ms. Sana Naveed Khan,** Assistant Professor, Department of Digital Media, University of the Punjab, Lahore **Dr. Saqib Saleem,** Assistant Professor, Mass Communication

	Group D (Duty Bearers): Identification of Roles and Responsibilities in Supporting Media and Information Literacy	Department, Forman Christian College, University, Lahore
15:30 – 16:00	Group Presentations	Group Representatives
16:00 – 16:15	Closing Remarks	**Mr. Hamza Khan, Swati,** National Professional Officer, UNESCO