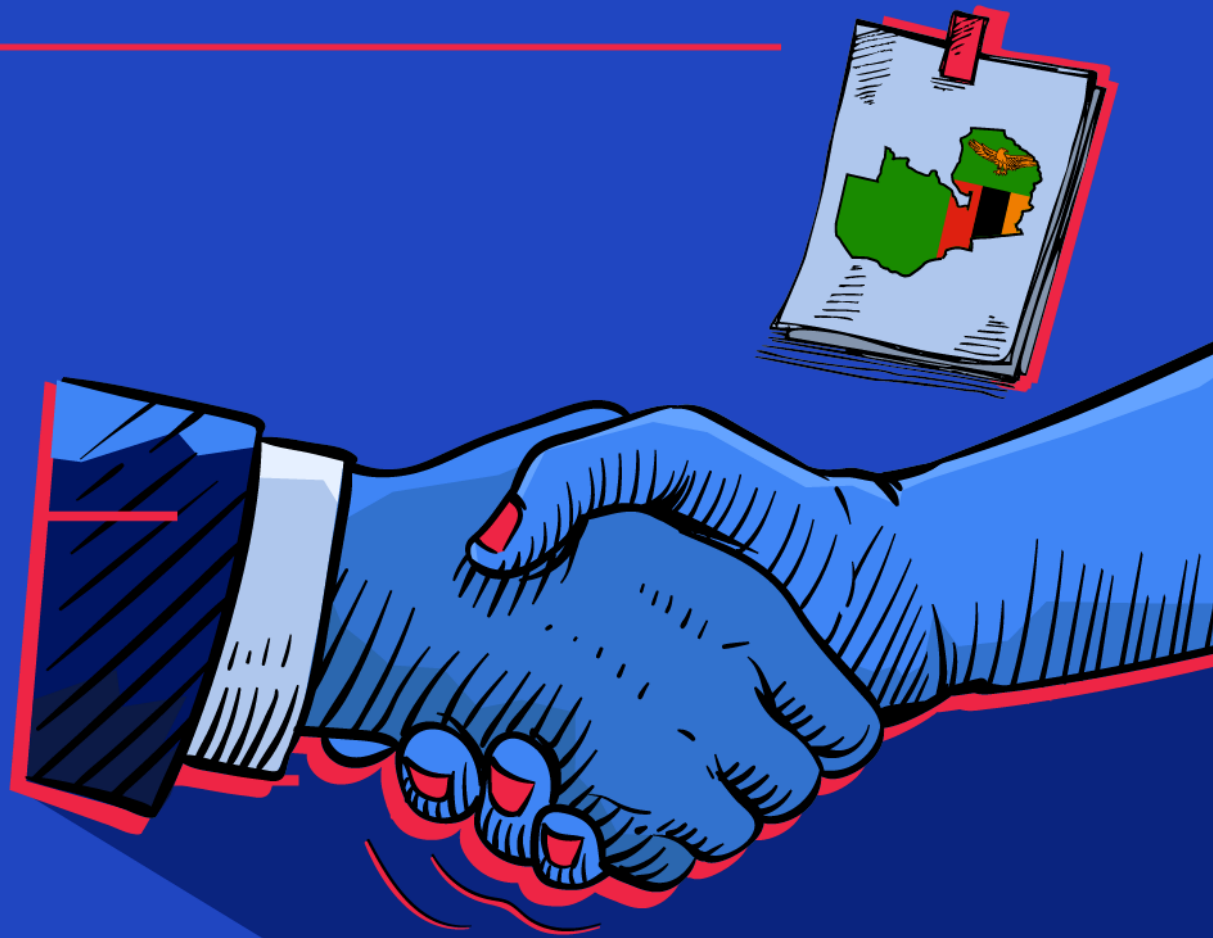


Transparency and trust: newsroom policies

Zambia



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1. Executive summary

Code for Africa (CfA) has undertaken this survey to establish whether news organisations in Zambia have clear editorial policies and are transparent in their business operations. The research is also intended to examine the accessibility and availability of these policies for both internal and external stakeholders.

Additionally, the findings of this research provide insight into the state of media transparency and accountability in Zambia, and also inform a number of recommendations to address these inadequacies and how to build resilience and restore public trust in the media in order to be less susceptible to media capture. The study revealed policy gaps in newsrooms that could impact media credibility which in turn could contribute to diminishing trust.

Media capture in this report refers to 'a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own¹, nor able to exercise their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for malign purposes'.

Drawing on survey findings, interviews and in-house research, this report examines the presence of newsroom policies in Zambia, and the need for greater accessibility and transparency in their implementation.

The report further highlights the challenges faced by media organisations in making newsroom policies accessible to both internal and external stakeholders, and the reluctance by media owners to share these policies publicly.

a. Summary of key findings

In reviewing the policies, the study found that:

- The ethics policy and the contact page are the most shared with the public at 38% respectively, while the fact-checking policy was the most available policy at 38%.
- While none of the newsrooms surveyed had an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy, 57% of the respondents indicated they use AI in different ways. Mwebantu News and Mufumbwe Community Radio said that they deployed AI to analyse videos and images for news content, while Mphangwe FM and Lubingu Lwansanse use it to write news bulletins.
- Only 19 websites of the 50 media organisations surveyed have a contact page and corrections pages.

¹ [Media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own](#), In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy, 2017

- The two newsrooms sampled with the most number of policies available publicly were Makanday with 8 out of the 10 listed policies, and Diggers Newspaper with 7 policies published on its site.

b. Recommendations

News organisations should adopt newsroom policies and guidelines. To promote transparency, accountability and ethical journalism, media organisations must put in place clear newsroom policies and guidelines. This not only fosters trust in the media but also guards against media capture. In this regard, media owners should invest in the development of clear editorial policies, as well as provide the necessary resources to support quality journalism. Indeed news editors emphasised the importance of clear policies in ensuring editorial decisions are merit-based and devoid of external influences.

Media houses should make ownership details and funding sources transparent. Vague ownership details can breed suspicion of external influence and the media organisation's agenda. To guard against such concerns and to uphold media freedom, media organisations should adopt clear policies that support full disclosure of funding sources.

All staff should be trained on the editorial policies, where these are published, as well as how to declare their possible conflicts of interest. This analysis shows significant gaps in the publishing and accessibility of newsroom policies. It is recommended that MISA Zambia helps create an outline of best practice policies and templates, and works with newsrooms to adopt a standard.

Newsroom adoption of artificial intelligence and adoption of guiding principles. Use of AI in newsrooms is relatively new, but already plays a role in newsroom operations. It is deployed in areas such as recommendation of stories to readers, text to speech, and identification of media to accompany stories. Other potential areas of AI include synthetic media creation such as automation of sports results, and financial market updates. However, this is happening without appropriate policies to guide the deployment of AI, or understanding the effect the technology is having in shaping the narrative. A lack of AI and synthetic media policy which guides the use of such tools exposes the media to influence from foreign actors and technology firms, which could come in the form of research, tools, training and financing to set up AI operations in the newsroom and so influence the news agenda. This report recommends the development of policies to guide AI use in news.

2. Background and context

Zambia (population of approximately 18 million people) has a relatively diverse news media landscape with radio being the biggest news platform. MediaData has to date mapped 288 newsrooms across private, community, and state-owned media organisations. This research is an attempt to assess and understand the level of transparency of the country's media landscape by evaluating the availability and accessibility of newsroom editorial policies.

Trust in media has been affected by recent criticisms of reporting standards, and restrictions on the freedom of journalists to practise their craft, with some saying they have to self-censor for their own safety.²

There are increasing calls for transparency about how news organisations go about their business, which speaks directly to the recommendation of this study that editorial policies be clearly accessible on news sites, as well as management and ownership structures.

3. Methodology and research process

CfA conducted the study using research from our own internal CivicSignal research analysts, alongside a survey of senior editors affiliated with the Zambia chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zambia), and held a roundtable discussion with other senior editors. MISA Zambia is a non-profit organisation that promotes media independence, pluralism and freedom of expression and its members include individual journalists, editors, academics and newsrooms.

The desktop research covered a sample of 50 organisations in Zambia. The organisations were selected based on their number of viewers, listeners and followers, or high levels of online engagement. The study was conducted between January and March 2023 and included online, print, radio and television. We included only entities that have a newsroom and publish their news at a regular interval. These newsrooms fall across the spectrum of state-owned, privately owned and community media organisations.

The objective of this study was to establish whether news organisations in Zambia have clear editorial and management policies, and whether the audiences of these news organisations could easily access this information on the prime publishing platforms. We used both quantitative and qualitative study methods by sending out surveys to news editors and managers.

The CivicSignal MediaData team also checked the websites of the selected news organisations for the presence of the following policies:

- Privacy policy
- Copyright declaration
- Contact page
- Corrections page or a linked corrections policy
- Complaints page
- Ownership of the media organisation
- Management structure
- List of editorial staff
- Public facing editorial guidelines
- Ethics policy

² [Media self-censorship in Zambia](#), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Caroline Katotobwe, 2022

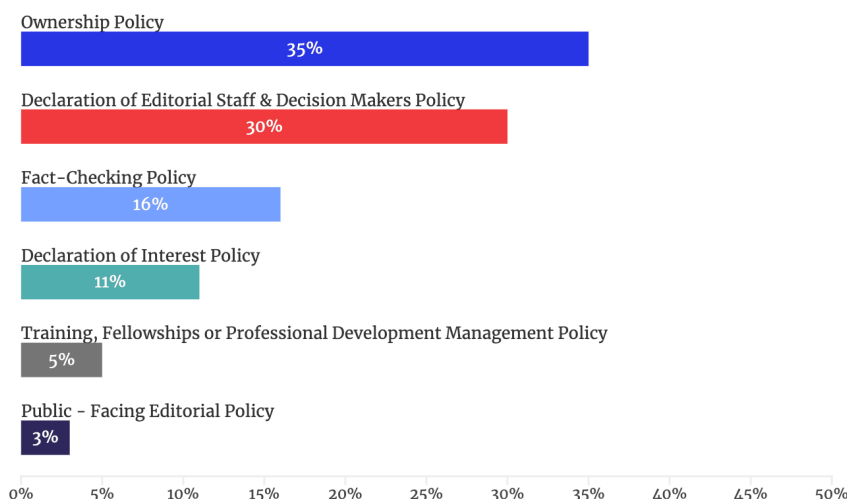
4. Newsroom policy

A newsroom policy refers to a document or documents created or used by a media outlet and sets out the essential guidelines and rules for all employees and freelancers to abide by when producing content. The policies are important because they help to uphold the integrity of the media industry, maintain public trust in journalism, and ensure that journalists and news media organisations are held accountable for their work. This policy can include, among other things, the news organisation's position on the source of funding such as adverts, donations, commercial programmes, ownership, and whether it is privately funded by an individual or by an organisation, as well as corrections and privacy pages.

The policy should also state the structure for decision making in the newsroom, and the management structure that is responsible for the entire organisation. The availability and accessibility of newsroom policies is important to build trust, as they enable internal and external stakeholders to understand the standards and expectations for news reporting.

In an analysis of newsroom social media policies, the African Centre for Media Excellence³ (ACME) said that 'while existing editorial guidelines might comprehensively cover journalistic standards, they may not address all the nuances of fast-evolving digital platforms'.

Existing editorial policies in newsrooms



This chart reflects the current status of editorial policies in newsrooms. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)

³ [Newsrooms should apply social media policies fairly](#), African Centre for Media Excellence, March 2023

a. Availability of newsroom policies

The availability and accessibility of newsroom policies is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical journalism in news organisations. Transparency International said⁴ that 'the lack of media ownership transparency, especially the lack of information on media companies' beneficial owners; non-transparent financing; and the substantial increase in non-transparent use of both state and private advertising' is one of the issues threatening integrity in media.

Our study found that most media organisations, despite having certain policies in place, did not make them publicly available. The data indicated that 30 out of the 50 newsrooms we used as the sample did not have active websites, but had an active Facebook presence.

The two newsrooms that had the most policies published were Makanday and Diggers Newspaper with eight and seven of the checked policies available respectively. The Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), the country's public broadcaster, had the ownership structure, privacy policy, complaints page, and contact details published on their site, while a community radio station Radio Chikaya listed the ownership and management structure, editorial staff, and contact information on its website.

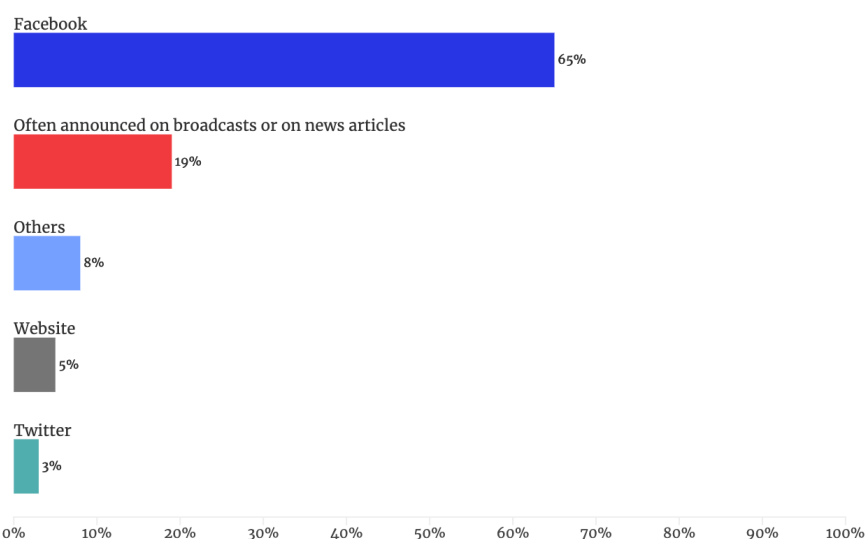
b. Ownership and management structure policy

These are the most common and publicly available policies in newsrooms at 34% and 24% respectively. Interestingly, the majority of newsrooms said in the survey that their ownership information was published on their newsroom's Facebook page but none of this information existed on their facebook page.

A senior editor observed at a roundtable discussion event that lack of declaration of media ownership leaves media organisations open to suspicion especially when they publish potentially sensitive investigations. It also makes them vulnerable to manipulation by either politicians or other foreign influences. Moreover, journalists in these media organisations could be under the editorial influence of their owners or could self-censor when reports conflict with their owners' interests.

⁴ [Good practices to ensure transparency and integrity](#), Transparency International, May 2016

Source of information on newsroom ownership



Respondents to the survey said their audience could use a range of platforms to access information on the structure of control and ownership of their newsrooms. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)

c. Declaration of editorial staff policy

Only 36% of the newsrooms surveyed declared having an editorial staff policy and only 32% of these shared the policy with the public.

A lack of this policy brings about mistrust which poses a risk to newsrooms and their editorial staff. This declaration is important in building public trust in journalism as it allows journalists and news media organisations to be held accountable for their work. Further, it helps guard against potential conflicts of interest arising, for instance, from editors or journalists wearing 'different hats' or moonlighting for other organisations.

d. Declaration of interests policy

Only 18 of the surveyed newsrooms (36%) have a declaration of interests policy. Of these, only 10 newsrooms (20%) made the policy publicly available. The lack of transparency heightens the risk of newsrooms falling victim to political or external influence through gifts, travel or training in exchange for favourable coverage.

During a roundtable discussion, editors highlighted the vulnerability of journalists to outside influences primarily due to their low salaries. The absence of a living wage for journalists and newsroom staff, in addition to the lack of clear editorial policies may increase their susceptibility to media capture.

e. Training fellowships or professional development policy

Seven newsrooms indicated that their policy existed but only 2 newsrooms shared it with the public. This study revealed that most media organisations do not have this policy in place which poses a danger to professionalism as trained journalists or media organisations become susceptible to media capture. In follow-up interviews, news editors said that newsroom staff tended to find their own training programmes, and would request permission from their editor to attend abroad. However, they indicated some staff are seconded for specialised training locally.

Of the media organisations surveyed, 15 community radio stations indicated that in their training policy, there is a clause that untrained staff who are sponsored for training within the country by the organisation sign an agreement to continue working for the organisation for a period of four years upon completion of the studies.

Previous research by CfA established that training and junkets were one of the ways news organisations in Zambia came under foreign influence. Lack of policies to guide foreign conferences, training and fellowships was one of the weaknesses that the study established as leading to media capture.

This lack of policy to provide guidance on who trains newsroom staff means that there could be a 'return on investment' required from the trainers. It also would pre-define who the actors are they would not accept training from in order to safeguard against possible influence. A clear policy also provides a clear guideline on how influence like this will be treated by newsrooms. Newsrooms should develop policies that caution against accepting financial favours and gifts as this has the potential to influence performance and cause conflicts of interest at work.

f. Public-facing editorial policy

From the survey, respondents said only 10% shared this policy with members of the public. The majority of newsrooms indicated that while they have an overarching editorial policy in place, it was not shared with the public. Newsrooms are advised to have this policy and make it accessible to the public to show news organisations' commitment to sharing impartial, accurate and credible content.

g. Privacy policy

No newsrooms indicated that they had this policy in place during the survey. Our research found 6 out of 50 media organisations published this on their website. Newsrooms are legally required to have a privacy policy document which informs their audience of the type of information that is collected on the website, and how the newsroom intends to use that data.

h. Ethics policy

This policy was declared by 26% of the surveyed newsrooms, but out of these only 38% shared it publicly. This study established that this is the most shared policy among all newsroom policies.

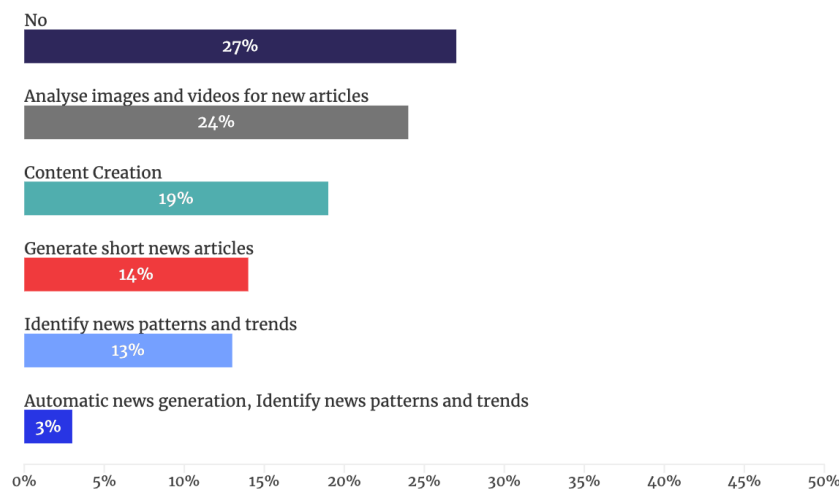
However, in a follow up interview all the respondents said the policy existed in their newsrooms not as a stand alone policy but is incorporated in an overarching editorial policy.

They revealed that all staff members are required to follow these ethical guidelines when executing their duty. This study also established that broadcasting media organisations relied on the ethical guidelines set by Zambia's Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA).

i. Artificial intelligence policy

The survey addressed both the use of AI in newsrooms as well as policies that govern it within newsrooms. No newsrooms had policies in place, but 57% indicated that they use AI tools in their newsroom.

Leverage of AI in Newsrooms



How newsrooms leverage AI in their work. (Source: CivicSignal Media Data)

Of the 57%, 24 % said they used AI tools to analyse images and videos for news articles, while 19% used it for content creation. A further 14% indicated they use it to generate short news articles, 13% to identify news patterns and trends, while 3% used it for automatic news generation.

For newsrooms to fully leverage AI in their work, they should ensure to have this policy in place, adhere to its guidelines and also understand how it affects their work. Lack of this policy exposes the media organisations to serious institutional damage as they may not be sure of the intentions of service providers and may be prone to surveillance which in turn may lead to media capture.

Yet newsrooms are already affected by the algorithms that control AI which determine how and which news gets to the audience.

In Zambia, where Chinese made phones are ubiquitous, news media organisations are at the mercy of web browsers which serve both as search engines and news aggregators with algorithms that determine the content users will see.

j. Corrections page or a linked corrections policy

Nine media organisations indicated on the survey that they have a corrections page. Out of these, only 4 organisations said they shared the corrections policy page with the public. However, a physical check on websites indicated none of the media organisations had a corrections page. In a follow-up interview with the respondents, they said that media organisations did make corrections to published stories whenever an error was brought to their attention. These corrections or retractions were made public in both electronic and print media.

5. Conclusion

Trust in news is declining globally, and had fallen in almost half the countries surveyed in the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's 2022 Digital News survey⁵. Having policies that are well articulated and accessible to audiences and journalists alike is part of the mechanism that can not only help insulate news media organisations against attacks on their credibility, but also ensure their sustainability.

It is important that newsrooms increase the audience's understanding of how journalism works, especially the decision-making and newsgathering processes that shape how the news is made. This will differentiate reputable news organisations from other less professional sources. While we have used some of the more popular and larger media organisations in Zambia as samples for this study, the media space is quickly shifting, with audiences moving away from mainstream media and towards other newer means of news consumption such as social media, blogs, or even partisan media that sometimes masquerade as vernacular or community media organisations.

Our recommendations cover areas of support to media houses to develop up to date policies and guiding principles for their operations. Systems that rank the trustworthiness of news sites use AI-driven analysis of a site's structures to score a news organisation's vulnerability to information manipulation. News sites that do not have easily discoverable editorial policies and ownership structures will inevitably score low on these metrics, with a potential knock-on effect on revenue.

The awareness of the existence, variety and nature of accountability measures used by media increases the audience's trust, and news media can improve their relationship with readers by creating and maintaining an infrastructure of accountability practices that is accessible to those looking for it.

⁵ [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022

As Code for Africa 2021 studies, co-authored with the Global Disinformation Index, found⁶, 'transparency about a newsroom's operations can be a key mechanism for building online user trust in news sites by dispelling any concerns about conflicts of interest or shadow owners.'⁷

The absence of key operational policies that are easily accessible was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups. 'Similar relationships between a site's operational integrity and the reliability of a site's content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.' Implementing and making available operational and editorial policies decreases news organisations' vulnerability to information manipulation and erosion of trust.

⁶ [Disinformation Risk Assessment](#): The Online News Market in Kenya, Global Disinformation Index, 2021

⁷ [Media Market Risk Ratings: South Africa](#), Global Disinformation Index, Amanda Strydom, 2021

Code for Africa (CfA) is an ecosystem builder. It is the continent's largest network of non-profit civic technology and open data laboratories in 22 African countries. CfA builds digital democracy solutions that give citizens unfettered access to actionable information that empowers them to make informed decisions, and that strengthens civic engagement for improved public governance and accountability. This includes building infrastructure like the continent's largest open data portals at openAFRICA and sourceAFRICA. CfA incubates initiatives as diverse as the africanDRONE network, the PesaCheck fact-checking initiative, the machine-learning research and analysis lab at CivicSignal, the iLAB disinformation investigative team, and the sensors.AFRICA air quality sensor network. CfA also runs one of Africa's largest skills development initiatives for digital journalists, and seed funds cross-border collaboration.

CivicSignal is Africa's largest non-profit media monitoring/mapping initiative that uses machine learning/natural language processing tools for 'AI' analysis of media content across the continent. CivicSignal's analysis includes mapping media ownership and understanding the underlying media economy that shapes online content.

Its products, MediaCloud (for tracking content) and MediaData (for tracking media ownership) are regularly used by development agencies and regulators to develop intervention strategies.

The African Data and Democracy Observatory (ADDO) is a member-driven voluntary network of independent watchdog CSOs that use cutting-edge digital analysis and forensic research to better understand influence operations that seek to subvert or usurp public discourse across Africa.

ADDO was originally co-founded by the continent's largest civic technology and open data non-profit, Code for Africa (CfA), in partnership with the Atlantic Council's global Digital Forensic Lab (DFRLab) and the DT Institute in 2020 to help coordinate their ongoing research into foreign disinformation and propaganda campaigns that targeted an initial 21 sub-Saharan African countries.

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The logo for Code for Africa features a stylized map of the African continent composed of horizontal lines of varying lengths, creating a stepped effect.