



Annual Report 2023

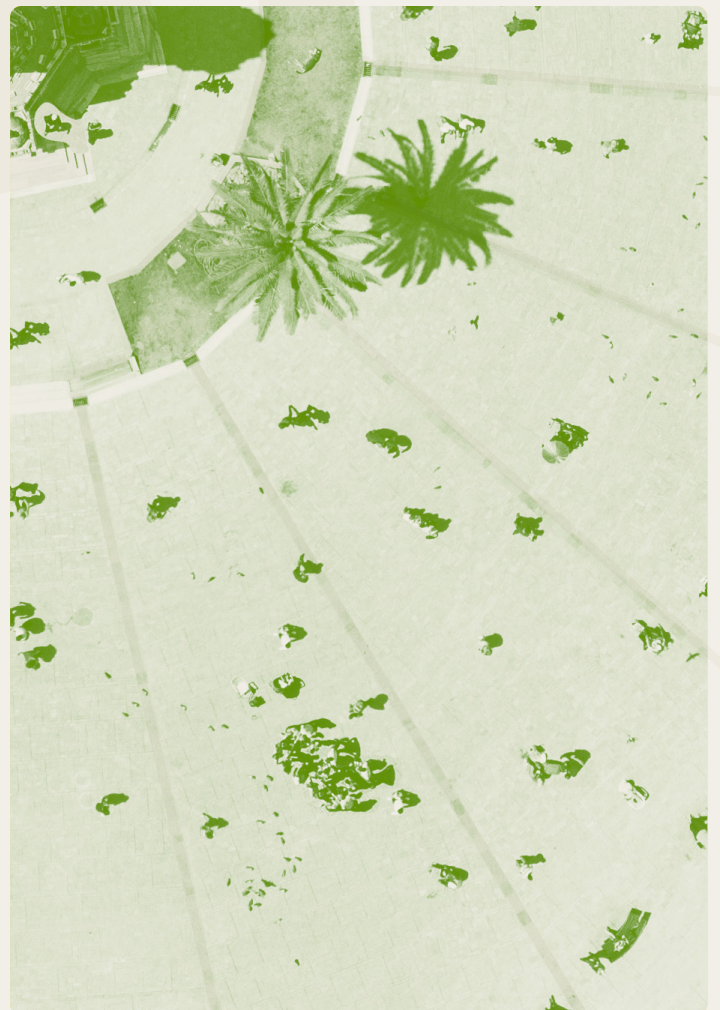


In the fight for reliable, accessible information, we're a not-for-profit organization focused on improving the principal vector through which knowledge travels today: the internet.

Pictured right is Konak Square in the İzmir province of Turkey.

Meedan means “gathering place” or “town square” in Arabic. Our not-for-profit organization was founded with a vision to serve many of the functions that town squares offer to people across the globe — to foster cultural, linguistic, and ideological dialogue between different communities online and offline.

(Photo credit: graphixel)



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One important aspect of our work with Meedan lies in network building. The 2023 Turkey-Syria Earthquake project enabled us to extend our reach to unconnected communities, particularly Arabic speakers in Turkey who were significantly impacted by the earthquake. This was mainly facilitated by the Check tipline bot, inspiring us to further expand our coverage and connect with this community through additional awareness campaigns and fact-checking work.

— **Dr. Moath Althaher,**
CEO of Fatabyyano

[See the section about Fatabyyano's work](#) ►

Executive summary



Democracy is the operating system for society. Disinformation is a virus in this operating system.

— Ed Bice, CEO and founder

Meedan is an organization grounded in human rights during a time when our planet's information ecosystems are under attack. As such, our efforts center on a global approach to community impact, product development, and ongoing research.

Global reach

With our continued emphasis on achieving global impact, particularly in the Larger World — our preferred term for the Global South — we focused this year on growing our worldwide partnership network.

Countries where our programs are running:

40

Community focus

Meedan's community impact programs run across three key verticals: elections, crises, and safe and inclusive online ecosystems.

Global partner organizations:

85

Product innovation

As we continue to evolve our flagship software solution, Check, we're also developing a tool for solutions journalism analysis and working on a new infrastructure initiative called Timpani.

Reports sent to users over the Check platform:

100,048

Conversations facilitated by Check:

446,182

Research excellence

In keeping with our mission to collaborate with underserved communities throughout the globe, research efforts in 2023 foregrounded concerns related to inclusive AI and linguistic diversity.

Peer-reviewed journal articles:

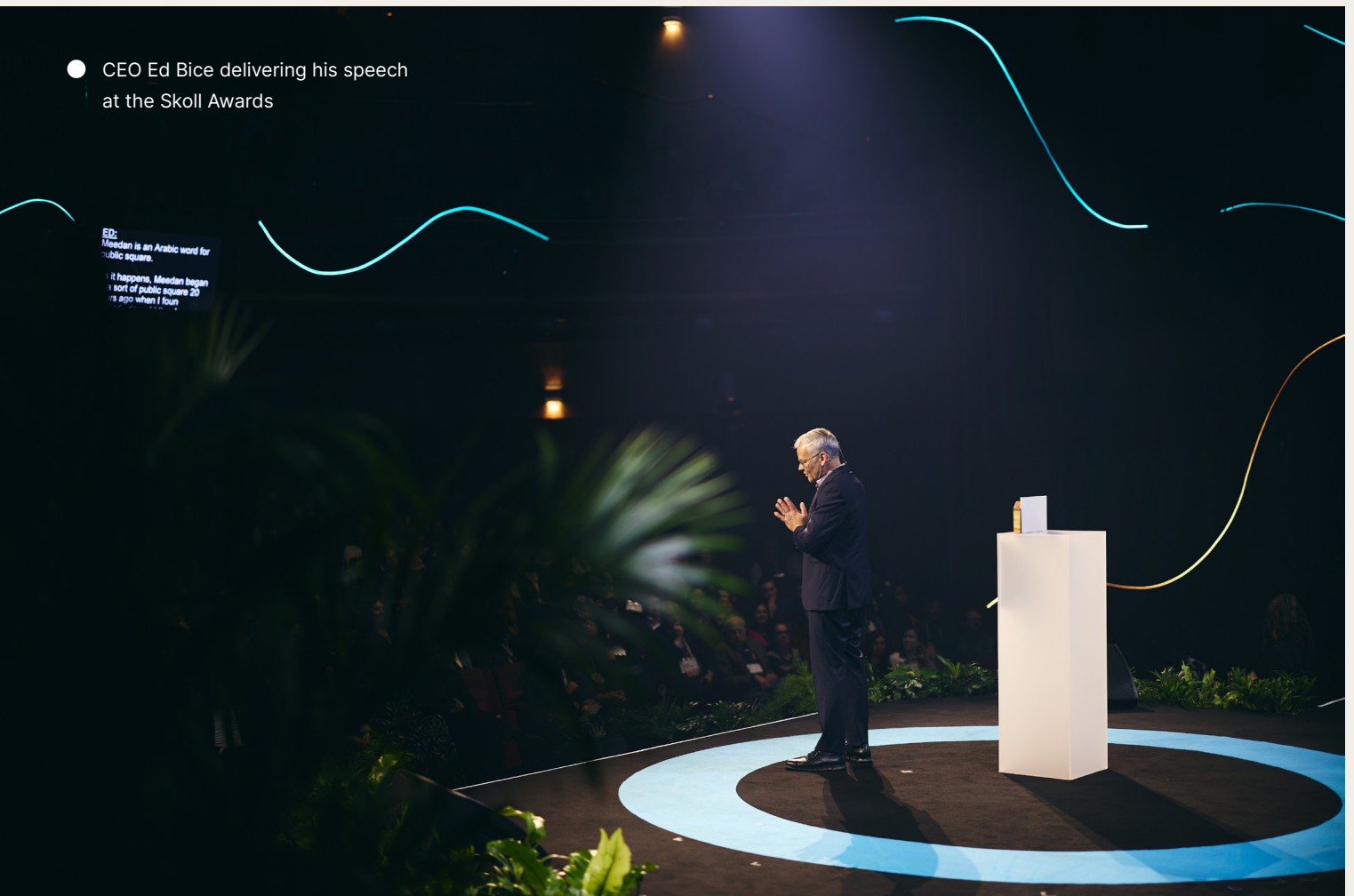
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A note from the CEO

2023 was a year of profound change for Meedan. In a single 12-month span, we found ourselves targeted by the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, awarded the highest honor a global nongovernmental organization can receive, and confronting the sudden and rapid evolution of generative AI. Weaving a coherent set of remarks between these three tectonic events is not likely to happen within the bounds of my prescribed word count, so I will excerpt my remarks delivered from the stage of the the New Theatre in Oxford, England, on April 11, 2024. The occasion was the Skoll World Forum, the annual gathering of global philanthropists and change-makers hosted by the Skoll Foundation. Meedan was one of four recipients of the prestigious Skoll Award for Social Innovation.

For those who are curious, I invite you to also read my [full remarks from the Skoll Awards](#).

● CEO Ed Bice delivering his speech at the Skoll Awards



Meedan CEO Ed Bice's remarks from the 2024 Skoll World Forum

Meedan is an Arabic word for public square. As it happens, Meedan began in a sort of public square 20 years ago when I found myself sitting in the middle of Market Street in San Francisco, my hands bound with a plastic zip tie. That day millions of people around the world had gathered in city streets to protest the first day of the Iraq War.

The day after that, I started a project to build a digital town square to connect news junkies and translation geeks across English- and Arabic-language communities to collaboratively curate, translate, and share insights across language boundaries.

At the time, I never could have imagined that today, our software would be leveraging artificial intelligence to augment and amplify the work of journalists, public health experts, and civil society organizations around the world to respond to information needs during critical civic moments. Nor could I have imagined that my stubborn attachment to the idea of building a kind and creative organization would find me on this stage tonight.

There is a phrase appropriate to the moment: "This means more than you know."

Very true tonight, but this phrase is also a centering point for the fundamental challenge my organization seeks to address. How do we enable communities to collaborate on the critical civic task of bringing needed context to online content during moments when this knowledge is most needed?

2024 will be the biggest voting year in the history of democracy. Elections will be held in more than 70 countries home to some 4.2 billion people. Around the world citizens will be placing votes based on the information available to them.

Democracy is the operating system for society. Disinformation is a virus in this operating system that impacts virtually every aspect of society, from social justice to public health to the very task of holding an election itself. With the additional perils of journalism in retreat and generative AI moving quickly to fill the void, the global philanthropic community needs to consider the compromise of our information ecosystem as an existential threat to humankind.

So with this remarkably generous recognition of our impossible work, we will continue to toil in code and partnerships to imagine a more hopeful and better-informed future where the work of wayfinding that we currently cede to algorithms is instead recentered to communities.

Meedan will continue our commitment to modeling a world where the value of knowing what has happened, what is real, and what is experienced rises to the surface and accrues to the benefit of the world.



Ed Bice
CEO



“How the Lebanese Government Disabled Hundreds of People — and Then Left Them to Pay for Its Crime” — The Public Source

Photographs ©Hussein Baydoun, taken on July 4, 2021. Composite image by The Public Source.

Community impact programs

2023 RETROSPECTIVE



Dr. Dima Saber
Director of programs and impact lead

Over the last 15 years, as the internet has evolved and changed, Meedan has maintained a unique position as a trusted partner and collaborator working with civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and journalists harnessing the affordances of digital technologies to communicate. Our approach is consistent: We build coalitions, networks, and digital tools that make it easier for hyperlocal community perspectives to be integrated into how global information challenges are met.

We have always seen internet equity as an “access” issue; we co-design, deploy, and implement open-source tools and comprehensive programs that enable communities — especially those that have been historically underserved — to access the quality information they need to mobilize, organize, and foster long-term social change. We also

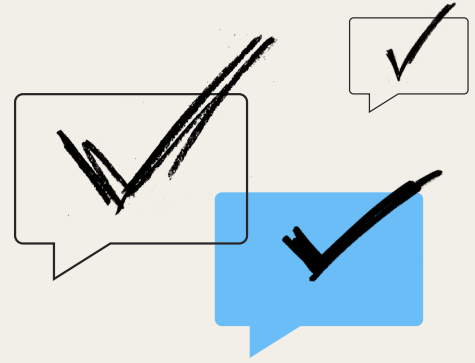
see internet equity as an “information integrity” issue; we use our relationships with technology companies to enhance the safety and inclusivity of online ecosystems so that the pathways for understanding both how content is produced and also the existing infrastructure within which this content is shared can better serve community needs, regardless of location, language, or income. We prioritize this work during critical events such as elections, democratic transitions, climate and health emergencies, conflicts, and social turmoil.

Our unique position in this ecosystem as a not-for-profit organization that works directly with both civil society organizations and technology platforms is a responsibility that we do not take lightly. In 2023 we spent a substantial amount of time rethinking our Theory of Change: We want to drive change at the scale of the internet by developing tools, programs, and research that allow communities to create, distribute, and control valuable and portable datasets. The community impact partners whose stories you will read in the following pages of this report are a cornerstone of this vision of a more equitable internet.

Elections

Supporting the Philippine election coalition

Meedan partnered with Rappler to launch the third phase of [#FactsFirstPH](#), reimagining the role of the coalition in a postelection environment.



Debunking election-related disinformation in Turkey

Meedan's partnership with Teyit helped to tackle election-related mis- and disinformation. Teyit reviewed more than 200 claims, exposing and debunking misleading information disseminated by politicians before and during the year's presidential and parliamentary electoral contests.

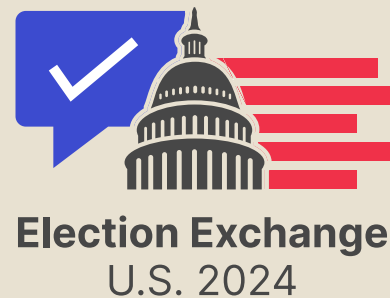
Bridging innovation and activism in Zimbabwe

Meedan's partnership has helped the Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE) to enhance its fact-checking processes. CITE exceeded its fact-checking targets and published 186 articles, including a notable increase between July and September 2023 during the Zimbabwean elections.

Countdown to US 2024: Meedan coalition to exchange critical election information with overlooked voters

In 2023, Meedan began forming a coalition of news outlets, fact-checkers, independent media groups, tech platforms, and civil society organizations to tackle deceptive content and online mis- and disinformation during the 2024 election cycle in the United States.

Coordinated disinformation campaigns, harassment against minority groups, and multilingual misinformation



are among the growing concerns. Meedan's coalition aims to share information with voters who are often overlooked by connecting journalists and fact-checkers to trusted community organizations working in news deserts and immigrant communities or with non-English speakers. The initiative will focus on combating political mis- and disinformation circulating on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, and Viber.

Crisis response

In 2023, Meedan worked closely with our partners to swiftly discern the emergency information needs of people on the ground in Gaza and in areas affected by the Turkey-Syria earthquake.

Meedan partner Fatabyyano launches tipline for earthquake crisis response

In 2023, Jordanian Meedan partner Fatabyyano launched an emergency tipline to share critical information with earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria. The multiplatform fact-checking assistant, named Kinan, was powered by Check, allowing social media users to reach out via Messenger or WhatsApp.

This collaboration between Meedan and Fatabyyano represented an important milestone, as Kinan became the first Check tipline made for an Arabic-speaking audience.



Kinan, Fatabyyano's fact-checking assistant

BLOG POST

Meedan partner Fatabyyano launches tipline for earthquake crisis response



Capturing critical evidence from the Israel-Gaza war

Rolling communications blackouts have plunged millions of Gazans, including civilians, journalists, paramedic teams, and aid agencies, into an information vacuum. Diminished electricity and internet supply, coupled with the suppression of witness accounts in both Gaza and the West Bank as a result of content takedowns and biased content moderation, led to a significant blind spot inside the war zones.

In November, Meedan's open-source investigations team at the [NAWA Media Lab](#) began [reporting on a convoy attack](#) in collaboration with Beirut partner Legal Agenda. The team monitored and analyzed open-source content — from Google Earth, social media, and broadcast news footage — to break down the circumstances surrounding attacks on vehicles carrying displaced civilians in Gaza on Oct. 13, 2023.



[Resources to capture critical evidence from the Israel-Gaza war](#)



[Fact-checkers respond to Gaza misinformation](#)

Beyond rapid-response efforts, we also focused on building local media organizations' and journalists' fact-checking capacity. Meedan partnered with Palestinian fact-checking platform Kashif to respond to queries through a WhatsApp channel powered by Check and worked with SMEX, WITNESS, and 7amleh — The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media — to develop the [Gaza Media Resources kit](#). Following requests from local media partners, we also hosted a virtual training session on advanced open-source intelligence skills for fact-checkers covering the war.

In response to unstable technology systems and communications blackouts, Meedan expanded our ongoing collaboration with WITNESS in the region, setting up a joint tech fund to supply individuals and organizations operating in Gaza and the West Bank with access to eSIMs, virtual private networks (VPNs), and other forms of tech support. The 50-gigabyte eSIMs work in 35 countries and have been tested and used by people in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jordan. We are able to offer VPN access for up to one year.

Safe and inclusive online ecosystems

Digital conversations inevitably impact offline realities. Meedan launches targeted calls to address timely issues such as human rights documentation and violence against women and gender-diverse communities. In 2023, we initiated projects aimed at promoting safe and inclusive media ecosystems by taking on gendered disinformation, misinformation targeting Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, and issues related to mental health and online safety.

Co-Insights

Co-Insights provides a unique platform utilizing social science and computational approaches to enable community organizations, fact-checkers, and academics to work together to respond effectively to harmful content targeting communities, with an initial focus on Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. The effort focuses on detecting, mitigating, and preventing societal harms arising from misleading narratives by: identifying the most important misinformation interventions needed; supporting access to high-quality, culturally tailored content; and developing a sustainable ecosystem for exchanging contextual data and driving research and innovation.

HIGHLIGHT

Gendered disinformation during elections

Meedan's **Understanding Trends in Gendered Disinformation During Elections** initiative aimed to produce both a cross-regional analysis of collated data sourced from Check tiplines and in-depth case studies covering diverse countries and languages. Partners included: Ecofeminita in Argentina; the Digital Rights Foundation in Pakistan; and the Africa Women Journalism Project in partnership with TogoCheck in Togo. During their respective elections, the partners launched Check chatbots to track, document, and fact-check gendered disinformation.

In addition to technological support, Meedan provided workshops and training on topics such as digital security and mental well-being for journalists and activists.



Case study: Digital safety training in practice

Digital safety is an issue for journalists worldwide, but solutions and toolkits cannot be uniform. Reporters from mainstream media outlets and those based in urban areas are often better equipped to deal with online threats and harassment, but their rural and independent counterparts are not as well protected.

Chambal Media, a women-led digital newsroom covering stories from the hinterlands of India, developed the **Digital Security Toolkit** for rural journalists. The group has also been a Meedan and Check Global partner since 2022. Their work focuses on rural, first-time internet users, particularly young girls from the Hindi Belt, stemming from the organization's commitment to bridging the digital divide and empowering a demographic that may face unique challenges in accessing and navigating the online world.

“Our origin lies in rural settings where women and girls often do not have access to mobile phones and the internet. Even when available, such access is often controlled by the patriarchs of the family, like their brother, father or husband,” said Suneeta Prajapati, who works as an operations manager for Chambal Academy. “When women are active on social media, they fear being scorned by family and being targeted with negative comments from community members. As a result, they choose to hide their social media activity from family members or do not use it at all.”

The Digital Security Toolkit is a comprehensive approach to digital literacy in which reporters explain digital safety by breaking down basic concepts, such as privacy and passwords, using relatable analogies and stories. Chambal Media's research involved a literature review and in-depth interviews that gave them insight into the kinds of content women and girls in the region were consuming online and the types of apps they were using. Various sections in the toolkit cover digital safety as well as privacy and security and reporting and blocking.



Video content from Chambal Media's **Digital Security Toolkit**

► Looking forward

Alignment with Check

Meedan's program staff are the first port of call for partners, many of whom use our flagship product, Check, to engage with their audiences and fight disinformation. As we grow, it will be critical for program managers to work in tandem with our engineers to ensure the product is responsive to needs on the ground globally.

Deepening partnerships and building capacity

Meedan's programs will continue to prioritize the protection of journalists and media sustainability. This involves expanding our partnerships with independent and investigative media groups, particularly those facing government-imposed restrictions on local or foreign funding. Such groups often produce content for underserved communities, including rural audiences and people who live in news deserts. Larger, longer-term partnerships will aid Meedan's own organizational growth goals while also benefiting partners through greater collaboration and enhanced capacity.

Research and solutions for data quality

In addition to implementing stronger feedback loops across our programming and with partners, we will also continue conducting qualitative research on the strengths, opportunities, and limitations of the digital infrastructure used by our community partners, including search engines, social media platforms, and chat apps.

BOOKLET

The Future Is Ours

Hyperlocal Action in the Global-South Larger World*

This booklet is organized into chapters that delve into various subjects in which our partners are active. Topics include media literacy in journalism — both online and offline — and how to address news deserts.

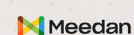
The exploration extends to the intersection of big tech and media freedom, examining issues like content moderation, takedowns, and the sustainability of archival records. "Democracy at risk" is another focus area, encompassing media security and plurality as well as internet shutdowns and election monitoring.

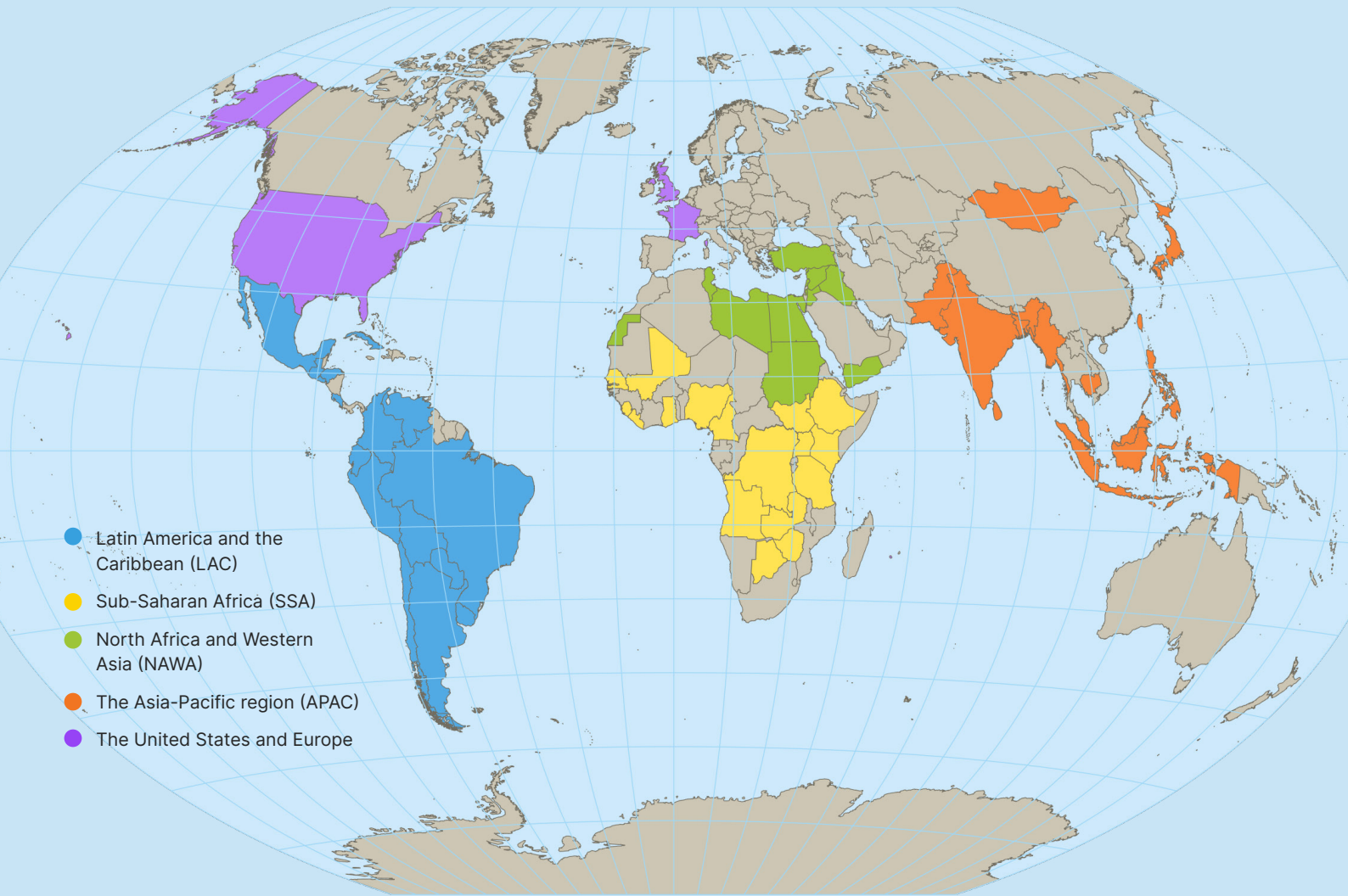
THE FUTURE IS OURS



Hyperlocal Action in the Global-South Larger World*

Gender, Journalism,
Communities





Meedan on a global scale

2023 RETROSPECTIVE



Shalini Joshi
Program director for the Larger World

In preparation for the upcoming cycle of elections and other key moments, Meedan conducted extensive interviews across our four global program regions to better understand shared concerns, distinct subregional perspectives, and emerging needs. The process helped create a priority road map for 2024, shaping our programmatic approach and partnerships. Interviews with partners and civil society groups, along with our own research, provided insights into shifts in the tech

sector and political contexts, both of which impact our work in the Larger World. In addition to interviewing current Check Global partners, we also expanded our feedback ecosystem to include the WhatsApp Third-Party Fact-Checkers (3PFC) program and regional civil society groups. We gave special attention to the nuanced contexts around elections, crises and conflicts, and gender and climate misinformation. In addition to sharing knowledge and resources, our goal was to identify strategic areas for intervention that could improve information access and integrity while ensuring that our priorities and work were aligned with the needs of each region. Our 2023 projects reflect and respond to regional realities, the priorities of communities, and partner organizations’ goals, setting the foundation for the year ahead.

The Asia-Pacific (APAC) region: Rising information integrity concerns demand sustained, targeted action



Challenges in the APAC region

Limitations on freedom of the press and free expression

Systemic crackdowns on independent media and increased state interference in fact-checking are rampant across the region. The lowest three positions in the [2023 World Press Freedom Index](#) are occupied by APAC countries — Vietnam, China, and North Korea — and the situation has gone from “problematic” to “very bad” in Tajikistan, India, and Turkey.

Insufficient support for sustained access to trusted, fact-checked information

Research conducted by groups based in or focused on the region remains limited, affecting advocacy and reporting efforts. This is compounded by the sporadic nature of fact-checking investment, which occurs primarily in short bursts during major events such as elections. More investment is needed to support the ongoing work of building trust and capacity to respond to pervasive disinformation efforts.

Weak policy positions from governments and platforms

Tech-sector layoffs have decreased platforms’ focus on internet trust and safety and impacted their ability to address or protect against misinformation and hate speech ahead of the numerous upcoming regional electoral contests. There has also been a marked increase in the excessive and targeted use of legislation related to terrorism, sedition, digital security, and defamation to suppress critics and [stifle dissent in the APAC region](#), both online and offline.

Shrinking spaces for civil society

There are few regional and subregional advocacy networks, and even fewer spaces for collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Constant targeting, a lack of safe spaces for open conversation, and mounting government pressure also impact the mental health and safety of advocates and journalists.

► Looking forward

Stronger presence within existing regional networks and expanded subregional approach

There is an opportunity to seek out and engage with groups focused on thematic interventions in the APAC region to promote cross-stakeholder collaboration. By providing networking opportunities, codesigning projects, and facilitating capacity-building interactions, Meedan can support its partners in their efforts to scale. This approach could also inform a new subregional strategy to more effectively cover the entirety of the APAC region.

Fundraising strategies specific to the APAC region

Such strategies include project-based fundraising undertaken in collaboration with area partners as well as raising awareness and building partnerships with funders focused on the region.

Interventions focused on policy, advocacy, and investigative journalism

In addition to working with fact-checkers and civil society organizations, advocacy engagements can help promote sustainability and expand the reach of Meedan's initiatives. At the same time, an effort to elevate the technological and financial capacity of media groups and journalists would support the development of a more cohesive antidisinformation ecosystem.



Digital Rights Foundation was able to build organizational capacity and address burnout, mental health and well-being of employees through Check Global's support. DRF was also able to work towards better team building and resilience particularly during a time when political instability within the country has been on a rise and spaces for civil society have been shrinking.

— **Nighat Dad**

Founder and executive director, Digital Rights Foundation

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): With journalism under attack, tech-enabled networks can point the way forward

Colonization, imperialism, and ongoing sociopolitical conflicts have left a particularly lasting imprint in LAC, contributing to significant challenges for human rights as well as for safe and inclusive media ecosystems, freedom of expression, and access to information.

Challenges in LAC

Inadequate media regulation and concerns related to public discourse

The lack of regulation and legislation surrounding digital media exacerbates the vulnerability of marginalized groups, including women, children, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Additionally, impunity for digital crimes remains prevalent due to a lack of adequate legislation as well as insufficient monitoring and justice mechanisms. Legislators are driven by moralistic biases and lack the digital literacy training they would need to effectively advocate for freedom of speech and digital platform governance. Discussions about AI and other digital topics often exclude the institutions these concerns most directly affect, leading to a deprioritization of gender-related issues, human rights needs, and the kinds of journalism needed to inform communities and hold policymakers accountable.

Inaccessible information and threats to journalism

Access to public data is a persistent challenge, particularly in rural and forested areas where reliable internet and digital technologies are scarce and where journalists cannot necessarily rely on local or municipal authorities to provide or distribute truthful information. In addition, rising levels of violence, especially in areas influenced by organized crime, can lead to self-censorship and compromised reporting. These circumstances contribute to a rise in news deserts while promoting the creation of an attention economy that prioritizes clicks over quality. Such factors also limit the public's capacity to discern false or manipulated content, which can lead to a growing distrust of journalism.

Funding and operational constraints

Core funding for civil society organizations is limited, impacting their ability to maintain strategic, long-term interventions. The majority of funds come from international agencies rather than regional funders, and they are often project based and reflective of these agencies' own priorities rather than focused on what practitioners in the region have identified as their key needs. Additionally, organizations working on feminism, racial justice, and LGBTQIA+ issues face more risk and funding constraints, as national funders often prefer projects that may be perceived as neutral. Lastly, complex bureaucratic processes further restrict access to funding, especially for small nongovernmental organizations.

► Looking forward

Provide access to essential resources and technology

The cost of technology poses a significant challenge to organizations in LAC. There is a growing number of programs that offer free access to tools used for specific organizational and journalistic purposes.

Facilitate opportunities for collaboration and networking

Workshops and skill development sessions could enhance the capabilities of journalists and expand their networks. The establishment of knowledge exchange practices promotes collaboration and empowers partners to share their experiences and resources.

Build capacity and advocate for healthier information ecosystems

Advocacy efforts can focus on better management of communication networks and promoting best practices within the sector, including collaboration with relevant regulatory bodies. Educational projects could be used to enhance the understanding of digital communications and to clarify the role of journalism in investigative processes. Other areas of emphasis might include advocating for the safety of journalists and the establishment of equitable AI research networks.

Exchange knowledge across linguistic barriers and refine rhetoric

More can be done to improve how we as a community converse with skeptical audiences about important and potentially contentious topics. Furthermore, efforts to make the internet more multilingual and to ensure it better represents the world as it exists demand that a greater number of resources be translated between English and other languages. Such efforts would facilitate a wider exchange of knowledge, strengthen ties, and promote better visibility for sponsorship opportunities.



Especially on the Technical contribution to the Federal Senate's Commission of Jurists responsible for establishing parameters for AI regulation in the country, the support of Meedan/Check Global team was crucial for us to have the resources to be able to work on the documents and participate in the discussions.

— **Joana Varon Ferraz**
Coding Rights

North Africa and Western Asia (NAWA): Building sustainable support and connection within crisis contexts

Since 2011, the year of the uprisings, Meedan's work in NAWA has been a response to a series of events-turned-crises. Through our work in the region, we aim to improve critical investigative journalism, provide access to trustworthy information, and amplify underrepresented voices.



Challenges in NAWA

Organizational sustainability

Small and unpredictable donor bases lead to funding scarcity, and government funding is also unstable. Additionally, ongoing crises make external funding difficult to attract, causing organizations to redirect funds so they can meet basic needs rather than using this money for projects, advocacy, and community engagement. International banking systems also routinely slow or halt fund transfers to certain countries.

Technology and data

Collecting reliable data in active or postcrisis contexts poses considerable safety and security risks. Related costs for technological capacity and resources are also a barrier for many organizations.

Collaboration and knowledge-sharing

Limited resources and geographical barriers often prohibit organizations and human rights defenders from accelerating their strategic work by collaborating or sharing knowledge and capacity.

Context

Unsafe environments make survival a priority, and trending topics may impact funding while also sidelining the issues and communities that organizations feel are most in need of attention. At the same time, inflation and emigration make it difficult to maintain a strong and consistent team. Those who remain often have to contend with intimidation tactics and fake-news regulations, both of which are used in the region to indirectly influence independent media operations.

► Looking forward

Training programs

In 2024, we will expand our programming for journalism students on advanced media monitoring, open-source intelligence, and fact-checking. This expansion of our work builds on the delivery of more than 30 reports and other deliverables focused on documenting the impact of climate change and ongoing conflict in the region in 2023.

Amplification for regional partners

Meedan's strategy in the region is geared toward showcasing the value of our partners' work locally and globally. We do this through immediate support, such as training and small grants, but also by providing platforms for wider visibility. This allows for expanded opportunities for funding and other engagement opportunities.

A wider range of collaborative projects

In 2024, we will work with our partners to codesign and execute projects focusing on mis- and disinformation, elections, and journalistic credibility. These will be designed to reflect and respond to the realities of the region, the priorities of communities, and the goals of our partners. Our goal is to ensure that organizations are able to further experiment and improve their tactics in collaboration with each other while expanding their reach and organizational sustainability.



The Check Global team at Meedan believed in us when we had little to show — before our official registration and even earlier, before gaining the returning readership we have now — and we're grateful for that. We are still an 'emerging' publication, so to speak, with far greater ambitions, and hope to continue this generative relationship with Meedan.

— **Lara Bitar**

Editor-in-chief of The Public Source

Journalism network in Iraq investigates ‘war by other means’

For over a decade, the Network of Iraqi Reporters for Investigative Journalism (NIRIJ), has aimed to help journalists acquire the skills they need to identify and expose what might be called war by other means, such as large-scale corruption, discrimination, and the forced migration of minority groups.

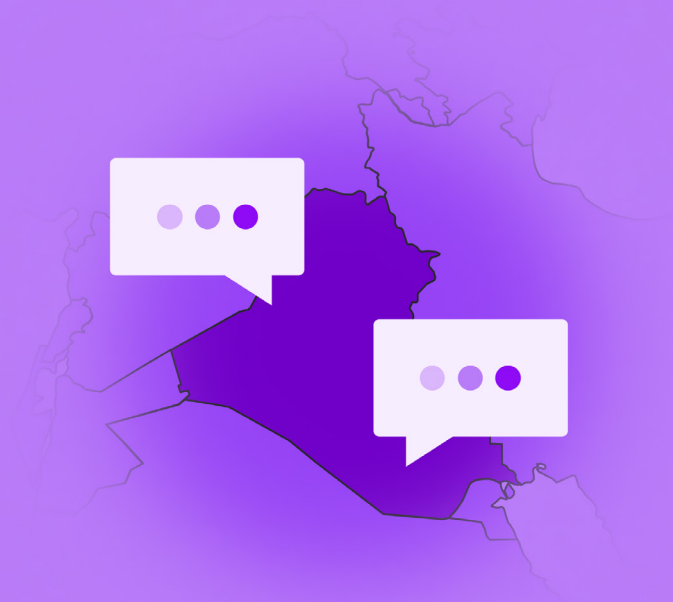
Since 2021, as one of our Check Global partners, NIRIJ has worked with Meedan in its efforts to cover stories that directly impact vulnerable populations in Iraq.

In one of its 2023 investigative reports, NIRIJ explored sprawling **real estate theft in Mosul** as militias, political parties, and high-profile individuals seized more than 20,000 public and private properties through forgery and force. This large-scale land-grab happened in the aftermath of Mosul's liberation from the Islamic State group.

“Many politicians and administrative officials are filing lawsuits against journalists for publishing information implicating them in cases of corruption or negligence,” NIRIJ’s editor-in-chief said. “To avoid this, we contact legal experts to vet and review information before publishing investigations. NIRIJ does not rely on rumors and accusations that are not based on evidence (documents, audio or video recordings).”

BLOG POST

Journalism network in Iraq investigates ‘war by other means’



Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): Discriminatory content and critical transitions make strong media ecosystems a must

Disinformation is a particularly widespread problem in sub-Saharan Africa. Gender and climate justice, and the harmful targeting of minority groups, are particular priorities that go underreported and deprioritized, with elections and crisis management close on their heels.

Challenges in SSA

Organizational sustainability and access to data

Across the board, Meedan partners are actively working to improve their teams' skills and their capacity to produce quality work. However, funding challenges mean that important projects often have to be deprioritized, and organizations may struggle to make the case for investing in projects that are more relevant to their communities instead of focusing on external initiatives. Without the ability to leverage reliable data, partners are less able to tell evidence-based stories or identify patterns and trends that affect their communities.

Election monitoring and related fact-checking programs

Upcoming electoral scenarios in SSA range from potential first-time power transitions in southern Africa's previously single-party political systems to efforts at returning to civilian rule following recent coups in Sahelian countries. There is also an urgent need for effective fact-checking and media literacy to ensure the integrity of electoral processes, especially in West Africa, where external actors have interfered in elections.

Persistent gender-based violence

Misinformation, stereotypes, and victim-blaming undermine public health initiatives intended to address gender-based violence. While gender-based violence was already pervasive across the region offline, technology has increased the level and sophistication of targeting. This escalates the problem and impacts legislation that could help alleviate the challenge.

Misinformation and climate change

Misinformation reduces trust in media and science, complicating the ways in which important information is communicated to the public and affecting how they engage with it. This issue also influences the actions of decision-makers, delaying climate action and leading to inadequate or misguided policies.

► Looking forward

Enhancing collaborations

Meedan's programming aims to increase media knowledge and information literacy skills across the region. In 2024, we hope to strengthen and expand our work with independent media groups, journalism programs, activists, human rights defenders, and other partners. While many media literacy efforts focus solely on misinformation, our goal is to center communities and underrepresented groups.

Bolstering democracy

Our work is geared toward strengthening groups' capacity for content moderation, fact-checking, and open-source investigative work, and we strive to elevate the role of civil society organizations. This approach is key for promoting democratic practices and civic engagement, particularly when it comes to monitoring information ecosystems and responding to electoral disinformation.

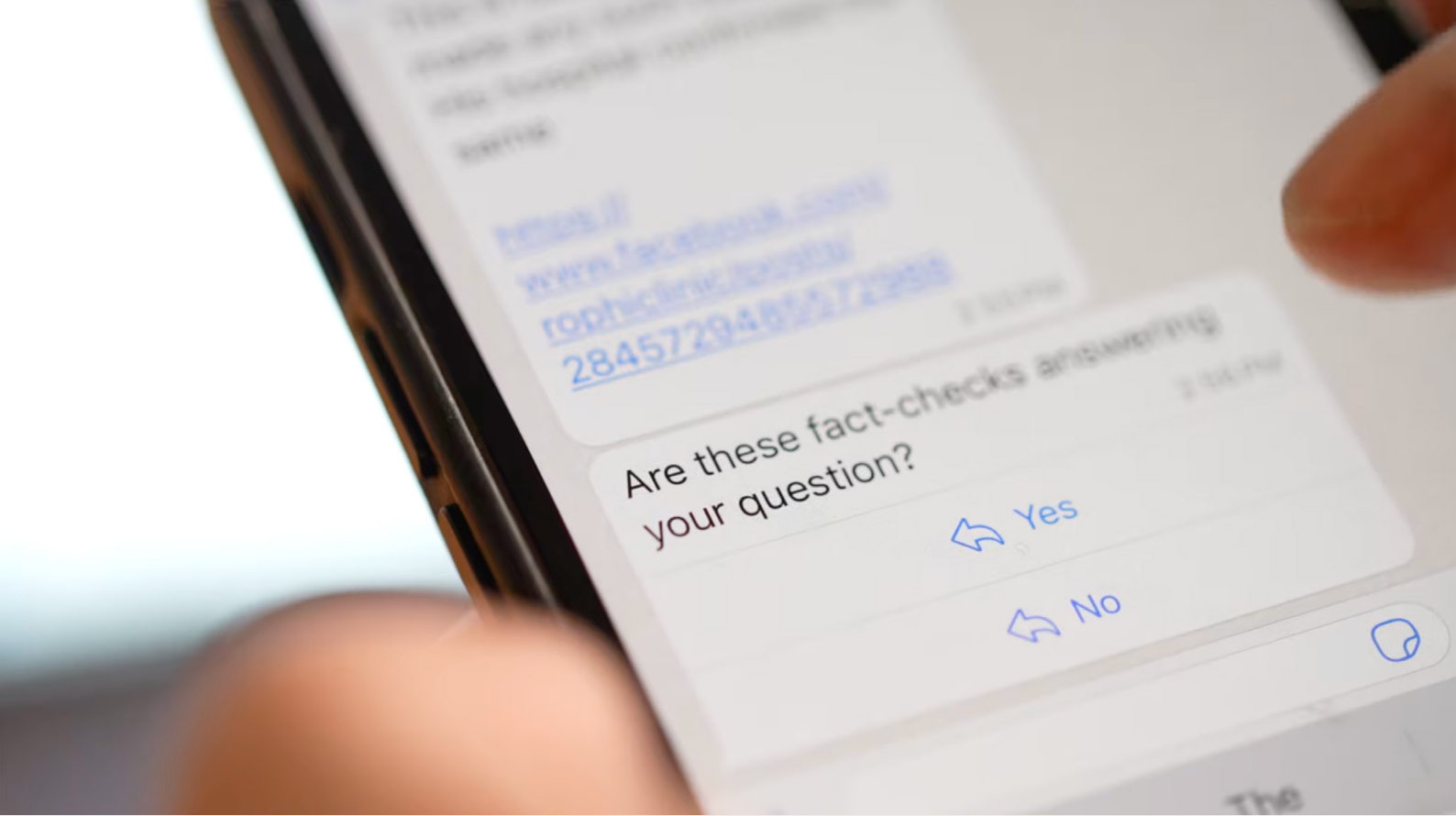
Expanding support

Recognizing the unique regional and subregional needs in sub-Saharan Africa, we will prioritize providing partner assistance for a wider variety of geographic and social contexts, including for digital safety, data protection and rights, and mental health.



The most important impact of the Check Global program is that it has helped CITE to gain the trust of its audience as a source of verified information. This is evident in the fact that CITE has grown in leaps and bounds in fact-checking and is now seen as an industry leader in combating misinformation and using current technology in its newsroom. This partnership with Meedan has also led CITE to collaborate with other institutions and organizations, which has further enhanced its reputation and reach.

— **Sean Ndlovu**
Co-founder of the Centre for
Innovation and Technology (CITE)



Product innovation



2023 RETROSPECTIVE



Caio Almeida
Check software engineering lead

2023 was an instrumental year for developing and refining Meedan's flagship product, Check, with substantial enhancements to its functionality and user experience.

The introduction of multimedia newsletters expanded content delivery options, offering users dynamic and engaging updates across various formats, and new forms of content improved communication between organizations and audiences. Advanced metrics provide valuable insights into the impact of these new features on user engagement, facilitating informed decision-making and strategy refinement. The implementation of

conversation histories and the ability to craft manual and custom replies helped partners better understand the needs of their communities and deepen engagement. New integrations with the Check API, offering a more stable and scalable solution, have allowed for automated importation of partner content into the Check platform.

In 2023, we migrated all WhatsApp tiplines from a third-party service to the WhatsApp Cloud API managed directly by Meedan. This move offers partners greater control, security, and customization options while reducing dependency on third-party platforms. Direct management ensures seamless stability, integration, and scalability as well as access to the latest features.

These changes encouraged significant usage. A total of 100,048 reports were sent to users, and 446,182 conversations occurred between fact-checkers and their audiences on the platform during the course of the year.

Continual adaptation of our technological offerings has made Check a tool that has endured shifts in digital communications

The channels through which disinformation flows continue to evolve and proliferate, exacerbating challenges to accessing high-quality, reliable information. Refinements to Check directly help to build up newsrooms' and civil society organizations' capacity to collect, translate, and annotate information — year-round and during high-profile events. The basic idea of Check is simple, but it's a powerful and unique tool for facilitating active interaction and access to trustworthy information

The product helps users:

- **Engage and scale audiences**
Check helps organizations meet the information needs of their audiences on closed messaging channels like WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, Line, and Viber. With the help of AI, conversations engage audiences directly on the platforms they already use.
- **Understand community insights**
Check workspaces are repositories of the information needs of a community. Features in the app help organizations better understand trends in user-submitted questions and content, which can be used for research or to set priorities and improve communications. Amplifying the usability of this area is a priority for new product development.
- **Collaborate with peers**
Sharing the data available on Check will also improve collaboration between partners. Our goal is to help peer organizations share information submitted by their tipline audiences, identify trends, and use this information to improve fact-checking capacity.

Highlight: New tech for solutions journalism and social listening

Innovating climate journalism: An AI-powered tool from the Solutions Journalism Network (SJN) and Meedan

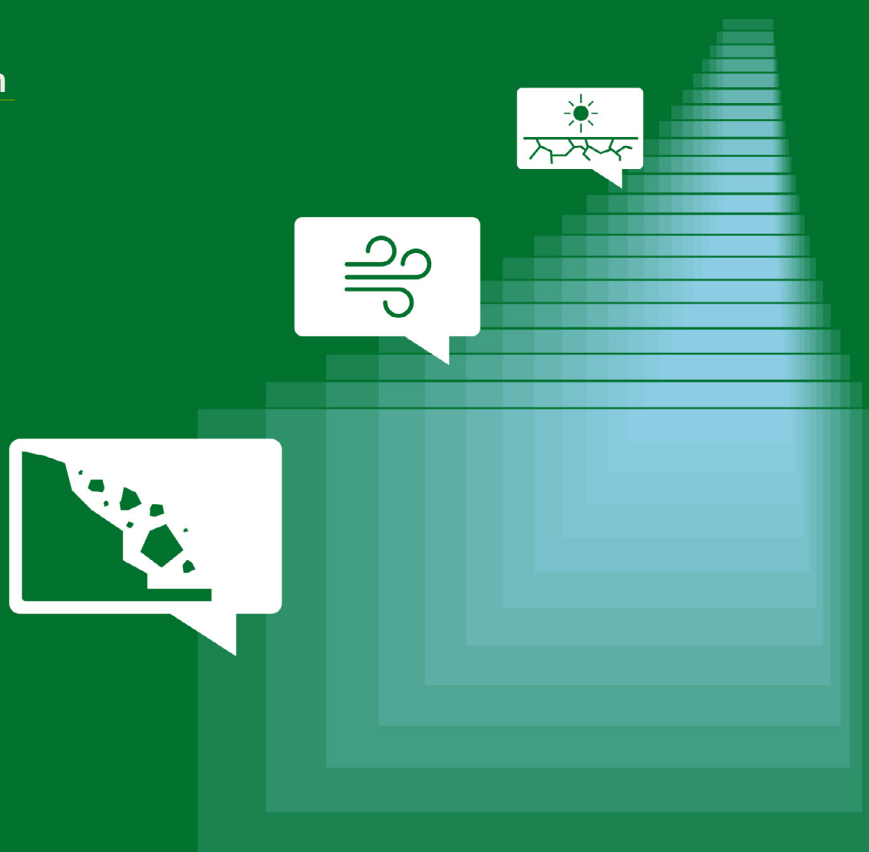
With funding from The Rockefeller Foundation, SJN and Meedan will build an original tool to rapidly evaluate and classify news stories based on custom criteria for assessing rigorous **solutions journalism**.

This new tool will leverage generative large language models (LLMs), and it will first be used to identify climate solutions stories, but it will be designed so that it can ultimately be deployed for any other potential use case.

“The AI classifier that Meedan is developing will make it possible for people to search specifically for news stories that show potential to respond to real-time challenges related to climate change,” said SJN CEO David Bornstein. “By making it possible to systematically identify rigorous reporting about climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience efforts from far and wide, this tool promises to speed up the global learning needed to make headway against the climate crisis.”

HIGHLIGHT

Innovating climate journalism: Meedan and Solutions Journalism Network’s AI-powered solution



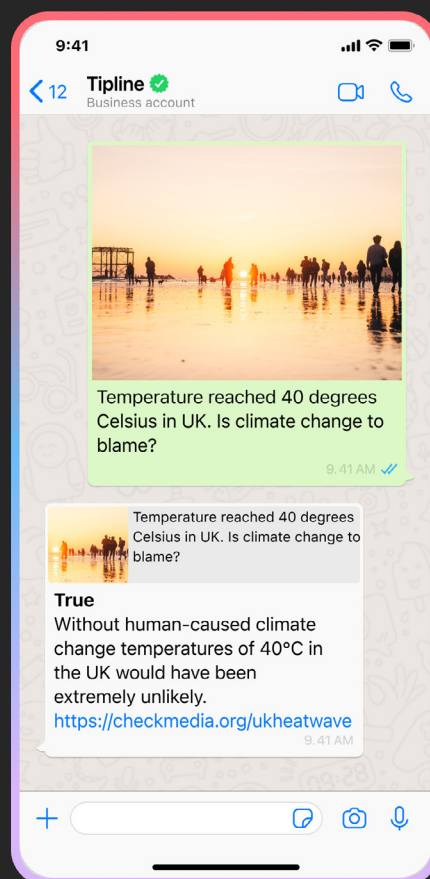
Tuning up Timpani

In 2023, Meedan began work on an infrastructure initiative known as Timpani, designed to support fact-checkers in effectively prioritizing and contextualizing their work by uncovering themes and content that are trending in the subject areas where their communities are experiencing harm. The project provides an adaptable data analysis workflow for regularly collecting bite-sized chunks of text, such as public social media posts, from specific lists of third-party sources. Then, similar items can be filtered and clustered together to uncover broader, systemic patterns. Whereas Check allows for the review of a narrower swath of data in significant depth, Timpani is intended to be able to handle a much greater volume of content. We are currently planning to launch Timpani as part of the [Co-Insights](#) project.

► Looking forward

We have initiated the implementation of foundational versions for new Check features that will be further refined in 2024. These upgrades are aimed at enhancing content-sharing and improving the user experience on tiplines. Sharing features will facilitate seamless content distribution among users, fostering collaboration and information dissemination. Meanwhile, natural language understanding will elevate user interactions by enabling more intuitive and efficient communication between partners and their audiences.

[Check tiplines](#) are being deployed to counter misinformation on messaging apps all over the world in 2024.



Research and development

2023 RETROSPECTIVE



Dr. Scott A. Hale
Director of research

Our vision of an equitable and inclusive internet cannot be achieved without tenacious curiosity and a cross-sectoral flow of knowledge.

Using models capable of processing text in a wide range of languages, we provide claim matching for our global partners — a process for grouping similar claims together to save fact-checking time and effort. While language model technology is usually focused on what are sometimes called high-resource languages, such as English, Meedan is working specifically to create new models and improve performance on languages spoken in areas of the world that are often overlooked.

In today's world, misinformation is created not only by humans but also by generative AI (GenAI). That said, GenAI technologies can also aid human fact-checking by performing tasks like claim extraction and summarization or by creating synthetic data for training models, as our draft position paper on [factuality challenges in the era of large language models](#) (LLMs) has described. While we have built prototypes for GenAI systems, these systems cannot yet match the accuracy of human fact-checkers, and we remain focused on building ways for humans and machines to work together.

Beyond fact-checking, we are working to ensure the next generation of GenAI models will be more inclusive. In partnership with the University of Oxford, we participated in [the PRISM alignment project](#) to create a dataset of human feedback about LLM interactions provided by participants from 75 countries. This is far more diverse than the feedback most models are currently trained on, according to our published review paper on [feedback learning in LLMs](#). We are also examining [biases in LLMs](#) and the [possibilities of personalization for large language models](#).

Finally, we've successfully harnessed LLMs to perform complex tasks such as evaluating whether news articles fit the criteria for [solutions journalism](#).

Through the execution of extensive and collaborative processes to conduct social science research and develop novel machine-learning methods, we generate new insights, bring academic rigor to our product, make our AI-based tools more effective, and contribute to the broader research community.

In close coordination with our partners and participants, researchers at Meedan:

- Examine the barriers that hinder equitable access to information.
- Enable product and program enhancements.
- Empower external research with ethical datasets and opportunities for dialogue.
- Execute horizon scanning to investigate emerging sources of information inequity.

A photograph from our all-staff retreat in Valencia, Spain



Organizational health and sustainability

2023 RETROSPECTIVE



Dwight Knell
Chief operating officer

It's been quite a ride for the operations team at Meedan in 2023. We've been all about making things better and more efficient, not just for us, but for everyone connected with our mission.

One of our team's biggest accomplishments was our all-staff retreat in Valencia, Spain. It was more than just a work trip. It was an amazing opportunity to come together, share ideas, and strengthen our bonds. These moments are vital — they rejuvenate us and remind us why we do what we do.

On the internal operations front, we've really revamped how things work around here. From overhauling our

finance system to hiring a fractional chief financial officer and rolling out new platforms like Justworks, we've streamlined our processes significantly. This has made our daily operations smoother, allowing Meedan to focus more on our mission and less on the mundane.

But perhaps the most talked-about update has been implementing unlimited paid time off. It's a change that's resonated deeply both inside and outside our organization, and it's often highlighted during interviews and team meetings. This update reflects our commitment to trust and work-life balance, and it's amazing to see how much it's appreciated by everyone.

As we continue ahead in 2024, I'm excited to build on these improvements while continuing to optimize how we operate. Needless to say, I'm proud of our achievements and grateful to be part of a team that's not just aiming for success but also ensuring we all enjoy the journey.

Organizational policies

Promoting a people-first approach with an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) lens

Meedan's commitment to fostering EDI is at the heart of our people-first approach. With a globally distributed team spanning diverse time zones, countries, and cities, Meedan places a strong emphasis on creating an inclusive culture. Guided by collaboratively cultivated core values, we ensure that every team member undergoes comprehensive EDI training during onboarding. Meedan actively addresses gender disparities — both within its product and engineering teams and at leadership levels — and the organization promotes diversity through dedicated gender-inclusive spaces.

Emphasizing operational excellence, we conduct an annual team survey to refine our policies and programs. To prioritize mental well-being, Meedan offers unlimited paid time off and a wellness fund for therapy costs. The organization promotes a healthy work-life balance through various initiatives. We believe in a culture of inclusivity and learning, and weekly team calls and a global mentorship program help make this vision a reality.

BLOG POST

Nurturing equity, diversity, and inclusion: Meedan's people-first approach



Applying proclimate practices

Our goal is to account for environmental factors when we implement new strategies, just as we do for all other economic, public health, and sociopolitical vulnerabilities.

Climate and program design

We design programs that respond, both directly and indirectly, to environmental change and climate emergencies.

Our approaches include:

- Strengthening our rapid-response infrastructure to support partners in disseminating information during climate emergencies.
- Prioritizing partnerships with organizations directly engaged in environmental adaptation, crisis preparedness, or mitigation of and response to environmental change.
- Creating specific funds to address climate-related issues.
- Developing programs and initiatives that aim to address inequalities exacerbated by climate injustice.

Climate and operational decision-making

We take into account a number of environmental considerations when developing and implementing organizational policies, including:

- **Conducting a carbon audit:** We are developing a matrix to help us monitor the number and quality of our carbon reduction targets. The goal of this is to review and assess our organizational carbon footprint by looking at the energy consumption of various elements of our organization, including web servers and hosting, physical travel, and the commitment of our partners to sustainability.
- **Encouraging home office work:** Meedan team members are encouraged to work in their home offices or at coworking spaces. Both of these options support more sustainable and energy-efficient lifestyles, as opposed to working in a traditional office building.
- **Minimizing air travel:** We recognize the environmental impact of flying, so we make a concerted effort to only have team members travel when necessary. When we do deem it necessary for air travel to occur, we strategically choose central locales based on where each team member is coming from in order to minimize our carbon footprint.

Digital security at the heart of our strategy

We work across the organization to make sure risk and security are well understood, and we ensure policies are followed by providing frequent security training to the entire team.

We limit risk to our IT infrastructure in a few ways:

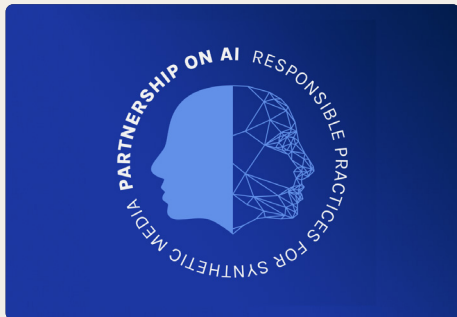
- We have a companywide single-sign-on system.
- Company-owned devices must all be enrolled in our device management system to access any data.
- Access is governed by the policies outlined in our identity management system.
- We provide frequent security training and updates to our team.
- Remote password resets must be confirmed by several factors.
- Meedan's email system is protected from phishing by industry-leading tools.
- Partners have no direct access to our internal systems.
- Continuous learning is a key part of our security program.
- All team members have access to our security and operations team on Slack at any time.

BLOG POST

Nurturing equity, diversity, and inclusion: Meedan's people-first approach

In the press

PARTNERSHIP ON AI



[PAI Welcomes Diverse Cohort of Partners to Synthetic Media Framework](#)

MEEDAN



[Meedan wins grant to research gendered disinformation in South Asia](#)

THE NEW HUMANITARIAN



[AI for humanitarians: A conversation on the hype, the hope, the future](#)

MEEDAN

[Meedan's Health Desk lands Webby Award nomination](#)

MEEDAN

[Special report: Narratives that drive climate misinformation in China](#)

MEEDAN

[Students find top spreader of climate misinformation is most read online news publisher in Egypt](#)

MEEDAN

[Meedan election project wins Most Innovative and Impactful Collaboration at Global Fact 10](#)

FATABYANO

[Fatabyano announces the launch of 'Kinan' the smart fact-checking assistant, in partnership with Meedan](#)

VERA FILES

[From Truth Bot to Trainings: Arming OFWs in the fight against disinformation](#)

AFP

[Social media posts falsely claim Japan launches probe into 'millions' of Covid-19 vaccine deaths](#)

BOOM LIVE

[Indian Fact-Check Coalition Ekta Welcomes 5 New Members](#)

PREMIUM TIMES

[How online violence against female politicians can be stopped — Experts](#)

TIMES NOW

[Google's War on Fake News: Tech Giant Battles Misinformation Menace in India](#)

DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION

[Feminist Approaches to Digital Safety: Perspectives from the Global South](#)

REPRO RIGHTS NOW

[New report warns of misinformation when abortion makes news](#)

THE QUINT

[Meedan Wins Grant to Research Gendered Disinformation, Partners With The Quint](#)

YUBANET.COM

[System to Report Online Abuse is 'Deeply Flawed' at Every Level. Report Shows How to Fix It](#)

TECH POLICY PRESS

[Centering Community Voices: How Tech Companies Can Better Engage with Civil Society Organizations](#)

TRUEPIC

[Truepic Joins Partnership on AI's Framework for Collective Action on Synthetic Media](#)

ECOFEMINITA

[Ecofemibot contra la desinformación de género](#)

POYNTER

[Fact-checkers from Nigeria, Indonesia and Brazil win GlobalFact 10 awards](#)

DEMOCRACY LABS

[WhatsApp Truth Squad: Tackle Disinformation One Message At A Time](#)

TRIBUNAL SUPERIOR ELEITORAL

[Parceria entre TSE, WhatsApp e agências para combater desinformação no app conquista prêmio internacional](#)

ABRAJI

[Prêmio internacional é dado a fact-checkers brasileiros](#)

ICIR

[Dubawa wins at Global Fact 10](#)

UOL

[Projeto integrado por UOL Confere ganha prêmio internacional de checagem](#)

ESTADÃO

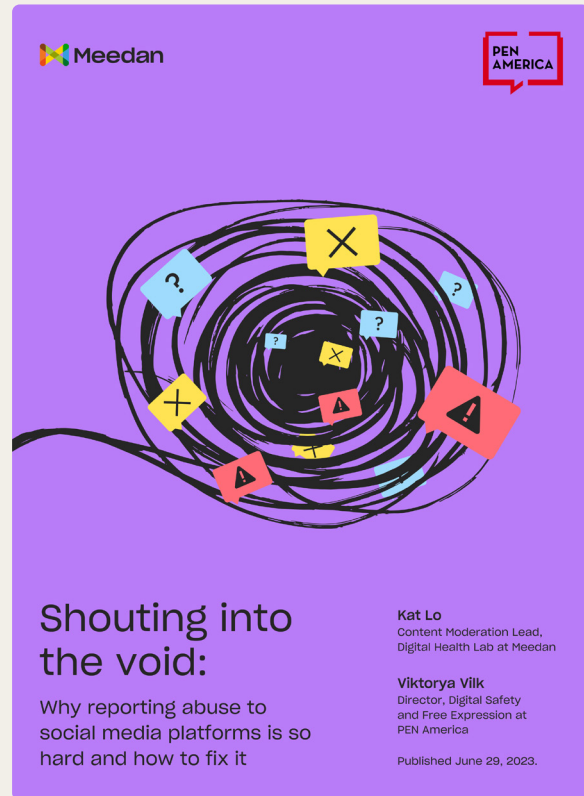
['Estadão Verifica' e parceiros recebem prêmio internacional por projeto colaborativo](#)

Reports and publications

REPORT

Shouting Into the Void

This report, produced with PEN America, examines the challenges users face when they flag abuse on social media platforms. The authors find that the reporting process can be difficult and time-consuming, and platforms often fail to take action on reported abuse. The report recommends a number of ways to improve the reporting process, including making it easier for users to report abuse, giving users more feedback on the status of their reports, and making platforms more transparent about how they handle reports.



ANALYSIS

Misinformation about abortion in the wake of the 2022 US Supreme Court decision

This report analyzes how misinformation about abortion spread in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The report finds that misinformation about abortion increased significantly after the decision was leaked in May 2022. The report also finds that misinformation about abortion is often spread by anti-abortion groups and individuals. The report recommends that fact-checkers and news organizations focus on debunking misinformation about abortion and that social media platforms take steps to reduce the spread of misinformation on their platforms.

OPINION

Here's what we're considering in the lead-up to the Supreme Court's decisions on the future of the internet

This opinion piece examined the potential impact of the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions on Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. Section 230 is a law that protects social media platforms from liability for the content that their users post. The article argued that the Supreme Court's decisions on Section 230 could have a significant impact on the fight against misinformation and disinformation online.

The Past, Present and Better Future of Feedback Learning in Large Language Models for Subjective Human Preferences and Values

Authors: Hannah Kirk, Andrew Bean, Bertie Vidgen, Paul Rottger, and Scott Hale. 2023.

Volume: Proceedings of the 2023 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing

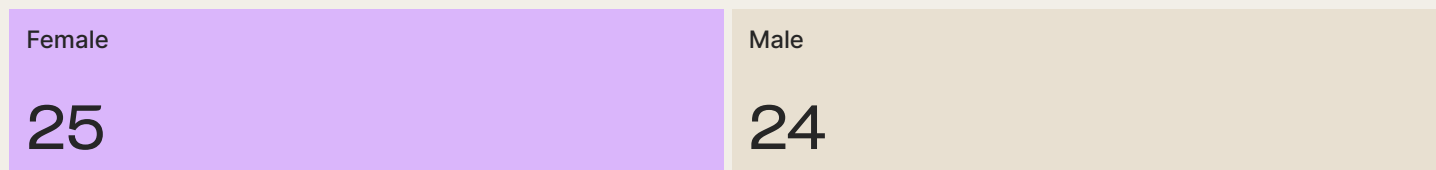
The Empty Signifier Problem: Towards Clearer Paradigms for Operationalising Alignment in Large Language Models

Authors: Hannah Rose Kirk, Bertie Vidgen, Paul Röttger, Scott A. Hale.

Volume: Socially Responsible Language Modelling Research (SoLaR) 2023

Impact and engagement

Gender distribution of the team

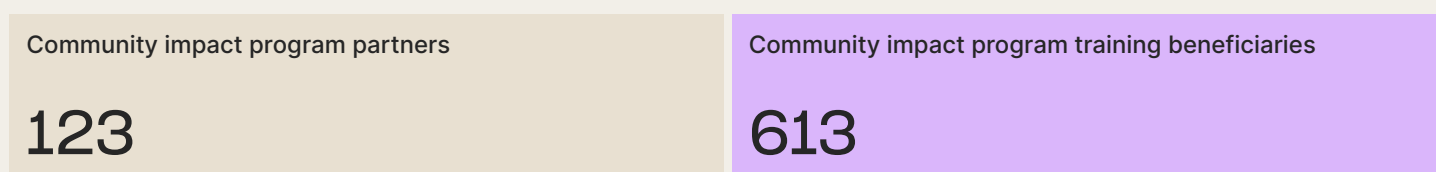


Larger World representation

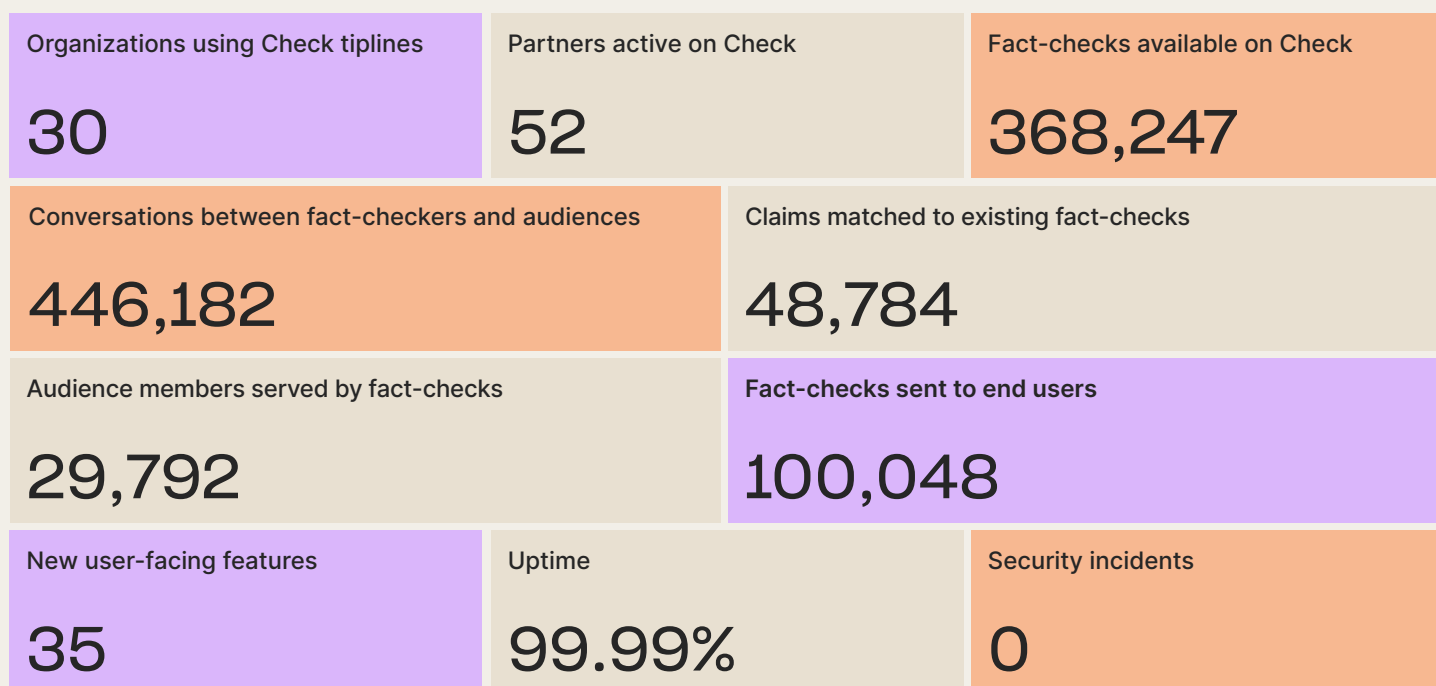


Many Meedanis have roots in countries other than where they currently reside.

Community impact programs

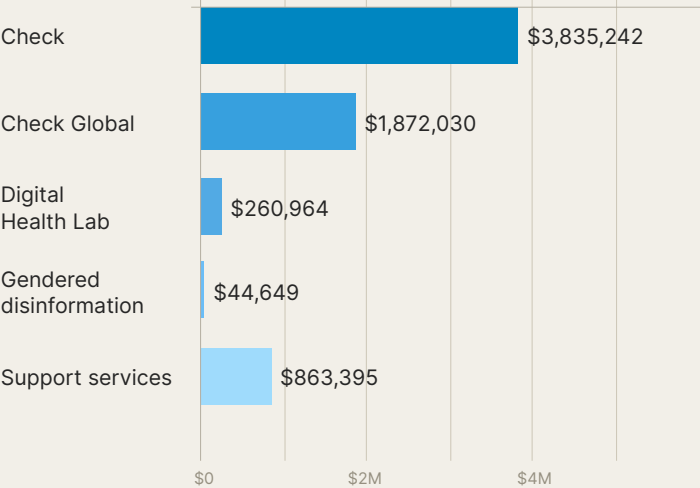


Check's impact in numbers



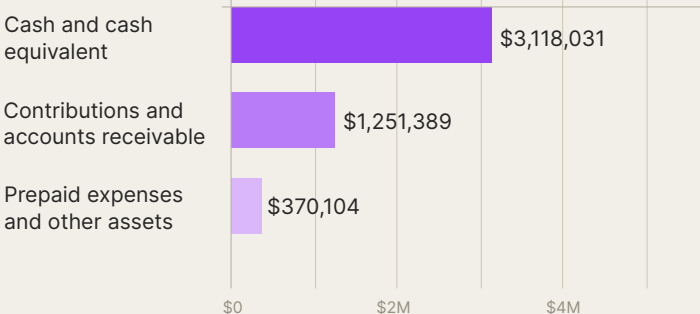
Financial highlights

Expenditures



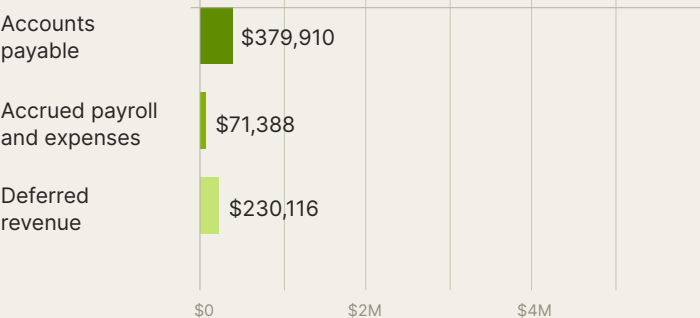
Total expenditures: \$6,876,280

Assets



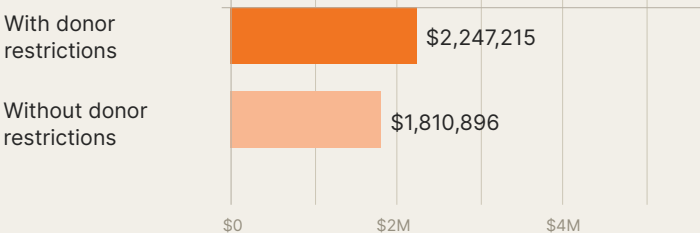
Total assets: \$4,739,524

Liabilities



Total liabilities: \$681,413

Net assets

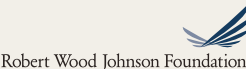


Total net assets: \$4,058,111

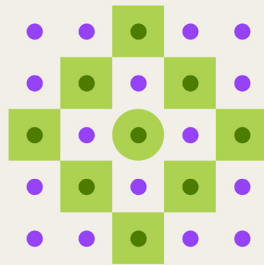
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The Checklist



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