#HackAgainstEbola
Final Report

Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal
November 2014 - January 2015

In partnership with:

OSIWA  Google  ICFJ

BBC  Deutsche Welle  Cartoon APF  Le Monde Afrique  Pan Atlantic University

February 2015
#HackAgainstEbola is a campaign by the Global Editors Network from November 2014 to January 2015 in Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria. The goal of the campaign was to fund the development of online and mobile tools by local journalists to tackle and prevent Ebola from spreading.

The Global Editors Network (GEN) is a community dedicated to media innovation supported by 20,000+ media innovators. More than 2,500 of those media innovators participate in GEN’s yearly programmes and GEN’s annual conference called the GEN Summit. GEN represents the world’s leading media and organises events bringing together the best newsrooms and opinion leaders of the industry.

#HackAgainstEbola Financial partners

OSIWA (the Open Society Initiative for West Africa) is part of the global network of Open Society Foundations founded and supported by George Soros. OSIWA supports the creation of open societies in West Africa marked by functioning democracy, good governance, the rule of law, basic freedoms and widespread civic participation. Includes news, programs and grant information.

Google has been a strategic partner of the Global Editors Network since GEN’s inception in 2011. For this campaign, they provided mentorship and training for the participating teams in areas focused on technology, expanding reach, and innovation.

#HackAgainstEbola Training & Mentorship Partner

ICFJ

The International Center for Journalists is a non-profit organization that is shaping the future of quality journalism. ICFJ’s programs empower journalists and engage citizens with new technologies and best practices.

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The Citi FM team won the first place in the #HackAgainstEbola hackdays in Ghana. Their project, City Ebola Updates, is a mobile platform that enables people, both educated and illiterate, to receive information and updates on the status of Ebola in their country, in their preferred local language.
The GEN Editors Lab Programme

The Editors Lab Hackdays is one of GEN’s key programmes for bringing innovation to the newsroom. It is a worldwide series of hackdays hosted by the world’s leading news organisations such as The New York Times, The Guardian and El País. Editors Lab brings together developers, journalists and designers representing the best newsrooms from each host city.

Over two days, teams build news prototypes around a theme linked to the latest trends in media innovation. After two intensive working days, teams present their prototypes to a jury that will choose a winning team. The highlight of the season is the crowning of the Editors Lab Final Winner, which gathers each national Editors Lab Winner at the GEN Summit.

In 2014, GEN launched the GEN Community. All Editors Lab participants use the GEN Community as their platform to share and collaborate on the prototypes created during the event. They connect to a worldwide network of media innovators.

Why a #HackAgainstEbola Editors Lab?

Ebola is creating panic, irrational information, dangerous rumours and uncertified facts, which can all generate chaos when not managed properly. Ebola has not yet been neutralised and could continue to spread throughout Western Africa as well as other continents. Journalists must be prepared to fight all collateral damage associated with Ebola. Unfortunately journalists on the ground don’t have the necessary resources and tools that match the responsibility they have to inform local communities. This is why the Global Editors Network and its partners organised a series of three Editors Lab in:

**Accra (Ghana) on 19-20 November, at Penplusbytes**
**Lagos (Nigeria) on 24-25 November, at the School of Media and Communications**
**Dakar (Senegal) on 14-15 January, at OSIWA**

Each time, we gathered local journalists to empower them with the expertise to develop and implement new applications and online tools that can save lives.
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

Location: Penplusbytes
Date: 19-20 November, 2014

Teams:

Business & Financial Times  Citi FM  Daily Graphic  Daily Guide
GBC  Multimedia Group Limited  NAFTI  Ringier Ghana

The Speakers:

Dr. Kofi Bonney, Chief Research Assistant in the Virology Department at Noguchi Memorial Hospital
Kingston Tagoe, Entrepreneur at Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology
Gerald Pharin, Entrepreneur at Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology

The Jury:

Teemu Ropponen, iLab Liberia Country Director
Nathaniel Ashiagbor, web programmer
Kwami Ahiabenu II, Penplusbytes
Evangéline de Bourgoing, Programme Manager, Global Editors Network
Teams:

Channels | DigitalSense Africa | News Agency of Nigeria | Nigerian NewsDirect
---|---|---|---
Tell | The Nation | TVC | University of Lagos
Vanguard | Voice of Nigeria | Yes International

The Speakers:

Mikang Longjan, Program Coordinator, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)
Babatunde Akpeji and Oluseun Onigbinde, Knight International Journalism Fellows, ICFJ
Taiwo Kola-Ogunlade, Communication and Public Affairs Manager, Anglophone West Africa, Google
Dr. Bakare Lawal, CEO, EbolaAlert

The Jury:

Babatunde Akpeji, Knight International Journalism Fellow, ICFJ
Mikang Longjan, Program Coordinator, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)
Evangéline de Bourgoing, Programme Manager, Global Editors Network
**Location:** OSIWA  
**Date:** 14-15 January, 2015

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**The Speakers:**

**Abdoulaye Kante**, Expert Associate Director in charge of Public Sector & NGOs Business Unit at Link4dev  
**Moussa Seydi**, Head of the Department of Infectious Diseases at Hospital Fann

**The Jury:**

**Hawa Ba**, Senegal Program Officer, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)  
**Evangeline de Bourgoing**, Programme Manager, Global Editors Network  
**Olivier Sagna**, Secretary General, Observatory on Information Systems, Networks and Information Highways in Senegal (OSIRIS)
The team from CitiFM won the competition with their project Citi Ebola Updates.

What is CitiFM?

CitiFM is an English-speaking radio station that operates from Accra. CitiFM has won numerous awards. To name just a few, CitiFM was recognised as the most Innovative Newsroom in Africa at the 16th Telkom Highway Africa Awards in 2012 and it was recognised by the BBC in 2007 as the new radio station of the year.

What is Citi Ebola Updates?

Citi Ebola Updates is a mobile platform that sends its users information and updates on the status of Ebola in their country in the preferred local language.

How does it work?

Users send a text message indicating their preferred language to a designated short-code. For example, they send E for English, T for Twi, G for Gha, H for Hausa. Then they receive a brief call (twice a day) with updates about Ebola in their country.

During their five-minute presentation, the team demoed the service. They asked a volunteer in the audience to send a code indicating their preferred language to a short-code. After having done that, the volunteer received almost immediately a call with an update about Ebola.

How will CitiFM encourage the adoption of this service? They will promote it on CitiFM and on CitiFM’s regional affiliate radio stations, on cityfmonline.com, on CitiFM’s various social media platforms and on WhatsApp. They will thus reach the different strata of the Ghanaian population.

Why did this project win?

The jury considered that CitiFM Ebola was the project that was likely to have the broader reach because it overcame two significant barriers preventing effective communication on Ebola: the language barrier and the technology barrier.

Using mobile technology was deemed the best way to communicate messages to the largest possible segment of the Ghanaian population. In fact, according to the team, the total number of active mobile phone subscriptions in Ghana was 29.5 million in August 2014. It is higher than the estimated population of Ghana, which stood at 25.2 million. Mobile penetration in Ghana stands at over 100%.
The team from Vanguard won the competition with their EbolaGo project.

What is Vanguard?
Vanguard is one of the leading newspapers in Nigeria today. It circulates 120,000 copies daily.

What is EbolaGo?
EbolaGo is a multi-platform service providing the Nigerians with all the information they need about Ebola.

How does it work?
EbolaGo is a service for both desktops, smartphones and mobile phones. On desktops and smartphones, users can have access to an updated database about Ebola and curated news articles on the topic.

Users of regular mobile phones can send a text message to a short-code and they will receive news about Ebola, a list of preventive measures, information on how to find doctors and treatment centres and answers to frequently asked questions.

Why did this project win?
The jury was very interested in the information platform developed for regular mobile phones. It considered it is an extremely simple and efficient system: Without any internet connection and in just a few clicks users can have access to the most important information about Ebola. This quick and cheap platform has the potential to become a broadly used tool in West-African countries.

The jury also appreciated that Ebola Go enables a two-way conversation between the media organisation and its users. The newsroom not only provides up to date and relevant information about the outbreak but also lets its users submit their own questions. Thus the newsroom can discover rumours about Ebola that they might not have been aware of and start fighting them.
SENEGAL

The team from Senegal Bloggers Network won the competition with their SenStopEbola project.

WINNING PROJECTS

What is the SenStopEbola network?

SenStopEbola is an initiative of the Senegal Bloggers Network created after the announcement of the first Ebola case in Senegal on August 26th 2014. These volunteers have set up a digital communication strategy with the hashtag #SenStopEbola on social networks (Facebook, Twitter) and created a mobile application to inform the public about the Ebola outbreak.

What did SenStopEbola develop during the hackdays?

During the hackdays, the goal of the #SenStopEbola team was to add three additional features to their already existing app: an SMS and call notification services to reach a wider segment of the population; the integration of WHO data analysis APO; and a diagnostic, monitoring, alerting and training tool for health professionals and volunteers.

Why did this project win?

The jury appreciated the project’s effort in increasing the reach of their platform by adding an SMS and call notification services. They praised the great development and design skills displayed in the app, although they kept in mind that the team just added additional features to an app that was already very impressive.

Two aspects of this project seemed very promising to the jury. First, the #Senstopebola team aims at making their app duplicable in 48 hours and adaptable to any other kind of emergency situations in the health sector. Secondly, they plan on making their technology open source and thus duplicable by other organisations around the world.
IN THE PRESS:

Ghana:

CitiFM wins #HackAgainstEbola competition, CitiFM Online
Journalists for #HackAgainstEbola To Be Equipped, SpyGhana
#Hack Against Ebola To Be Held Today, ModernGhana
Ghanaian Journalists for #HackAgainstEbola, GraphicOnline

Nigeria:

Vanguard wins GEN Editors Lab, Vanguard (republished by FindNews Nigeria)
GEN ranks Voice of Nigeria among the best, NewsPlus (republished by Voice of Nigeria)
Nigeria: #Hackagainstebola Comes to Lagos, AllAfrica (republished by NewsDesk Africa)
Nigerian editors brainstorm on solutions to Ebola, News Plus

Senegal:

DakarActu, Agence de Presse Sénégalaise, SocialNetLink.org
Le Monde Afrique | Le datajournalisme pour combattre Ebola
Le Monde Afrique | A Dakar, des hackers s’en prennent au virus Ebola
Afrique IT News, Google Europe Blog, HumanIPO

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Tweets with #HackAgainstEbola 1,646
Mentions, Favourites and Retweets: 424
Special Mentions

**Ebola Sniper**, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation’s project, is a web game that aims at dispelling myths about Ebola. At the first stage, players have to shoot bats in a tree. (Indeed, it is thought that some fruit bats are natural Ebola virus hosts.) When they manage to kill a bat, they have to answer a question about Ebola. If they provide a correct answer, they save an Ebola victim, who in turn leaves a hospital bed. When there are no more patients in the hospital, players progress to the next level where they repeat the scenario but are asked harder questions about Ebola.

The jury was impressed by the creativity of the concept and the possibility of having an entertaining and an equally educational game.

**Ebola Tracker**, Graphic’s project, is an app for reporting Ebola cases. Users can quickly report Ebola cases by filing a form (region, local area, age, gender, etc.) then reported cases are displayed on a map, all the while pushing notifications through users’ smartphones.

The jury praised the idea of a crowd-sourced mapping platform and thought it could be a very useful tool for journalists to get information about the Ebola Outbreak in remote areas. However, they warned the team that if the crowdsourced information is not sufficiently fact-checked, this tool could work in reverse and disseminate rumours about false Ebola cases.

**The Ebola Shield**, the University of Lagos’s project, is an app that is divided in three parts: Education, The Victims and Community. The Education part informs users about Ebola symptoms and the preventive measures. The Community part allows users to interact with other people from the same country on ways to tackle and alleviate Ebola. The Victims part enables users to discover the profiles of the survivors and the victims of Ebola.

Users of this app will also receive for free a special ringing tone reminding them of the need to shield themselves against Ebola. This ringing tone has been written, sung and produced by one member of the team and was played at the pitch session.

The jury was impressed by the uniqueness of the storytelling experience created by the team. They thought it was crucial to give a face and a story to victims who are just numbers for most people. Telling the stories of Ebola survivors is an efficient way to spread the message that, contrary to a commonly-held belief, Ebola can be cured. It is crucial to debunk the myth that Ebola is an incurable disease because such myth prevents people with Ebola symptoms to seek help.

**Voice of Nigeria #HackAgainstEbola**, Voice of Nigeria’s project, is a dedicated blog that serves as a hub for verifiable Ebola-related information and data. It filters the stream of information about Ebola and only presents verified data. This platform also addresses children’s needs by providing them with fun-filled quizzes with underlying educational content on Ebola prevention, symptoms, detection and management.

At the pitch session, Voice of Nigeria #HackAgainstEbola presented a functional platform with a user-friendly design that impressed the jury. The jury also praised the emphasis that the team put on curation and fact-checking. Surprisingly, this aspect has often been overlooked by the teams, although it has been proven that the dissemination of unverified facts about Ebola could cause deaths.

**FLOT Contre Ebola**, DakarActu’s project, is a MOOC that aims at training doctors, journalists, bloggers and community intermediaries. The training
will be available in different Senegalese languages. It will consist of videos and quizzes. The team started building a prototype on OpenEdx, an open-source platform to create MOOCs. The jury thought this project fills a real need as few health workers and journalists in Senegal have received an in-depth training about Ebola, although training these multipliers of opinion could have a great impact on public opinion.

**ACCES Santé 2.0**, Ouestaf's project, is a data-journalism web platform that both informs the public about health issues and collects data about the behaviours and the opinions of the Senegalese population on these very issues. The data collected when users answer quizzes about public health will be made available to everyone and could be used by the state or by NGOs to build awareness-building campaigns.

Data journalism is still in its infancy in Senegal and the jury thought this project could set an example for other Senegalese newsrooms to follow. The jury also appreciated that this platform is not only focused on Ebola but can be applied to different health issues.

**OTHER CATEGORIES**

**Games**

- The Ebola Shield
- Feedtrack Ebola
- Ebola Awareness Ranker
- Ebola Escape
- The game to neutralize Ebola

**Ebola and its economic impact**

- Ebola Xibaar
- Ebola Impact Economique

**Information portals**

- Ebola Yarn
- Know Ebola
- Ebola Prevention Education
- Ebola Free
- KeekEbola
- EbolaUpdate
- NebolApp

**Specific focus areas**

- Fighting Ebola: At the bedside of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups
- Securing A Space For Child Beggars In The Ebola Safety Nest
- Ebola in Churches and Mosques
- AFIA Report
- Stop Ebola It is Time
- Ebol@ctu
How would you describe your experience of the event as a whole?

‘Oh! it is a wonderful experience. This is my first time and I saw more than I expected to see. The event is really going to educate people worldwide on how to stop the Ebola virus. It is a wonderful event.’ (Nigeria)

‘I was a memorable one and such that I never knew it could be like that. In short, an inspiring event.’ (Nigeria)

‘1) Informed. 2) Thrilled and 3) Equipped.’ (Nigeria)

‘Very Educative and really rich in innovation’ (Ghana)

‘(…) I learnt how to build an app’ (Ghana)

‘Too short to do quality work’ (Senegal)

What was the most useful part of the event for you? Why?

‘[Speaking of Google workshop]: it revealed a whole lot of ‘hidden’ tools that could enhance a journalistic work’ (Nigeria)

‘The Google workshop. It was the most educative and most enlightening part as I discover I didn’t know how to maximize the use officer Google before that’ (Nigeria).

‘The prototype development process. This was my first time and I was excited about the aspect of the practical session’ (Ghana)

‘The discussion with the experts like Professor Moussa Seydi and the representative of the state’ (Senegal)

What did you think about the masterclasses? Were they relevant? Were they too long?

‘EMPOWERED. That is how I feel’ (Nigeria)

‘1) Informative 2) Very relevant 3) Not at all’ (Nigeria)

What did you learn during those two days?

‘1) Self-reliance 2) The use of my creativity 3) Team work 4) Respect’ (Nigeria)

‘I learned various methods of creating awareness of ebola and prevention’ (Ghana)

‘I learned how in our own little way and with the help of technology we can fight Ebola.’ (Ghana).

‘The ultimate for me is to affect lives positively’ (Ghana).

‘A lot about the disease’ (Senegal).

‘I realize today that the editorial work should be more open and adapted to new technologies’ (Senegal)

Any suggestions to improve the Editors Lab?

‘A few development tools could be introduced’ (Nigeria)

‘Stretching their projects over a longer period. The two-day period was too short. Probably a week’s workshop / hack will enable the programme run better. So much was put in the two-day program’ (Ghana)

‘Think a longer period for the program will be great (eg One week, Two weeks).

‘Training with extra information will be useful to equip journalists in their dissemination of news. Incentives and certificates for participants’.

‘Do more training’ (Senegal).

‘A workshop given by Google or an other organizations about developing mobile and web app etc’ (Senegal)

Two Senegalese participants complained that the level was very different between the teams and that some of the teams had prepared their prototypes in advance.
BENEFITS

Think Digital

In Ghana and in Senegal, two journalists told us that participating in this competition was very challenging for them, as they spend their days reporting from outside the newsroom and almost never think about how their content will appear online. This mindset seemed to be shared by other journalists at the hackdays. For them, creating content only for the web as well as producing multimedia and interactive storytelling is not part of their workflow. Moreover, they do not have the opportunity to step back and try to invent new kinds of storytelling. At the hackdays, freed from their daily routines, they had the chance to mingle with developers and to develop a more digitally-oriented mindset. As one of the participants in Senegal wrote in the post-event survey, “I realise today that the editorial work should be more open and adapted to new technologies”.

Showcase African innovation

All the speakers, jury members and participants were coming from African countries – the only exception being the GEN staff and one of the jury member in Ghana. Our goal was to showcase personalities whose work and talent could be sources of inspiration that participants can relate to. We wanted to show how innovation can thrive in local contexts and present the participants with good practices that really work in daily practice. The very high level displayed by some teams at the pitch session empowered the other teams by showing them how innovation can flourish in organisations that are similar to theirs.

At the hackdays, freed from their daily routines, journalists had the chance to mingle with developers and to develop a more digitally-oriented mindset

Engage media in the fight against Ebola

Our program provided the participants with a unique opportunity to interact with prominent Ebola specialists and get more informed about the epidemics. Moreover, devoting two days to think about Ebola helped the participants make this issue their own. It made them aware of their responsibilities in the fight against Ebola. After the event, one Nigerian attendee confided in us that Nigerian media had been somehow demotivated at sharing the states’ messages about Ebola. We believe our program had contributed to improve this situation.

CHALLENGES

Fostering innovation usable by the great public

The goal of our hackdays is to foster digital innovation in the newsrooms and the specific aim of the #HackAgainstEbola program was to discover innovative way to use technology to better inform about Ebola. However, it seemed sometimes that the most efficient way to reach this goal was not always the most technologically sophisticated ones. SMS-based services might not seem revolutionary but they will probably perform way better at informing the great public about Ebola than sophisticated news-games or beautiful interactive data visualisations.
Encouraging creativity without reducing effectiveness

When examining the prototypes created throughout the #HackAgainstEbola program, one could be surprised by the apparent similarity of some of the projects. Indeed, many teams concentrated their efforts on creating information portals either on the web or on mobile phones. We expected to see more diverse and creative types of projects and tried to make the participants differentiate more their projects. But on further reflection, we realized that the participants were only trying to create the projects that they deemed the most useful for the great public and that information portals might not be the most creative way to create awareness about Ebola but are probably among the most efficient ways.

Communicating with teams with very different levels

The technical level was very uneven between the teams. At the pitch sessions, some teams presented functioning prototypes which displayed impressive technical expertise. Other teams could not manage to create functional prototypes but presented mock-ups and an implementation roadmap. Some teams proposed only a concept on a powerpoint. Some teams could not even present their project on a powerpoint. Communicating in front of teams with such different skill sets was very challenging. Setting high goals - such as developing a working prototypes - could galvanize some teams while discouraging others. Giving strong guidance to the teams could boost some teams but hamper the creativity of others. That is why, although at most hackdays, we mostly communicate about the competition through short workshops intended for every participant, for #HackAgainstEbola, we opted in for more personalized communication to fit with the teams’ different needs.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

This programme highlighted the need and want for more digital training in the media community. Two types of programmes could be developed: practical workshops to learn how to use digital tools and conferences to raise awareness about digital innovation and help develop a ‘digital mindset’ among journalists.
The #HackAgainstEbola series of hackdays were conducted in partnership with:

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