

22 media innovators to receive funding from GNI Innovation Challenge

Google has announced the names of 22 media innovators set to receive \$2.1m in funding through the second Google News Initiative (GNI) Innovation Challenge for Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey.



Source: techcrunch.com

Applications for the second GNI Innovation Challenge opened in February and ran until 12 April 2021. A total of 329 established publishers, online-only players, news startups, publisher consortia and local industry associations applied, from 35 countries across the regions showing the diversity and the appetite for innovation of the news ecosystem. A rigorous review process, a round of interviews and a jury selection process followed, for the final selection of successful recipients.

“The vibrancy of the markets in the 14 countries, projects were selected from, could clearly be seen in the vast range of news players, topics and technologies considered,” says Ludovic Blecher, head of innovation at Google News Initiative (GNI).

In South Africa, **Olduvai**, an online-only publisher, developed Scrolla.Africa, a data-light platform that makes news available to millions of people in southern Africa, who would otherwise be unable to afford data costs.

Naij.com Media Limited owner **Legit.ng** in Nigeria, was selected for ReCo, a solution that improves Internet user experience by making content recommendations based on user preferences on their home page and within articles.

Standard Group PLC in Kenya is solving the challenges of declining revenue from legacy products and changing media consumption habits of audiences with The Messenger Reading Revenue Project.



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The applicants' innovations addressed issues ranging from audience development to virtual reality storytelling and recipients were able to clearly demonstrate their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

"We are excited about the 2021 GNI Innovation Challenge projects and we will be following their progress alongside that of previous recipients, who are already impacting the news ecosystem with initiatives that increase reader engagement and make for a more sustainable future for news," Blecher adds.

A few other 2021 GNI Innovation Challenge recipients are:

- **The Citizen Bulletin:** Zimbabwe Centre for Media and Information Literacy is building a loyal audience around hyperlocal journalism. The project is an open-source WhatsApp bot for news distribution and audience engagement.
- **Habari RDC:** Habari Streaming is a mobile application in the Democratic Republic of Congo that offers subscriptions to videos and podcasts. In a plan to diversify their source of income, Habari RDC created a user experience platform that provides paid content to its users.
- **263Chat:** Radio is the most accessible medium for Zimbabweans. To reach new audiences, 263Chat has established a podcast network to provide an alternative media source.
- **Eco-Nai+:** Nigeria's first digital geo-journalism platform providing access to interactive geo-data through web and mobile applications. Eco-Nai+, developed by Richmond Hill Media Limited (Ripples Nigeria), will host environmental data such as on drought, rainfall and erosion, while carefully tracking and making changes to environmental phenomena to help track climate change.

The full list of the selected projects for the 2021 GNI Innovation Challenge can be found on the GNI [website](#). GNI is Google's effort to help news players in their transition to a digital future, focusing on three pillars: elevating and strengthening quality journalism, evolving business models to drive sustainable growth, and empowering news organisations, through technological innovation.

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