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Report • Regional Edition

The State of *Media Development*

Middle East and North Africa

DW Freedom • *The Media Development Think Tank*

Supported by the

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

Imprint

Publisher
Deutsche Welle
53110 Bonn
Germany

Published
August 2025

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Introduction

Independent media are facing growing challenges on both a regional and global level, from economic crises and the spread of disinformation to threats to journalists' safety and the profound technological transformations such as artificial intelligence and the collapse of traditional business models. Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need for more focused and effective development interventions to support independent media and foster a vibrant and diverse information environment.

In response to these challenges, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted in 2024 the "Principles for Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment". These aim to enhance coordination of international media support and provide a reference framework to guide development efforts in ways that are better aligned with local contexts.

This regional assessment is part of DW Akademie's efforts to engage practically with these principles by assessing the extent to which the current reality of independent media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region aligns with the OECD principles and exploring the best pathways for their practical implementation. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data through in-depth interviews with international and regional experts and representatives of independent media development organizations from eight countries in the region. The objective is to identify key challenges and needs, highlight effective practices, and formulate recommendations that contribute to more coordinated, impactful, and sustainable media development support. It builds on a global study published in early 2025.

The findings of this study aim to support decision-making processes among donors and media development institutions by offering a reality-based vision that enhances the alignment of support with the actual needs of independent media, and contributes to building a freer, more diverse, and inclusive information environment in the region.

Conclusions on whether the OECD Principles are fulfilled in the MENA region:

	Summary	Assessment
Principle 1	Do no harm to public interest media	Minimally fulfilled
Principle 2	Increase financial and other forms of support	Not fulfilled at all
Principle 3	Take a whole of system perspective	Partially fulfilled
Principle 4	Strengthen local ownership & leadership	Overall fulfilled
Principle 5	Improve coordination of support	Minimally fulfilled
Principle 6	Invest in knowledge, research and learning	Minimally fulfilled

Main challenges/gaps in fulfilling the Principles:

- Shrinking and unstable funding: Includes sudden funding cuts, the unexplained decline since 2019, and reliance on short-term grants.
- Weak crisis response: Involves the absence of effective and rapid mechanisms to deal with emergencies.
- Lack of proactive risk assessments: Refers to the absence of regular risk assessments in highly risky or complex environments.

- Poor alignment with local context: Includes donor agendas that do not match with local priorities and contexts, and a weak understanding of each country's specificities.

- Weak comprehensive understanding of the media and information context: Includes limited awareness of the media and information environment in terms of legislation, ownership, audiences, technology, and economic models, as well as a weak research culture and lack of knowledge production.

- Weak measurement of long-term impact: Challenges in assessing the real long-term results of projects due to limited resources and complex environments.

- Limited strategic participation of local organizations: Their role is often confined to implementation, with little involvement in context analysis, planning, or priority setting, in addition to international organizations absorbing the largest share of funding.

- A lack of basic components: Including weak infrastructure, limited available time, and insufficient financial support, which restricts the ability to conduct research, share knowledge, and ensure the continuity of the learning process.

- Lack of coordination: between donors, international partners and local organizations in general, especially during crises.

Best practices in fulfilling the Principles:

- Neutrality of some donors and funding diversification: Some donors adopt a neutral approach, and some local organizations are moving towards diversifying funding sources to ensure sustainability.

- Media environment analysis and strategy development: Efforts by some local organizations to identify needs and develop appropriate improvement plans.

- Relying on local capacities: Employing local staff and expertise to enhance effectiveness at the local level.

- Flexibility and simplified procedures: Positive examples of donors and international partners who contribute to simplifying administrative procedures and supporting research and knowledge.

- Capacity investment: Investment in the internal management of some organizations.



The media landscape across the MENA region is increasingly complex, shaped by overlapping political crises, continuous conflicts and deteriorating economic conditions

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Methodology

The research questions can be summarized as follows:

- How is the media development sector in the MENA region performing vis-a-vis the six Principles?
- What are the best practices in media development practice in the MENA region as regards these Principles?
- What are the blind spots in the MENA region that need to be addressed for effective support to the media and information environment?

To answer these questions, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods through interviews with regional and international experts from the **Middle East** and **North Africa** region, including the **Palestinian territories**, **Jordan**, **Iraq**, **Yemen**, **Egypt**, **Tunisia**, **Syria**, and **Lebanon** and a survey with representatives of media development organizations working in the MENA region.

The research primarily focused on the qualitative method, conducting 11 in-depth interviews between January 15 – February 15, 2025, with the aim of gathering data on past and ongoing projects and assessing the extent to which organizations' practices align with the OECD Principles for media support.

The interviews complemented a quantitative survey that was completed by nine local organizations. The survey sought to identify challenges, set priorities, and collect recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of international media support.

Participants were selected to ensure diversity in terms of gender, organizational age, location (domestic or in exile), and scope of work (local or regional). The goals of participating institutions varied, including capacity building, journalist support, and institutional and legislative reform.

This regional assessment represents the second phase of data analysis at the regional level and aims to contribute to the development of a regional report on the state of media development in the Middle East and North Africa, as part of a broader global effort.

General overview

The media landscape in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has become increasingly complex due to the intertwining of political, social, and economic factors. This directly impacts the media environment and diminishes its ability to fulfill its fundamental role in promoting accountability, democracy, and serving the public interest. Amid ongoing political crises, continuous conflicts, deteriorating economic conditions, and rapid technological developments, media organizations operate under restrictive conditions characterized by shrinking freedom of expression and weakening legal protections for journalists. In this context, media sectors in several countries across the region face economic pressures such as unstable funding, alongside continuous threats faced by the majority of journalists working in conflict, post-conflict, and high-risk areas, both on the ground and in digital spaces.

Despite these challenges, the past decade has witnessed the emergence of independent media initiatives in several countries across the region. These initiatives were launched between 2011 and 2023, following the Arab Spring revolutions, as a response to the decline of government media outlets in meeting public expectations. These initiatives have had a positive impact at both national and regional levels, particularly among youth. Their efforts have focused on advocacy, raising awareness, skill-building, supporting institutional and legal reforms, and contributing to monitoring and evaluating public policies.

These independent initiatives have relied heavily on support from regional and international donors, who played a key role in funding and sustaining them. However, this support has not been comprehensively evaluated, raising important questions about whether it has been properly directed and to what extent it has achieved its true goals. Moreover, the lack of coordination between donors and implementing partners increases the risk of resource wastage and reduces the effectiveness of these efforts.

PRINCIPLE 1

Do no harm to public interest media

Minimally fulfilled

The data indicate that this principle is minimally fulfilled.

From the perspective of the "do no harm" principle, the media landscape in the MENA region is characterized by complexities resulting from the interplay of political, economic, and digital factors. Public interest media face major challenges, including difficulties in diversifying funding sources, weak crisis response mechanisms, and insufficient protection for journalists. Although international support is crucial in this context, if it is not designed in line with the specificities of each country, it may cause unintended harm, such as marginalizing local actors and distorting labor markets, which threatens the sustainability of public interest media and increases its dependence on international funding.

The quantitative findings showed that achievement of the "do no harm" principle was rated at 55.6 Percent, with some media organizations having risk management strategies in place. However, the qualitative data revealed a gap between donors' declared commitments and actual practices on the ground. International support at times turns into a burden on local organizations in the absence of effective mechanisms for risk mitigation and accountability.

Challenges

1. Weak integration of disability issues and equal opportunities in leadership and policies, with a clear gap in women's and diversity participation.

2. Restrictions on freedom of expression and weak commitment to democratic and professional standards locally and internationally. "On the local level, we suffer from government restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression. Internal authorities persecute Palestinian journalists for expressing their view"—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

3. The risks resulting from sudden funding cuts. "Some donors withdrew their funding, while others froze projects here. However, in general, all organizations were affected due to the limited funding allocated to them, as most funding shifted towards aid and emergency efforts in Gaza. The restrictive conditions, as mentioned, also expose organizations and the continuation of their activities to danger"—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

4. The absence of rapid response mechanisms for crises and emergencies. “Since May 2014, we have been raising the alarm about our friends in detention whose fate we don’t know. Two have died in the prisons. The international community’s response was limited to statements. In truth, at that moment, we felt that as a civil society, we have no value, and the international community only cares about us when we are working, but when we are in danger, organizations say they can’t intervene in cases of armed conflict”— Organization working in Yemen.

5. The absence of proactive risk assessment mechanisms.

> ***We have talked a lot with donors about the need for a real mechanism to protect workers in both international and local organizations. There should be a risk assessment conducted monthly or even every six months.***
>
> **Organization working in Yemen**

6. The lack of a safe environment for journalists and media organizations operating in high-risk settings. “Our association has not been harmed itself, but the core of our work is to support those in Syria who have been harmed in the field of journalism, media, and media institutions, whether by the war, the impacts of the previous regime, or violations committed against journalists and their media. The number of female journalists affected by these factors has reached 45, while the number of journalists killed stands at 468. Violations against media organizations have amounted to 132 since 2011. Violations of journalists’ rights inside Syria, as well as those in exile or forced migration, and the violation of journalists’ safety while performing their work, both directly and indirectly, have been ongoing since 2011”—Organization working in Syria.

7. The imposition of donors’ agendas. “There are five or six donors who have their own agendas and conduct the same trainings with the same trainers, with goals that contradict ours. We refuse to work with them because there is no renewal”—Organization working in Tunisia.

8. Weak support provided to journalists in exile.



It is necessary to establish rapid response mechanisms and proactive risk assessments, while enhancing physical safety of journalists

Positive examples

1. The neutrality of some organizations. “For example, UNESCO and the United Nations continue to provide assistance”—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

2. Temporary protection through identity concealment and flexible working arrangements.

3. The presence of a clear strategy and careful selection of partners.

Recommendations

1. Ensuring a safe and independent environment for journalists and media through comprehensive protection, support, and the rejection of conditional funding.

2. Promoting inclusive and fair media policies by mainstreaming disability issues and safeguarding freedom of expression in line with democratic standards.

3. Establishing rapid response mechanisms for crises and emergencies to provide humanitarian support to media organizations and journalists (such as emergency funding, shelter, or legal assistance).

4. Developing proactive risk assessment systems that include early warning tools and regular analysis of the political and human rights context in high-risk countries.

5. Ensuring data availability and the right to access information during crises.

6. Enhancing the physical and digital safety of journalists through continuous training, provision of digital protection tools, and the establishment of technical and advisory support units in cases of targeting or digital attacks.

7. Setting transparent funding standards to ensure content independence and prevent the imposition of external agendas on media institutions.

8. Designing support programs for journalists in exile including legal, psychological, and financial assistance, as well as providing job opportunities in host countries to facilitate their professional integration.

PRINCIPLE 2

Increase financial and other assistance

Not fulfilled at all

All data show that the principle has not been met.

Media development organizations in the Middle East and North Africa face an almost complete reliance on external funding from multilateral and bilateral donors as well as international NGOs, while local funding is nearly absent due to an unsupportive political and legal environment. Although forms of support such as training, capacity building, legal, and technological assistance are available, they often do not align with local needs and rarely translate into long-term institutional support. The focus on the sustainability of organizational structures and economic models remains absent from donors' priorities, which renders the support limited in sustainability and flexibility.

The findings indicate that the principle of "increasing financial and other forms of support" has not been achieved in the Middle East and North Africa, as media development organizations face funding shortages, particularly regarding the decline in funding between 2019 and 2024. Although some organizations have experienced a relative increase in funding, many challenges continue to hinder their development and the sustainability of their impact, in addition to their ongoing need for core operational funding.

Organizations receiving enough funding for meaningful media support

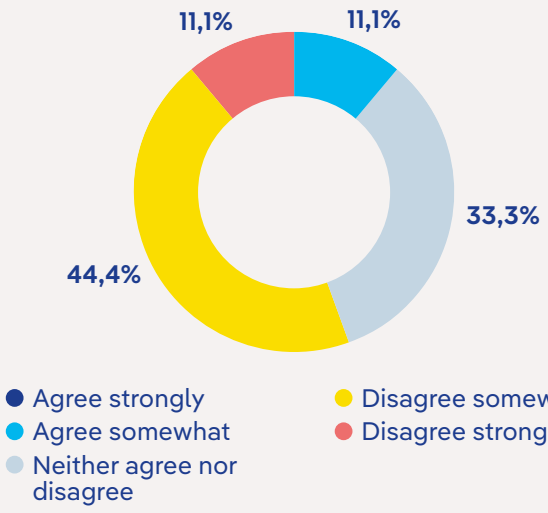


Figure 1: *Percentage of organizations that agree they receive enough funding to meaningfully support public interest media and the information environment*

Challenges

1. Decline and reduction in funding since 2019, with unclear reasons. “Support over the past five years has seen a significant decline compared to previous levels. When analyzing this, we observe a paradox that everyone recognizes: Support for journalism, press freedom, and related fields in Europe has multiplied several times in recent years, while the support available for media development in the MENA region has decreased” —Regional expert from MENA.

2. Strict funding restrictions and conditional partnerships. “Due to the restrictive conditions since 2021, we no longer apply for funding at all, especially with partners who impose restrictions on us”—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

3. The absence of sustainable funding mechanisms and the lack of core funding. “The reality is that donors providing core funding make up no more than 30 Percent of the international donors supporting the region”— Organization working in Jordan.

4. Reliance on limited and ineffective funding sources that lack the capacity to support the development of organizations. “Donors rely on the association’s ability to collect membership fees from its members, not realizing that these membership fees are symbolic amounts collected from journalists who already suffer from low living standards and limited job support, we cannot burden them with additional financial obligations”—Organization working in Syria.

5. There is a bias among some donors in their selection of local partners, as opportunities are not fairly granted to all actors in the sector.

> ***[Some international media development organizations] provide grants and funding only to the organizations they have worked with for many years, no changes, no replacements, and no additions of new organizations that may potentially have better work or activities than their existing partners. [They] work with the same organizations and individuals.***
>
> **Organization working in Iraq**

6. There are important areas that receive limited support. “Financial sustainability support for media institutions, capacity building, enhancing investigative journalism, and reforming legal and regulatory frameworks, strengthening media-related scientific research”—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

7. Weak financial support directed toward emerging media institutions. “I worked for a whole year without any money, support, or funding from any entity. I was funding the website from my own pocket. I work here in Belgium at a magazine, and at the same time, half of my salary went to cover platform expenses, while the other half covered my personal expenses. This was a huge challenge”—Organization working in Egypt.

Positive examples

1. Moving towards funding diversification as a tool for ensuring sustainability.

> ***70 Percent of our funding comes from international organizations working in the field of independent journalism, and 30 Percent comes from us as an institution generating income through providing consulting services, media production, and offering services such as renting part of our office. We have a studio where we create video advertisements for clients. These activities help us fund the institution.***
>
> **Organization working in Lebanon**

Recommendations

1. Funding should achieve financial sustainability support for organizations: Media development organizations need stable and long-term funding sources (such as core funding) to support independent media projects, training, and research.

2. Funding should not be influenced by the political orientations of donors; the funding allocated for projects and programs, especially in the field of media and development, should be neutral and not linked to any political agendas.

3. It is important for funding to be directed towards achieving genuine developmental goals such as promoting press freedom, developing media capacities, or improving access to information.

4. Donors should ensure the fair distribution of funding among organizations working in media development in the MENA region and provide financial support in a balanced and equitable manner to all organizations in this region, regardless of their size or status.

5. Avoid concentrating funding on large institutions in order to ensure the promotion of media diversity in the region and provide growth and development opportunities for small and medium-sized institutions.

6. Support and funding should be provided based on a needs and impact assessment to avoid wasting resources on projects that do not benefit the region, the institution, or the community.

7. Funding should be flexible enough to cover a fair proportion of operational expenses including staff salaries, office rent, and administrative costs.

PRINCIPLE 3

Take a whole of system perspective

Partially fulfilled

The data indicate that this principle is partially fulfilled.

The findings indicate a clear shortcoming in understanding and supporting the media system in the MENA region. The media environment in the MENA region is complex due to the intertwining of political, social, and economic factors, which necessitates adopting a comprehensive approach to analyze and support the media system. Most interventions focus on specific groups such as content creators and fact-checkers, while key actors such as investigative journalists and those working in remote areas are marginalized. Moreover, the application of certain international concepts without consideration of the local context creates a gap between donor priorities and the region's needs. The main challenge lies in the lack of integration among the components of the media system and the weak coordination between donors and local actors, which limits the translation of research into effective strategic programs.

Despite a relative improvement in donors' efforts to understand the media environment, these efforts often lack a comprehensive vision and do not translate into integrated outcomes. In-depth contextual analysis remains absent, and short-term perspectives dominate support strategies, leading to weak project designs that fail to align with local needs. In contrast, local media organizations are making tangible efforts to assess their own needs and those of the market, highlighting the persistent gap between external support and on-the-ground realities.

Challenges

1. Lack of comprehensive analysis of the media context.

> ***"I don't feel that there is sufficient effort in analyzing the media and information environment from donors and international partners.***
>
> **Organization working in the Palestinian territories**

2. Weak coordination among key stakeholders, donors, international partners, and local actors, which leads to overlapping efforts and duplication of projects. "The same study was done again by them independently, as there is no harmony between the donors' ideas and the

international partners to make real progress. Everyone works on their own, sets their own visions and strategies, and works in isolation. Then, they blame us as a sector, claiming that the support they provide has no real impact on the ground for the projects they fund because of the clash in ideas and priorities"—Organization working in Tunisia.

3. Lack of alignment between donor priorities and local needs.

> ***They have specific agendas that they bring, and they prefer clear editorial lines to be set without conducting a general study and analysis of the region. What matters to the donor is their priorities and how they will achieve them through their funding. I have not seen any study on the needs of journalists or media institutions.***
>
> **Organization working in Tunisia**

4. Difficulty in assessing the long-term impact of projects. "Impact assessment is difficult over the long term due to several factors, including time, budget, and the complexity of circumstances"—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

5. Donors' misunderstanding of the local context in the MENA region, including the political and social context of each country within the region. "The idea revolves around understanding the media environment of donors, which is linked to the production of knowledge. The research into the media environment and its producers are also experts who are close to the donors. As a region, we are at a disadvantage from both sides. Donors may have a misunderstanding of the local context of the region, but those who produce the knowledge frameworks and sources also come from the same reference point. Therefore, we end up as losers in this situation"—A regional expert from MENA.

6. Some areas do not receive sufficient attention or adequate support from donors. "In my opinion, regarding my field of work in combating misinformation and fake news, there is very little focus on this issue, especially in a region that is constantly changing and where some countries are suffering from crises such as political instability, wars, transitional phases, and internal conflicts"—Organization working in Iraq.

Positive examples

1. Local organizations are making efforts to analyze the media environment in order to identify needs and develop appropriate strategies for improvement.

> ***We work according to a strategy. A year ago, we created a five-year strategy, and every year we review it, assess the progress, and identify the needs of our newsrooms, networking, and our readers. We then make adjustments based on our needs, not on what the donor requires. We develop our own strategy and present it to our partners when applying for grants.***
>
> **Organization working in Lebanon**

2. There are some actors that receive clear attention and support from donors within the media development sector, such as influencers, digital content creators, and freelance journalists.

Recommendations

1. Designing projects in line with the local and political contexts of each country.
2. Adopting a participatory approach that ensures the involvement of local actors in all stages of the project.
3. Embracing an integrated approach that includes the legal framework, institutions, financing, infrastructure, and professional capacities.
4. Ensuring data availability and the right to access information.
5. Striking a balance between donor priorities and the needs of the region.
6. Supporting the production of knowledge from within local communities and by local actors.
7. Basing projects on accurate needs assessments with long-term monitoring and evaluation.
8. Providing space for experimentation and innovation in media models.
9. Enhancing coordination between donors and local and international partners through regular meetings.

PRINCIPLE 4

Strengthen local ownership and leadership

Overall fulfilled

The data indicate that the principle is overall fulfilled.

The findings reveal a clear intention to empower local partners; however, their participation remains limited in strategic phases such as context analysis and evaluation, which weakens the local impact of projects. Empowering local ownership is essential for achieving sustainable media development in the MENA region, through engaging local institutions in leading projects in line with their needs. Despite successes in training, capacity building, and the emergence of strong local platforms, implementation faces challenges such as weak institutional investment, reliance on foreign experts, and political and economic constraints that limit local leadership and push skilled professionals to migrate.

While most participants expressed satisfaction with their organizations' role in applying for funding, they pointed to disparities in impact. Some local organizations have achieved positive results, while others have seen their role decline due to limited funding and political constraints. They also emphasized that organizations in the region are mostly led by local leadership and experts, and that bringing in international experts can sometimes be beneficial, but in other cases, it may become a burden.

Challenges

1. Limited involvement of most local organizations in the strategic phases of the project cycle, such as context analysis, priority setting, and planning.

2. The international partners' dominance over the largest share of financial resources. "Because there are international organizations that take large amounts for managing the process, around 60 Percent of the project budget. For example, if project costs $1,000, they take $600, excluding salaries, taxes, and rent. The discussion after these funds were deducted from the budget was about how much of the remaining funds would actually reach the journalist in Yemen. All organizations have conducted studies on this issue"—Organization working in Jordan.

3. Some determinants when an organization applies for funding, whether as a lead applicant or as a co-applicant, "With the most important being the donor's trust in local organizations. For example, donors often fear that local organizations will take the funding and

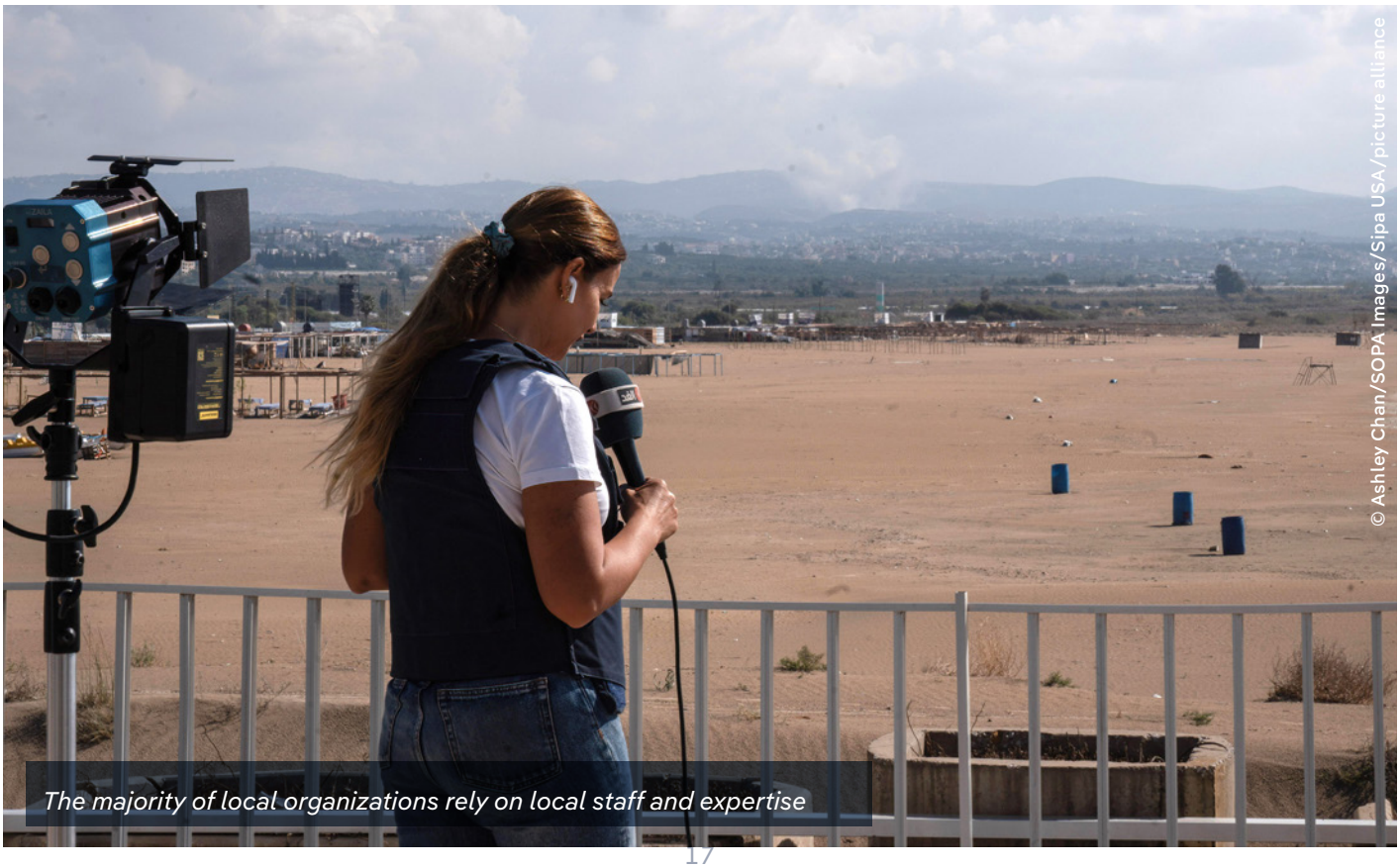
then close their activities. Another factor is policies, such as financial policies, strategies, reports, and money management. Some organizations don't follow policies in their work, whereas international organizations rely heavily on these as the foundation of their operations, and that's how we work. Thirdly, there's money management, meaning the amount of funding you manage annually. For instance, if you apply as lead applicant managing $500,000 a year, but the project's size is $5 million, that's a big gap, so you can't lead and would turn into a co-applicant"—Organization working in Iraq.

4. Sometimes, bringing in a foreign expert represents a burden on media projects in the MENA region. The main burdens of bringing in foreign experts include the high costs of salaries, the lack of alignment of expertise with the local context, the logistical burdens related to protection and ensuring safety, in addition to language challenges. "However, at times it can be a burden on the organization, especially when it comes to the language barrier that always requires translation. When we have a trainer or expert, both international and Arabic, with the same level of expertise, I would choose the Arabic one. Additionally, the organization is fully responsible for their care and safety, which requires effort and time."—Organization working in Jordan.

   "This is exactly what happened with the European program, which relied on international European experts, wasting over 80 Percent of millions of euros in salaries without any benefit to Tunisia or any achieved findings" —Organization working in Tunisia.

   "When it comes to corrupt organizations, the foreign expert, who knows nothing about the local environment in Yemen, receives salaries that can account for half of the funding. Since they are unfamiliar with the context, they do not add much value"—Organization working in Yemen.

5. Some fields lack qualified local experts with sufficient experience.



The majority of local organizations rely on local staff and expertise

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> ***The region possesses 70 Percent of the expertise and experts that we can rely on to lead our projects, while the remaining 30 Percent involves areas where we lack experience, such as business models, satellites, and open sources, where international experts are ahead of us. We do not have accumulated experience in these areas, but the 70 Percent of local and Arab expertise in the region is something we can rely on.***
>
> **Organization working in Jordan**

Positive examples

1. There are successful models of local organizations and platforms that have had a positive and effective impact at the local level. "I can say that ARIJ Foundation is one of the most important local initiatives that prioritized in leading its own media initiatives in the region"—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

2. The majority of local organizations rely on local staff and expertise.

> ***Most of our work has been with local experts from the region in the countries we operate in.***
>
> **Organization working in Jordan**

Recommendations

1. Enhancing the active and leading role of local actors in the design and implementation of projects.

2. Transforming the role of local partners from implementers to strategic partners in all stages of the project.

3. Building the capacities of local partners to effectively lead their projects and reduce reliance on international experts.

4. Supporting emerging organizations with local impact instead of focusing only on large ones.

5. Easing some of the requirements imposed on local partners when applying for project funding.

6. Providing direct funding opportunities to local organizations without the need to go through international intermediaries.

7. Adopting a participatory approach that allows local partners to express their views.

8. Investing in local and regional networks and alliances to enhance knowledge exchange, coordination, and collective impact.

9. Ensuring the provision of effective mechanisms to protect the privacy and safety of local partners, particularly in repressive or unstable environments.

PRINCIPLE 5

Improve coordination of support

Minimally fulfilled

The data indicate that this principle is minimally fulfilled.

Enhancing coordination between local media development organizations and international partners in the MENA region is an urgent necessity to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of support provided to the media sector. The absence of coordination often leads to duplication of efforts and initiatives, as well as the waste of resources. Local organizations face significant challenges in dealing with the evolving requirements of donors, while international projects are often designed without adequate consultation with local actors.

The findings reveal a clear weakness in coordination between donors and local organizations, particularly during times of crisis, along with limited meaningful engagement and ineffective funding mechanisms. In addition to this, organizations continue to suffer from the burden of administrative requirements. Despite some relative improvement in this area, trust and integration between partners still require real strengthening.

> ***All the crises had coordination meetings, but they were not useful. The biggest crises were Gaza and Sudan, but the regional crises did not receive the same level of attention as Ukraine. The response was not bold in terms of quick action. We need fast and effective coordination and action plans. We were gathered as 20 organizations; how can there be an alliance without an action plan? When we met with a large organization during the Gaza crisis, the situation was catastrophic, and we were talking about the displacement of colleagues seven times over nine months, yet they spoke indifferently as if the war had only been ongoing for two weeks. So, we became convinced that if any crisis happens in Jordan, no one will help, and we will be in the same situation.***
>
> **Organization working in Jordan**

Challenges

1. Weak coordination during crises.

2. The administrative burdens imposed by donors on local organizations. “Of course, it’s a huge burden, especially with newly established organizations, I am responsible for my work as editor-in-chief and for all the administrative and financial tasks required because there is no financial capacity to hire a financial and administrative officer, this includes managing reports, finances, evaluating productivity, impact, and viewership rates”—Organization working in Egypt.

3. There are some local complexities related to the administrative requirements imposed by donors. “There is a significant burden associated with local administrative requirements. First, the constant increase in the price of the dollar every day compared to the previous day in the areas controlled by the eastern government. In addition to the difficulties in obtaining approvals, permits, and renewing licenses within the southern regions of Yemen, there are challenges where you either have to pay money to expedite the licensing process or wait, which could cause delays in projects and activities” —Organization working in Yemen.

4. The mechanisms of some donors for selecting recipient organizations for funding: “Organizations are chosen based on who submits a lower budget, which affects the quality and impact of the projects”—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

5. Bureaucratic complexities associated with administrative requirements.

> ***We don’t receive any feedback on what we provide. I consider this a waste of time and effort, and repeating questions three times with just a change in phrasing feels like a purely routine task. There is also a lot of bureaucracy in fulfilling the requirements from [European government donor].***
>
> **Organization working in Egypt**

6. The absence of practical implementation following coordination discussions. “There is always a gap between the discussion and the steps that follow. The [international media development network] plays an active role in coordinating discussions, but they have not had the courage to take effective action after the discussion. We always end up stuck at the discussion stage without any real outcome”—Organization working in Jordan.

7. Some donors lack flexibility when imposing complex administrative requirements on local partners. “There some entities have very complicated procedures that require multiple steps, such as the European Union and everything related to it”—Organization working in Tunisia.

8. Some of the current support models are ineffective and lead to waste of resources. “There is more than one approach. The first is that all the existing support models are completely unsuitable, wasting enormous resources. For example, if the German government decides to allocate one million euros for journalism in Egypt, it gives it to a German organization, which then works with a manager and a local organization in the region. By the time the one million euros reaches the local organizations, it becomes half a million and this is the very optimistic scenario” —Regional expert from MENA.

Positive examples

1. Positive examples of some donors and international partners who demonstrate flexibility in simplifying administrative procedures. “All United Nations organizations and Arab funding bodies”—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

2. Investment in the internal management of local organizations. “We realized that without good management, things couldn’t be organized. Now, we’re investing in management, and today our team has reached six people”—Organization working in Lebanon.

Recommendations

1. Simplify administrative procedures by adopting a unified proposal template.
2. Build regional networks to exchange expertise and solutions.
3. Prepare national and regional advisors to coordinate media reform efforts.
4. Enhance communication between policymakers and media institutions.
5. Hold regular meetings between donors and local partners.
6. Reduce intermediaries between donors and partners to improve support efficiency.
7. Allocate 10 Percent of funding for administrative costs to ensure effective management.
8. Focus on practical meetings rather than formal ones to solve problems and develop innovative solutions.



There is weak coordination between donors and local organizations particularly during times of crisis

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PRINCIPLE 6

Invest in knowledge, research and learning

Minimally fulfilled

The data indicate that this principle is minimally fulfilled.

Investing in knowledge, research and learning is one of the key pillars for developing the media sector in the MENA region. It contributes to ensuring the professionalism of media organizations, improving content quality, and enabling media to fulfill their role in supporting accountability and democracy. Despite a growing number of initiatives aimed at research and evaluation, such investment continues to face challenges, including limited funding for research, the absence of effective mechanisms to apply research findings in media policymaking, and a lack of strong partnerships between media and research institutions.

The findings point to key challenges in investing in knowledge, research, and learning within the media sector in the MENA region. Chief among these are insufficient funding allocated to this area and limited access to best practices. Many organizations also suffer from a lack of effective institutional mechanisms for sharing lessons learned, as well as weak documentation and dissemination of experiences. The data reveal a clear gap between a small number of organizations that allocate adequate budgets for research and the majority that neglect this component due to financial constraints. A focus on project implementation

Organizations receiving funding for research and sharing of findings

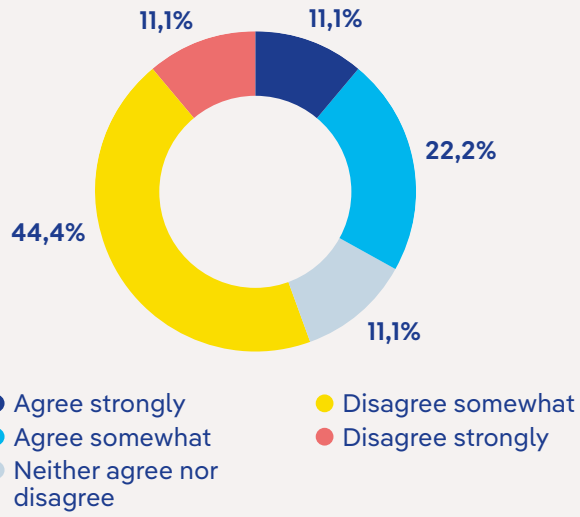


Figure 2: *Organizations that agree they receive funding to carry out research and share findings about what works to the sector as a whole.*

often comes at the expense of evidence-based learning and development.

Challenges

1. Lack of funding allocated to research and learning: The majority of media organizations do not allocate sufficient resources to this area. “However, we do not have a dedicated budget for scientific research, as our budget is very limited”—Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

2. The challenge of finding sufficient time for learning and research due to the administrative burdens associated with project implementation. “We need time when we’re not busy moving from one crisis to another to follow up on the latest developments, absorb them and digest them, along with having sufficient financial funding. This is because all organizations start their work each year with a deficit from the previous year’s budget, so there are limited opportunities to be calm and to learn”—Organization working in Jordan.

3. The weak knowledge production in the media sector. “In my opinion, the issue of new scientific research is still in its infancy in the region across all fields, for various reasons, including the lack of knowledge production in the media sector and its role in our societies. It shouldn’t require huge budgets, these budgets are available, but unfortunately, they are being used by international institutions rather than local ones” — Regional expert.

4. Alignment of research style and methodology with the target audience. “It’s just a question of who is supposed to read your research and to shape the style, and the methodology in a way that best serves [...] to make it more accessible for those who need to read it rather than just having yet another report”— International expert.

5. Limited sharing of acquired knowledge and best practices.

6. The excessive focus on implementation and immediate results comes at the expense of sustainable, evidence-based learning.

7. The lack of some essential components that support the enhancement of research, learning, and knowledge production.



Media development researchers need capacity building in evaluation and access to robust local, regional, and international research networks

> ***What we need first is reliable internet access that allows us to perform our work and communicate with partners in a sustainable way. We also need increased resources to support development plans, and more time to dedicate to the association's work and the future of the media sector in the context of establishing a new state.***
>
> **Organization working in Syria**

8. The migration of some qualified professionals due to low salary levels. "There's also a problem where many come, train with us, and become successful, but then leave for the Gulf countries, which pay four times what we can offer, and we can't stop them. Additionally, we need to maintain and periodically improve the salaries of those who stay with us, and this requires multiple sources of funding"—Organization working in Lebanon.

Positive examples

1. Some examples of knowledge investment carried out by some local organizations.

> ***We established a research unit in 2013 to conduct studies that serve the media sector in all fields, its key achievements include documenting the stories of journalist martyrs in both English and Arabic, with 125 martyrs documented so far, and continuing to complete the rest.***
>
> **Organization working in the Palestinian territories.**

"We are constantly working on networking, learning, and staying updated with media research from institutions like Maharat Foundation, Samir Kassir Foundation, and International Media Support (IMS)"—Organization working in Lebanon.

2. Examples of donors that contribute to supporting research and knowledge production. "The main supporters of media research in the region have been UNESCO and SIDA in the past" —Organization working in the Palestinian territories.

Recommendations

1. Integrating research into institutional strategies and programs.
2. Allocating a fixed percentage of budgets (10 Percent) for research and learning.
3. Establishing regional platforms and a digital library to share knowledge and research.
4. Engaging local institutions in setting research agendas instead of importing external models.
5. Training project teams and researchers on evaluation mechanisms, learning, and continuous capacity building.
6. Developing local, regional, and international research networks between local organizations and international partners.
7. Encouraging donors to include knowledge documentation and results-sharing in every project.
8. Reducing membership fees of international media development networks to enable emerging media organizations to benefit from resources.

Conclusion and key recommendations

In light of the rapid changes in the political, economic, and technological landscape in the region, there is an urgent need to reassess the goals and priorities of media support programs in the MENA region, focusing on challenges, best practices, and providing effective recommendations. This also requires adopting a more coordinated and integrated approach between donors and local partners to ensure that support aligns with the real needs of media institutions and the communities they serve. This is considered the foundation for achieving sustainable impact, rather than relying on short-term or fragmented support that does not keep pace with local realities.

Key recommendations

1. Risk assessment and compliance with local context: Develop proactive risk assessment systems that include early warning tools and analysis of the political context, with project designs aligned to the local and political conditions of each country.

2. Protect journalists and enhance their safety: Strengthen physical and digital safety through continuous training, provision of protection tools, and the establishment of technical and advisory support units in cases of targeting.

3. Sustainable and neutral funding: Provide core and long-term funding to ensure financial sustainability, while maintaining funding neutrality, and ensure fair distribution.

4. Adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach: Adopt strategies that consider all components of the media system, supported by thorough needs assessments and long-term monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure impact and sustainability.

5. Empower local partners: Enhance the active role of local actors and transform them from implementers to strategic partners in all stages of the project.

6. Build the capacities of local partners: Develop the skills and knowledge of local partners and researchers specialized in media development, integrate research and learning into projects.

7. Support emerging organizations: Continue funding and supporting small, locally impactful organizations, rather than focusing on large ones only.

8. Simplify administrative procedures: Reduce administrative burdens through standardized proposal templates and allocate a percentage of funding to administrative costs to ensure effective management.

9. Enhance coordination among stakeholders: Appoint national and regional media reform advisors and strengthen links between policymakers and media institutions to ensure synergy.

DW Akademie

DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

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