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Report • Regional Edition

The State of *Media Development*

Anglophone Africa

DW Freedom • *The Media Development Think Tank*

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Introduction

This study examines the status of media development in Anglophone Africa and specifically assesses adherence to the OECD's six principles that guide donor support for relevant and effective media development. The research draws on qualitative and quantitative data collected through surveys and interviews with diverse media development actors who have worked in this sector in different countries for over a decade. The findings reveal a complex media landscape shaped by political interference, shrinking revenues, digital disruption, and systemic underfunding that affect progress to evenly adhere to the six OECD principles.

The principles also reveal the need for a shift toward systemic, inclusive, and evidence-driven approaches. Across the region, local actors are often positioned as implementers rather than agenda-setters, limiting genuine ownership of media development. Coordination between donors and media outlets is hampered by bureaucratic burdens and duplication of efforts, especially during crises. Investment in research, learning, and knowledge sharing is underfunded, restricting the growth of an evidence base that could guide future reforms. However, isolated successes—such as legal defense mechanisms in West Africa, risk assessments in Kenyan newsrooms, and media literacy integration in Namibia—highlight the potential for scalable solutions. These cases underscore the importance of strengthening local leadership, diversifying funding, and embedding research and systemic collaboration into media development strategies.

Overview

The media landscape in Anglophone Africa is influenced by political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors. Politically, press freedom varies widely across the region, with constitutional protections often undermined by inconsistent enforcement and political interference. Media ownership is frequently concentrated in the hands of politically connected individuals, and government advertising contracts can shape editorial agendas, leading to subtle forms of censorship (African Centre for Media Excellence [ACME], 2025). Journalists face fragile security conditions, particularly during elections and civil unrest, while donor support for independent journalism, although vital, can be politically sensitive and sometimes resisted by governments (Associated Press [AP], 2025; UNESCO, 2024).

Economically, the sector has faced a sharp downturn, with reports of an average 20.7 Percent decline in funding between 2019 and 2024. Advertising revenues are shrinking, donor funding is increasingly short-term, and global digital platforms such as Google and Meta capture a significant portion of advertising markets (Reporters Without Borders [RSF], 2025a; Global Investigative Journalism Network [GIJN], 2025). Market concentration by dominant advertisers and politically linked owners further constrains editorial independence, while broader economic instability, fluctuating exchange rates, and inflation hinder investment in staff, technology, and long-term sustainability (RSF, 2025b).

Social dynamics also play a major role. Africa's young population is driving demand for digital-first, multimedia storytelling, yet women and marginalized groups remain underrepresented in leadership roles and are disproportionately targeted by harassment, particularly online. Public trust in media varies and is often weakened by perceptions of bias and limited accountability (Afrobarometer, 2024). The continent's cultural and linguistic diversity offers opportunities for niche and minority-language media, but these outlets remain underfunded and underdeveloped, limiting inclusion and representation (Journal of Democracy, 2024).

Technological transformation is reshaping media through converged newsroom models, multimedia production, and data-driven storytelling. However, rural and marginalized areas often lack reliable Internet connectivity, limiting reach and audience participation. Heavy reliance on third-party platforms exposes outlets to algorithmic changes, content removals, and cybersecurity threats such as surveillance, online harassment, and hacking (International News Media Association [INMA], 2024; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [FES], 2024).



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A community reporter in the Kakuma displaced persons camp in Kenya

Methodology

The methodology applied here follows the overall framework of DW Akademie's State of Media Development report, designed to ensure comparability across regions while capturing the specific dynamics of media landscapes in **English-speaking African countries**. The data collection period ran from December 2024 to February 2025, using a mixed-method approach:

- 11 key interviews were conducted across 9 countries (**Ethiopia**, **Ghana**, **Kenya**, **Namibia**, **Nigeria**, **Zambia**, **Tanzania**, **Uganda**, **Zimbabwe**).
- A regional online survey gathered broader perspectives on donor behavior, funding sustainability, strategic priorities, and local capacity-building.

Interview questions and surveys were designed around the OECD principles to assess alignment in practice.

Key findings

This analysis assesses the current level of implementation of the six OECD principles for effective media development within the Anglophone African media landscape. It provides a snapshot of the performance of each principle, highlighting areas of partial progress, minimal achievement, or outright gaps. Each principle is accompanied by a summary of the key issues identified and an assessment rating, which together form the basis for the detailed narrative analysis that follows.

	Summary	Assessment
Principle 1	**Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media** *Media organizations apply some safeguarding measures, but weak consistency and limited resources leave many outlets vulnerable to risks.*	**Partially fulfilled**
Principle 2	**Increase financial and other forms of support** *Shrinking donor support and overreliance on short-term funding cycles continue to weaken media financial stability..*	**Minimally fulfilled**
Principle 3	**Take a whole of system perspective on supporting the media and information environment** *Fragmented interventions and limited coordination hinder the development of systemic, long-term media solutions and continue to hinder systemic and sustained interventions in media development.*	**Partially fulfilled**
Principle 4	**Strengthen local leadership and ownership** *Local actors remain implementers rather than decision-makers, limiting true ownership of media development efforts.*	**Minimally fulfilled**
Principle 5	**Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment** *Weak coordination and heavy bureaucracy slow progress; streamlined collaboration improves efficiency and crisis response.*	**Minimally fulfilled**
Principle 6	**Invest in knowledge, research, and learning** *Insufficient investment in research limits innovation; sustained learning and knowledge-sharing drive accountability and smarter media development*	**Partially fulfilled**

PRINCIPLE 1

Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media

Partially fulfilled

Media organizations apply some safeguarding measures, but weak consistency and limited resources leave many outlets vulnerable to risks.

This principle is partially fulfilled. While some organisations have implemented safety and risk prevention measures, these are unevenly applied, and many media actors continue to operate in environments where safeguarding is reactive rather than proactive.

General overview

The "Ensure no harm to public interest media" principle emphasizes that donor support and organizational practices should not inadvertently expose journalists or institutions to greater risks. Across Africa, evidence shows uneven implementation, as pointed out by a representative of a development organization in Namibia:

> ***"In some African countries, identifying as a journalist at immigration (entry points) can result in heightened scrutiny, delays, detainment, or searches of materials.***

Survey results suggest that while most organizations recognize safety as essential, many lack structured systems to monitor or prevent harm. For instance, while **61.1 Percent** have strategies in place, **38.9 Percent** are unsure or disagree. For monitoring tools, the figure drops further, with less than half expressing confidence.

Qualitative findings paint a stark picture. In **Ethiopia**, community radios supported through foreign partnerships were branded as foreign agents, drawing state hostility as shared by a participant from the region:

> ***"Community radio managers faced threats from Ethiopia's media regulatory agency due to their association with [name of European partner] and other international partners.***

In **Uganda**, reporters covering the last general elections in 2021 were detained while others were subjected to physical assault. In **Kenya**, journalists intimated that they were forced to withdraw sensitive corruption stories from publication after receiving threats from interested parties. In

Nigeria, it was noted that there has been increased digital surveillance by government and other interested parties through hacking of their technology which leads to source exposure.

Southern Africa also reflects these challenges: **Zambia** has seen independent radio stations harassed or shut down for airing opposition voices, while in **Zimbabwe**, restrictive media laws continue to criminalize dissent. Despite its reputation for press freedom, in **Namibia**, journalists investigating corruption reported subtle intimidation. **Liberia**, on the other hand, saw threats towards community radio reporters who have no institutional safety nets.

Good practices are emerging. Some Kenyan outlets use pre-assignment risk assessments to guide their reporting and safety measures for their journalists. In West Africa, legal defense mechanisms have been activated to protect journalists under threat. These efforts, however, remain uneven, donor-driven, and difficult to scale.

Primary needs

- **Standardized, context-sensitive safety** and monitoring frameworks for all media actors;
- **Greater protection** for community and minority language media who are often the most exposed;
- **Frameworks that integrate approaches** covering physical, digital, and legal threats.

Recommendations

1. Develop a **continental "do no harm to public interest media" framework** tailored to African realities.
2. **Fundraise for rapid-response safety programs**, including relocation, legal aid, and trauma support for affected media actors.
3. **Encourage peer-to-peer learning**, linking safer environments like Namibia with higher-risk contexts such as Uganda or Zimbabwe.
4. **Ensure inclusion measures protect** women journalists and marginalized community media workers facing layered risks while at work.

PRINCIPLE 2

Increase financial and other forms of support

Minimally fulfilled

Shrinking donor support and overreliance on short-term funding cycles continue to weaken media financial stability.

This principle is minimally fulfilled. Only 11.1 percent of respondents believe their organizations receive sufficient funding, while 72.2 percent do not. On average, organizations reported a 20.7 percent decline in funding between 2019–2024, with a median decline of 40 percent.

General overview

Sustained funding is the lifeline of media development. Yet across the continent, organizations operate in increasingly fragile financial conditions. Survey results confirm widespread frustration as only one in eight organizations expressed that they were adequately funded. This was confirmed by an interviewee in Zimbabwe:

> ***While partnerships are beneficial, challenges remain in long-term funding and sustainability, as many donor programs are short-term and project-based rather than providing core institutional support.***

Organizations receiving enough funding for meaningful media support

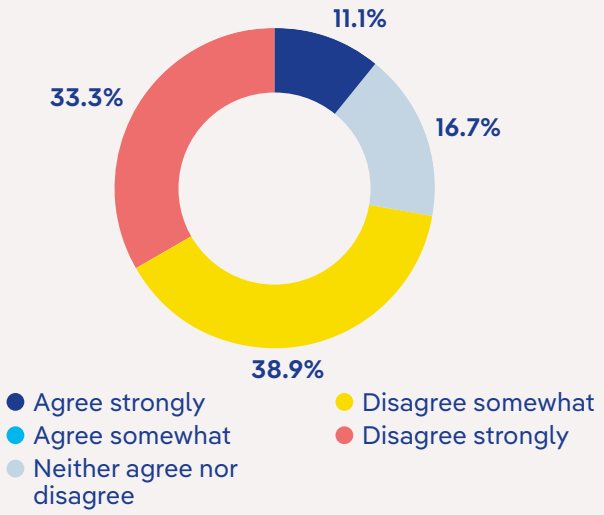


Figure 1: *Organizations receiving enough funding for meaningful media support*

Short-term funding cycles, which in recent times have concentrated on digital and broadcast media with community and minority language outlets, compound the problem. Almost half (**47.1 percent**) of projects run for only one year, forcing organizations into survival mode rather than strategic planning as the costs for media organizations to operations are rarely covered by donor funding. This was pointed out by an interviewee in Kenya:

> ***"Many grants explicitly state that they cannot be used for overhead costs, forcing organizations to subsidize administrative expenses through scarce unrestricted funding.***

However, despite these challenges, efforts have been made to mitigate funding challenges organizations face. In **Kenya**, a media development organization that once relied on 80 percent donor funding has successfully shifted its model to **70 percent self-generated income** (through memberships, events, and co-working spaces) and 30 percent donor support. This is a rare success story in an environment where many outlets, especially community radios, still struggle to diversify financial resources.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an organization in **West Africa** renegotiated with their donors to allow them to use project funds, originally allocated to travel costs, to cover core costs. This is indicative of donor flexibility in funding decisions during periods when organizations are vulnerable. In **Tanzania** and **Uganda**, regulatory restrictions on foreign funding further complicate sustainability, leaving smaller outlets especially exposed to financial fragility that affects their operations.

In **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**, political capture of state advertising has led to the shrinking of commercial advertising markets, leading to the undermining of the media industry's independence. **Namibia's** smaller minority language and community outlets are often excluded from donor pipelines that favor larger digital players. In Liberia, community radio stations remain donor-dependent, and with donor fatigue, many struggle to cover basic operations like electricity and salaries.

Primary needs

- **Long-term, flexible, core funding** to reduce reliance on project cycles.
- **Diversification strategies for outlets:** subscriptions, syndication, events, and service offerings.
- **Targeted funding for underserved media**, especially community, nonprofit, and minority-language outlets.

Recommendations

1. **Create regional media viability funds** accessible to small and mid-size outlets.
2. **Support training for media managers** on business innovation and financial planning.
3. **Stimulate hybrid funding models (earned revenue + donor support).**
4. **Protect and prioritize funding** for community and nonprofit media as democratic infrastructure.

PRINCIPLE 3

Take a whole of system perspective on supporting the media and information environment

Partially fulfilled

Fragmented interventions and limited coordination hinder the development of systemic, long-term media solutions and continue to hinder systemic and sustained interventions in media development.

This principle is only partially fulfilled. While **22.3 percent** of respondents agree that up-to-date data and analysis of the media environment exist and **29.4 percent** believe media development adopts a long-term approach, many responded neutrally to this statement (29–39 percent) or disagreed (41–44 percent) showing that systemic and sustained interventions are still limited.

General overview

A whole of system perspective emphasizes that media development should move beyond isolated projects to strengthen the broader ecosystem of journalism, policy, and civil society. The survey data, however, points to fragmentation. Fewer than a quarter (**22.3 percent**) of respondents agree that reliable contextual data exists for their operating environments, while **38.9 percent** are neutral and **38.9 percent** disagree. This indicates that organizations often work without a strong evidence base. The qualitative research corroborates this finding as intimated by an interviewee in Nigeria:

> ***In many cases, donors come with pre-set projects, leaving little room to adapt to our local media landscape realities.***

Survey respondents further shared that donor funding cycles reinforce short-termism as almost half (**47.1 percent**) of project funding is for less than a year. Only **11.8 percent** of participants said that their funding extended beyond three years. This undercuts long-term capacity building and institutional resilience.

While many media development organizations support digital (88.9 percent) and broadcast (**83.3 percent**) media, fewer fund minority-language outlets (**38.9 percent**) or nonprofit/community-based organizations (**38.9 percent**), leaving critical ecosystem actors under-resourced. Examples across the Anglophone Africa illustrate this imbalance. In **Kenya**, media development programs often focus on national-level media outlets in Nairobi, sidelining minority language and community radios that are the primary information source for rural populations. This was emphasized by a Kenyan interviewee:

> ***Support often ends up concentrated in capitals, while rural or community-based outlets remain invisible.***

In **Uganda**, election-related media support initiatives are rarely integrated into broader democratic reforms, resulting in one-off trainings rather than systemic changes that support the media ecosystem. In **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**, donor responses to media development remain project-based rather than structure-based, in an environment where the political capture of state advertising squeezes independent outlets into oblivion.

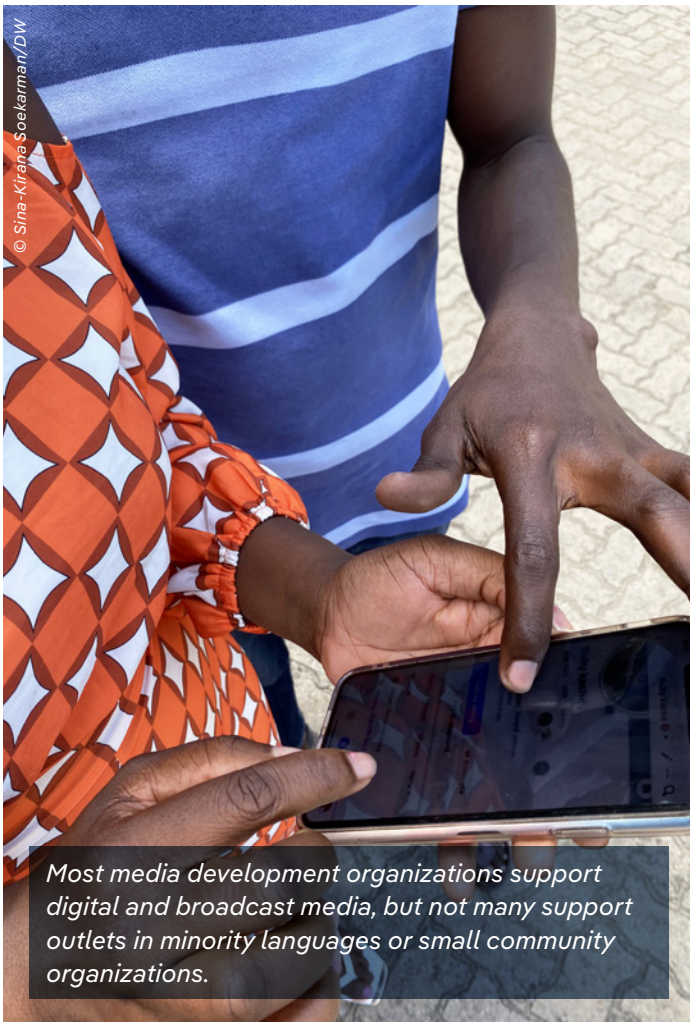
There are, however, positive cases in the region. In **Namibia**, donor funding has supported media literacy programs that have been integrated into education curricula through partnerships between government and NGOs. In **Liberia**, community radios have collaborated with civic groups to strengthen local governance, and shows how multi-sectoral partnerships can reinforce democracy. The survey data of this report demonstrates that many organizations contribute to enabling environments through media literacy (**83.3 percent**), research (**77.8 percent**), and safety measures (**55.6 percent**) in their media development programs. The data, however, established that fewer organizations engage with advocacy coalitions (**44.4 percent**) or representative bodies (**38.9 percent**). Furthermore, inclusion in national multi-stakeholder fora is limited, with only 33.3 percent feeling meaningfully involved.

Primary needs

- **Long-term, system-oriented programming** rather than one-off projects.
- **Expanded support to underserved actors:** community, minority-language, nonprofit, and investigative media.
- **Stronger inclusion of media actors** in national multi-stakeholder policy dialogues will help inculcate the whole of system perspective in media development initiatives.

Recommendations

1. **Commit to sustained funding:** Donors should provide 3–5-year funding commitments that prioritize structural change that supports media development.
2. **Support ecosystem mapping** and regular data collection to inform donor funded media development interventions.
3. **Ensure that support includes diverse actors** ranging from nvestigative journalists to community broadcasters and media NGOs in media development initiatives.
4. **Integrate multi-stakeholder coordination in media related donor-funded program**s to ensure the alignment between media, civil society, and governance reforms.



Most media development organizations support digital and broadcast media, but not many support outlets in minority languages or small community organizations.

PRINCIPLE 4

Strengthen local leadership and ownership

Minimally fulfilled

Local actors remain implementers rather than decision-makers, limiting true ownership of media development efforts.

This principle is minimally fulfilled. While 72.2 percent of respondents agree their organizations focus strongly on marginalized groups, participation in project design, budgeting, and evaluation remains limited, showing that local actors are often implementers rather than agenda-setters.

General overview

Strengthening local ownership and leadership requires shifting power from donors and international partners to African media organizations, ensuring they lead in diagnosis, design, and implementation. Yet survey results show uneven progress towards this approach, with survey data indicating that while participation is strong in implementation (**81.8 percent**), fewer organizations are meaningfully involved in diagnostics (**63.6 percent**), project design (**54.5 percent**), and budgeting (**54.5 percent**) activities. Further, involvement of local players in evaluation and monitoring drops to just **36.4 percent**. These findings are corroborated by what a participant in Namibia shared:

> ***We are fully involved in implementation but rarely in budget design or evaluation.***

Qualitative evidence confirms this imbalance. In **Uganda**, a respondent noted that donor-driven media projects often bypass local expertise:

> ***Donors tend to treat us as delivery partners rather than as thought leaders in our own context.***

Alternative models of local leadership have emerged in media development. In **Kenya**, independent hubs illustrate what locally-driven leadership can look like, independently convening journalists, technologists, and creatives as paid members of their media labs. Through various revenue streams, they are also able to set their own priorities while generating **70 percent of their revenue internally**, which reduces their need to carry out donor funding.

Elsewhere, **Liberia's** community radios play a leading role in shaping civic debate at the grassroots, despite being excluded from national media development project design discussions. In **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**, politically sensitive environments mean local actors often have limited say in donor media development agendas and priorities designed for their countries. **Namibia**, on the other hand, exhibits a more positive example where NGOs collaborate with government institutions in integrating media literacy programs in their schooling agenda.

Respondents stressed that when local actors lack ownership, projects often fail to address country specific contextual needs, or that media entities relying on media development support collapse after donor exit. Respondents emphasized that participatory approaches such as joint planning and co-created diagnostics of the Anglophone Africa's media ecosystem will yield more sustainable results in development initiatives.

Primary needs

- **Broader involvement of local actors** in all stages of the project cycle, especially evaluation;

- **Recognition and encouragement** of the input of local expertise on par with donor priorities in developing media development initiatives.

- **Greater investment in independent, locally-led media hubs** and associations would support a robust media ecosystem in these countries.

Recommendations

1. **Adopt co-design and co-evaluation processes** with local partners in the media development sector.

2. **Fund locally-owned hubs** like Baraza in Kenya and adapt these models for Uganda, Tanzania, and elsewhere.

3. Increase donor support for **community media associations. They drive public discourse** in Liberia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe which is critical in enhancing their role in national decision-making.

4. Gear donor support towards providing leadership training and institutional support to build confidence and bargaining power among local actors in negotiations with donors.

PRINCIPLE 5

Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment

Minimally fulfilled

Weak coordination and heavy bureaucracy slow progress; streamlined collaboration improves efficiency and crisis response

This principle is minimally fulfilled. Only **23.5 percent** of respondents agree that donors and media organizations coordinate swiftly in crises, while **52.9 percent** disagree. Although **58.8 percent** find donor budget management efficient, many highlights administrative burdens and uneven involvement in coordination.

General overview

Effective coordination of donor support is crucial for avoiding duplication, filling gaps, and ensuring timely crisis responses within the media sector. The survey results revealed serious shortcomings as fewer than a quarter of the respondents at **23.5 percent** agreed that there was effective and swift coordination in times of crisis in the media sector. The results further indicate that administrative requirements remain a burden for **29.4 percent** of organizations, and only about half (**50 percent**) felt that donors take their responsibilities toward local partners seriously; in Kenya, small media development outlets complained of being of being "drowned in paperwork" to meet donor reporting standards, leaving little time for editorial or business innovation as stated by an interviewee in Kenya:

Organizations meaningfully involved in sector co-ordination

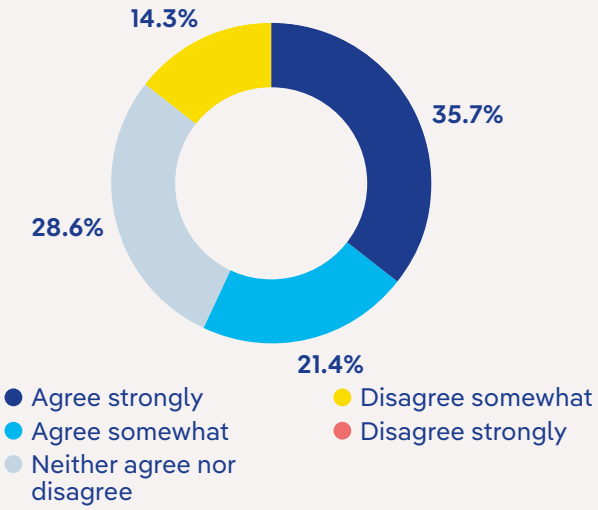


Figure 2: *Organizations meaningfully involved in sector co-ordination*

> ***Reporting requirements are so heavy that we spend more time on paperwork than on actual journalism.***

Qualitative findings illustrate these weaknesses. In **Uganda**, several organizations reported that during the 2021 elections, multiple donors funded parallel media monitoring projects on elections, creating duplication instead of synergy towards this effort As a Ugandan interviewee shared:

> ***During elections, three different donors funded monitoring projects without talking to each other — duplication wasted time and resources.***

In **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe**, lack of coordination has meant that while some independent outlets receive overlapping donor support, others in rural or marginalized communities are overlooked. In **Liberia**, community radios noted in coordination meetings, usually dominated by larger international NGOs, they are rarely consulted about their opinions regarding media development efforts. Conversely, in **Namibia**, coordinated approaches by some donor consortia successfully pooled resources to support national media literacy campaigns in the country.

The data also suggests uneven involvement in coordination: there are no inclusive processes to support the contribution of local media related activities. This then risks reinforcing imbalances and sidelining smaller or rural-based actors in donor supported efforts.

Primary needs

- **Faster and more coordinated responses from donors and local media actors** during crises.
- **Simplified and harmonized administrative processes** to help reduce the administrative burden for grantees when reporting on how the funding was used.
- **Inclusion of small and community-based outlets** in coordination mechanisms in media development efforts.

Recommendations

1. Establish **joint donor platforms** in each sub-region to align funding priorities and exchange insights.
2. **Adopt rapid-response crisis funds** to be deployed quickly when media freedom is threatend.
3. **Develop standardized reporting templates and requirements** across donors to reduce duplication and administrative burden on grantee organizations.
4. **Ensure inclusive coordination processes** that give equal voice to community media, women-led organizations, and rural outlets.

PRINCIPLE 6

Invest in knowledge, research and learning

Partially fulfilled

Insufficient investment in research limits innovation; sustained learning and knowledge-sharing drive accountability and smarter media development.

This principle is only partially fulfilled. While **47.1 percent** of respondents agree best practices are available, just **29.4 percent** report receiving donor funding for research. The average budget allocation for research and learning is only **22.6 percent** (median 20 percent) among the surveyed media development organizations.

General overview

Strong research and knowledge-sharing are the backbone of evidence-based media development, yet both remain underfunded and under-prioritized. Survey data shows that 47.1 percent of respondents feel best practices are sufficiently accessible. When it comes to funding for research, only **29.4 percent** agree they receive support, while **35.2 percent** disagree and **35.3 percent** remain neutral. Although **41.2 percent** of organizations have mechanisms to share lessons, more than half either lack such systems or are unsure about these mechanisms.

Qualitative findings confirm that many African media organizations rely on outdated or donor-driven research that does not always reflect local realities. For example, in **Uganda** and **Zimbabwe**, respondents described donor-funded research projects that produced reports in English only, which render them inaccessible to community radios or local language outlets. An interviewee in Tanzania pointed out:

> ***Most findings are in English and inaccessible to local language outlets and community journalists.***

In Kenya, a participant noted that research findings are not often disseminated to the wider media sector.

> ***Research outputs often sit on shelves in donor offices, never reaching the media houses that need them***

Still, there are examples of innovation in the regional media sector: **Namibia** has integrated media literacy research into education programming, supported by local NGOs;

Liberia has seen partnerships between community radios and civic groups help in tracking governance and share lessons on the same across counties; and in **Tanzania**, collaborations between universities and media NGOs have generated useful data on media viability. However, these efforts remain scattered and lack regional coordination, and are compounded by a limited South–South knowledge exchange.

Respondents highlighted that best practices from West Africa are rarely shared with peers in Southern Africa, and vice versa. This fragmentation prevents the emergence of an African-wide evidence base that could more effectively guide policy and donor support in the media sector.

Primary needs

- **Dedicated funding** for research, knowledge sharing, and South–South exchanges;

- **Ensured accessibility** and dissemination of media sector related research findings in local languages shared in practical formats;

- **Stronger institutional mechanisms** to embed research into policy and programming in the media development agenda.

Recommendations

1. **Adapt approach where donors allocate a minimum share of budgets** (e.g., 10–15 percent) to research, learning, and dissemination.

2. **Establish regional knowledge hubs** in East, West, and Southern Africa to facilitate cross-border exchange of evidence-based knowledge;

3. **Support partnerships between universities, think tanks, and media organizations** in the co-production of actionable research.

4. **Share translated and simplified research outcomes** that can be used by community media and policymakers alike.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings show that while some progress has been made in safety measures, localized innovation, and research initiatives, African media development remains constrained by weak financial sustainability, fragmented donor support, limited local ownership, and underinvestment in systemic approaches. The research for this report is limited by its reliance on survey and qualitative data, which may not capture the full breadth of country-specific contexts or the rapidly evolving media environment. Looking ahead, the future of media development in the region will depend on building long-term funding models, expanding inclusive leadership, and creating context-sensitive frameworks that integrate safety, sustainability, and research into a coherent ecosystem for growth.



The future of media development in Anglophone Africa depends on long-term funding models, inclusive leadership, and context-sensitive frameworks.

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