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Report • Regional Edition

The State of *Media Development*

Francophone Africa

DW Freedom • *The Media Development Think Tank*

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Introduction

Since the OECD recognized media development as a key component of international development cooperation, DW Akademie has taken the opportunity to assess whether this approach is in fact being applied. Following comprehensive research conducted in early 2025, DW Akademie presented its findings at Italy's Perugia International Journalism Festival in April 2025, offering a snapshot of the current state of media development and outlining existing monitoring mechanisms and policy tools to guide future support.

The State of Media Development report provides an overall sector assessment, helping both media organizations and donors to identify where and how their engagement is most needed. It serves as a valuable tool to understand how efforts align with the OECD's six principles for effective media development, and where strategic adjustments may be required.

This follow-up report offers a regional perspective on **Francophone Africa**, drawing on interviews and a survey with media developers and experts from Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Rwanda and Senegal. Structured around the OECD's six principles, the report begins by assessing the current African media landscape, highlighting persistent challenges such as restricted press freedom, limited financial sustainability, political interference, and digital transformation gaps. It then provides targeted recommendations to help both media organizations and donor communities strengthen the sector, foster resilience, and ensure that the media remains a cornerstone of democracy, accountability, and inclusive development in Africa.



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The Francophone African media environment is diverse and dynamic, reflecting the continent's vast cultural, political and socio-economic diversity

Overview

Africa's media environment is diverse and dynamic, reflecting the continent's vast cultural, political, and socio-economic diversity. While many countries have made significant strides in expanding press freedom, fostering pluralism, and embracing digital innovation, the sector continues to face deep structural challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability and independence.

1. Political and legal environment

Press freedom conditions vary widely across Africa, ranging from relatively open environments in countries such as South Africa, Namibia, and Ghana, to highly restrictive contexts in Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan. In several countries, restrictive media laws, vague anti-cybercrime provisions, and emergency regulations have been used to limit journalistic freedoms. Political interference in state-owned media remains common, with editorial independence often compromised during election periods. Regulatory bodies exist in many countries but often lack true independence, reducing their effectiveness in safeguarding pluralism and fair access to information.

2. Economic and financial sustainability

African media outlets operate under fragile economic conditions, with low advertising revenues, shrinking donor funding, and limited audience willingness to pay for content. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated financial decline, forcing many outlets to cut staff or close. In rural areas, community radio remains a lifeline but often relies on donor support or volunteer labor. While some digital-native platforms are experimenting with subscription models and diversified income streams, monetization remains a challenge due to small advertising markets, the dominance of global tech platforms, and limited access to investment capital.

3. Technological transformation

Mobile penetration and Internet connectivity have grown rapidly, enabling digital media innovation, especially on social media platforms. However, the digital divide remains significant, with rural communities and marginalized groups often excluded from online news access due to poor infrastructure, high data costs, and low digital literacy. The spread of misinformation and disinformation—especially during elections—has emerged as a major threat to trust in journalism, prompting some countries to introduce controversial online regulation measures.

4. Safety and security of journalists

Journalists in Africa face physical threats, legal harassment, and online abuse. In conflict zones such as parts of the Sahel, Somalia, and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, reporting is extremely dangerous, with cases of killings, kidnappings, and intimidation. Female journalists are disproportionately targeted with gender-based violence, particularly online. While some countries have developed safety mechanisms or journalist protection laws, implementation remains weak.

5. Professional standards and capacity

Africa has a vibrant pool of talented journalists, but professional training opportunities are unevenly distributed. Urban-based media professionals have greater access to training and technology, while rural and community-based journalists often lack resources and opportunities for skills upgrading. Investigative journalism initiatives have gained traction in some countries, uncovering major corruption scandals, but these efforts are often donor-dependent and face sustainability challenges.

6. Audience engagement and trust

Audiences across Africa consume news through a mix of traditional media—especially radio—and online platforms. Trust in the media varies widely, with state-owned broadcasters enjoying significant reach but often being perceived as politically biased. Independent outlets, while trusted for their editorial integrity, often lack the resources to maintain nationwide coverage. Citizen journalism and social media activism have empowered new voices, but they have also contributed to the spread of unverified information.

Overall, the African media landscape stands at a crossroads: Technological opportunities and growing youth engagement present unprecedented potential for innovation and pluralism, yet political pressure, economic fragility, and safety concerns continue to undermine the sector's ability to function as a robust pillar of democracy and development. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action from governments, media organizations, civil society, and international donors, guided by the OECD's six principles for effective media development.

Methodology

The methodology applied here follows the overall framework of DW Akademie's State of Media Development study, designed to ensure comparability across regions while capturing the specific dynamics of media landscapes in French-speaking African countries. The data collection period ran from December 2024 to February 2025, using a mixed-method approach that combined quantitative data collection, qualitative expert insights, and contextual desk research to provide a nuanced and evidence-based assessment of media development in Africa.

The study is structured around the OECD's six principles for effective media development, serving as both a guiding framework and an analytical tool. This approach allowed for a systematic assessment of the extent to which each principle is fulfilled in the African context and enabled cross-comparison with other regions.

Despite these constraints, the triangulation of multiple data sources and the combination of quantitative and qualitative inputs provide a robust, credible, and context-sensitive assessment of media development in Africa.

PRINCIPLE 1

Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media

Partially fulfilled

Approximately half of the requirements under the principle have not been fulfilled.

General overview

Although most media organizations report no direct harm from international partners, significant oversights in security planning, risk mitigation, and institutional support remain unaddressed. Many partners fail to anticipate and mitigate risks faced by media actors in fragile or repressive contexts. The lack of institutional support, operational security mechanisms, and responsive crisis management compromises safety and viability. These gaps, especially in high-risk contexts such as the Sahel, indicate that the principle is only partially fulfilled in practice.

Quantitative data on risk mitigation strategies further reflects these concerns. When asked about the effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies, only 25 percent of respondents strongly agreed that such strategies are in place, while 25 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. Alarmingly, 50 percent of respondents expressed a degree of disagreement: 12.5 percent disagreed somewhat and 37.5 percent disagreed strongly. These figures underscore the perception that existing mechanisms to protect media institutions from political or operational harm remain insufficient, particularly during crisis situations.

The lack of institutional support, operational security mechanisms, and responsive crisis management compromises safety and viability.



Figure 1: Organizations with effective risk mitigation strategies

Positive examples

- **No harmful collaboration** was reported by some organizations (e.g., Central African Republic (CAR), Madagascar), emphasizing clear mandates, professionalism, and strong relations with funders.
- **Positive collaboration** with partners like UNDP and EU was noted in Congo (Brazzaville) and CAR, particularly in journalist training and logistical support.
- **Respect for editorial independence** and local journalistic values was noted as a strength (Senegal, Madagascar).
- **Co-developing security protocols with partners** was reported by some organizations (Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar).
- **Joint training initiatives on physical safety** involving journalists and security forces were mentioned as effective (Sahel region).

Challenges

- **Failure to anticipate security risks:** An expert on the Sahel region highlighted that some partners expose media organizations by publicizing support in politically sensitive contexts: "There are partners who … come to your organizations with the country's authorities to talk to them about it. This is dangerous."
- **Lack of emergency response:** An interviewee in Senegal cited partners' inaction in cases of journalist endangerment, such as during a coup in Burkina Faso: "Our partners did nothing to exfiltrate them."
- **Imposed agendas:** An expert from Rwanda reported external funders pressuring journalists to cover pre-selected topics, undermining editorial independence: "They wanted to impose the information journalists need to go and collect … and what they have to say."
- **Insufficient institutional and legal protection:** A media support organization in Burundi lamented the lack of legal aid for journalists in prison: "No partner helps us provide them with legal assistance."
- **Funding inflexibility and disconnection from local realities:** An interviewee from Chad mentioned delays and pre-financing burdens due to rigid donor procedures: "You can't carry out work … when deadlines approach, and you don't have a means of pre-financing."
- **Neglect of institutional resilience:** In Côte d'Ivoire, the lack of support for core funding and staff protection undermines media sustainability and safety.
- **Minimal digital security and viability measures** across the board, especially in fragile states.

Recommendations

1. **Develop security protocols and response mechanisms:** Establish funded emergency protocols for at-risk journalists (legal, physical, digital); include exfiltration support and rapid legal aid in project agreements.
2. **Ensure joint risk analysis and local ownership:** Conduct co-designed risk assessments with local partners before project launch; avoid public announcements of support in sensitive political contexts.

3. **Strengthen institutional capacity and autonomy:** Allocate funding for core institutional support (not just project-based funding); support training in physical/digital security and skills transfer for local resilience.

4. **Respect journalistic independence:** Avoid imposing content or editorial lines; uphold cultural and contextual alignment of projects.

5. **Adapt funding mechanisms to local realities:** Offer flexible financing models allowing pre-financing or advance disbursement; prioritize long-term engagement over short project cycles.

6. **Systematize risk assessments** before, during, and after project implementation, especially in fragile or repressive contexts.

7. **Create emergency response protocols** with local media partners, including rapid legal aid, relocation options, and psychological support.

8. **Invest in organizational resilience**, including core funding for staffing, safety measures, and sustainability strategies (e.g., pension systems, institutional insurance).

9. **Support capacity building in digital, legal, and physical security,** particularly in conflict-prone zones like the Sahel.

10. **Adopt a "do no harm" checklist** as part of all partnership agreements, tailored to local realities.



While funding exists, it is often unstable and inflexible, limiting sustainability and hindering capacity development

PRINCIPLE 2

Increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment

Partially fulfilled

Approximately half of the requirements under the principle have not been fulfilled.

General overview

While external funding has supported many media organizations' operations and specific projects, donor funding remains mostly short-term, project-based, and rarely covers core operational costs or institutional needs. Many interviewees from Francophone regions in Africa pointed out that even when funding exists, it is unstable, inflexible, and does not allow sustainability or capacity development. The lack of institutional support was cited as a critical gap.

"Our partners give us operational funds but do not support us with institutional support. ... After the project they finance, you will have difficulty continuing to work because you do not have staff." — Representative of media development organization, Senegal

Rigid donor funding arrangements further exacerbate the problem. Most external funds are earmarked for specific activities, leaving no flexibility to address emerging priorities. One respondent stressed, "There is no flexibility... funds have to be used only for these activities."

Positive examples

- **Diverse funding** has been received by some organizations and comes from multiple international donors (NED, IMS, OSF etc.).
- **Multi-sectoral partnerships:** A media development organization in Rwanda has developed these partnerships, linking journalism to thematic areas like education, health, and agriculture.

Increased public subsidy to private press: In 2022, Chad's media regulatory body saw a 50 percent increase in the public subsidy to private press; this doubled in 2023.

Challenges

- **Insufficient institutional/core funding:** A majority of interviewees (e.g., from Senegal, Burundi, Madagascar, Côte d'Ivoire) denounced the lack of support for salaries, administrative structures, or long-term viability.
- **Project-based dependency:** Funding is mostly earmarked for specific activities with no flexibility for core or sustainability needs (Rwanda, CAR, Chad).
- **Exclusion of local capacities:** Some partners prefer to implement training or projects themselves, not trusting local organizations to lead. ("Partners should not doubt our abilities." —Representative of media development organization, Côte d'Ivoire)
- **Neglected community and local media:** Community radio and rural media are often excluded from support targeting capital-based outlets. ("They often forget community radios." — Media development expert, Sahel.
- **Political instability impacts funding:** Countries like Burundi, CAR, and the Sahel region have experienced a dramatic withdrawal of international partners due to political crises, coups, or global crises.
- **Lack of tailored training:** Donors often dictate training content without a proper needs assessment or alignment with local realities (e.g., Chad and Congo).

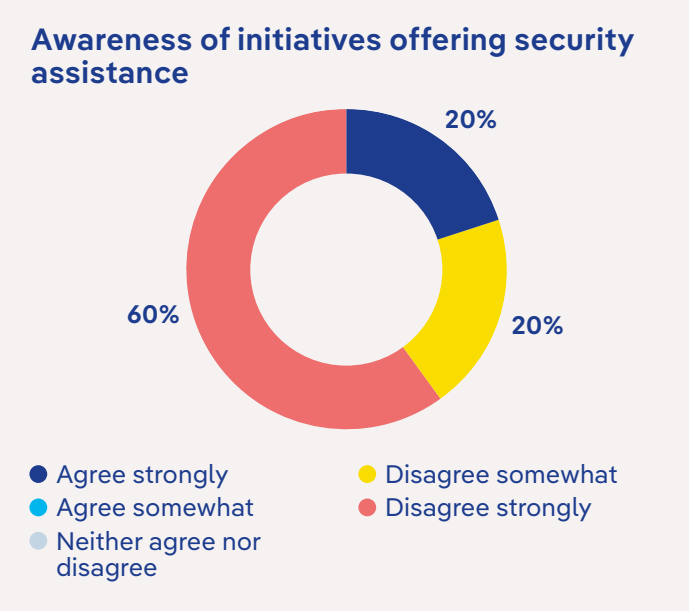


Figure 2: Awareness of initiatives offering security assistance

Quantitative findings about the awareness of security assistance reveal additional weaknesses: 60 percent of respondents strongly disagree, and 20 percent somewhat disagree, that they are aware of any security assistance mechanisms for media, while only 20 percent somewhat agree. This significant lack of awareness illustrates the gap in communication and resource provision for media protection, a critical aspect of sector support.

Recommendations

1. **Donors should allocate at least 30–50 percent of support to institutional funding:** Divide financial packages between project-based activities and operational/core funding (staff salaries, rent, Internet, administration); encourage multi-year agreements rather than one-off project grants.
2. **Increase support for community and local media, especially in fragile regions:** Set up dedicated funds for community radios and rural media; develop mapping tools to ensure equitable distribution of funds outside capital cities.
3. **Enable local ownership and leadership in capacity-building programs:** Donors should trust local institutions to lead training ("Give us the freedom to train ourselves" — Representative of media development organization, Côte d'Ivoire); co-design training programs with local organizations and media practitioners.
4. **Create flexible funding mechanisms:** Allow a portion of programmatic funds to be repurposed for emerging needs or institutional strengthening when justified.
5. **Support sustainability through innovation:** Encourage diversification of income sources through support for media entrepreneurship, digital transition, and new business models.
6. **Advocate for increased public support and reforms in media policy:** Push governments to restructure media subsidies, ensure transparency, and promote independent governance of public media funds.



PRINCIPLE 3

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

Partially fulfilled

Approximately half of the requirements under the principle have not been fulfilled.

General overview

Despite a few isolated efforts, most international partners do not carry out complete or collaborative analyses of the media landscape before intervening. Analyses are often unilaterally produced by beneficiaries, without review or dialogue. Many emerging actors (influencers, podcasters, independent journalists) are overlooked. The lack of coherent strategies or up-to-date data prevents the development of a true systemic understanding of the sector.

Analyses are often unilaterally produced by beneficiaries, without review or dialogue. Few academic or institutional studies exist on the media landscape (e.g., Senegal, Sahel)

Positive examples

- **Media landscape analysis** by some projects (e.g., Madagascar).
- **Locally adapted methodologies** have been developed, for example in Burkina Faso.
- **Active contribution** by some local organizations to contextual analysis during project design.

Challenges

- **Analyses are carried out in isolation by local NGOs,** without external support or validation.
- **Little or no joint analysis** between international partners and local stakeholders.
- **Few academic or institutional studies** exist on the media landscape (e.g., Senegal, Sahel).

- **Many actors are left out**, including influencers, freelance journalists, technicians, photojournalists, correspondents.

- **Partners focus primarily on traditional media**, especially in regions where new formats are still emerging (e.g., Sahel).

- No comprehensive sectoral strategies **or tools exist to** co-develop approaches with local stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. **Co-design diagnostics** with local organizations from the project design stage.

2. **Create national or regional media observatories** in partnership with universities and research institutes.

3. **Expand support to new formats and emerging actors** in the media landscape (e.g., digital storytelling, podcasts, social media).

4. **Set up permanent consultation frameworks** between international partners and local organizations to ensure a shared understanding of sector challenges.

5. **Fund independent contextual studies** before allocating funds, with mandatory local participation.

6. **Develop shared and regular analyses** of the local media landscape with all relevant stakeholders.

PRINCIPLE 4

Strengthen local leadership and ownership

Partially fulfilled

Approximately half of the requirements under the principle have not been fulfilled.

General overview

Although some donors support local leadership and capacity-building, many media development initiatives still lack genuine local ownership. Local organizations are often relegated to co-applicant or implementing roles, and the expertise of local professionals is undervalued. There is limited trust in local capacities, and parachuting of Global North experts remains widespread.

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Positive examples

- **Active encouragement of independence and capacity-building** by some donors (e.g., Fondation Hirondelle, EU)
- **Consortium approach** promotes collaboration and strengthens local leadership.
- **Local organizations increasingly applying as lead applicants,** especially when well-structured.

Challenges

- **Few examples of local ownership prioritized** for independent or public-interest media (Senegal).
- **Parachuting in of Global North experts** remains common and often perceived as undermining local expertise (Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal).

- **Local actors often involved only after project design** and rarely shape the strategic direction.

- **Commercial or politically aligned media** tend to dominate funding spaces, leaving out genuine independent voices (Senegal).

- **Leadership remains** conditional and dependent on donor trust or maturity of local organization, even when funding is received.

Recommendations

1. **Mandate local co-leadership** in all donor-funded media development projects.

2. **Invest in local trainer training programs** to build autonomous expertise pipelines.

3. **Discourage the automatic parachuting in of foreign** experts; instead, require capacity transfer and mentorship components.

4. **Support institutional development** of local media organizations to strengthen their ability to manage funds and lead initiatives.

5. **Facilitate joint project design workshops** with local and international actors to ensure shared vision and ownership.

6. **Empower local actors** to take lead roles in project design, implementation, and evaluarion.

PRINCIPLE 5

Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment

Partially fulfilled

Approximately half of the requirements under the principle have not been fulfilled.

General overview

The coordination of donor support remains inconsistent across the region. In some countries, administrative burdens are minimal, but in others, particularly where organizations handle multiple donors with differing requirements, the lack of harmonization creates inefficiencies, an increased workload, and resource strain.

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Positive examples

- **Administrative requirements are not excessive** and are manageable in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burundi, several respondents noted.
- **Strong coordination among media actors** during the COVID-19 crisis was observed in many countries (e.g., Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar), and demonstrated strong coordination, forming synergies and ensuring timely, verified information for the public.

Challenges

- **Donor procedures vary widely,** especially between systems like the UN and EU, leading to duplicated processes and frequent audits (Madagascar).
- **Small organizations with limited staff** are disproportionately affected by the complexity and volume of paperwork.

- **A lack of long-term, harmonized funding** increases administrative load and affects project sustainability.

- **External crises** in Burundi (e.g., 2015 political crisis) severely disrupted donor coordination, leading to a complete halt in media funding.

Recommendations

1. **Establish pooled funding mechanisms** with shared reporting/audit standards among donors to minimize burden.

2. **Promote co-funding agreements** where one donor manages compliance for others.

3. **Invest in training and support staff** for local media and civil society organizations to manage complex administrative tasks.

4. **Develop crisis-response protocols** among media stakeholders to enhance coordination during emergencies, based on successful models seen during COVID-19.



Local expertise is often undervalued, which is why investing in training programs for local trainers is essential to building sustainable, independent expertise pipelines

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PRINCIPLE 6

Invest in knowledge, research and learning

Partially fulfilled

Approximately half of the requirements under the principle have not been fulfilled.

General overview

The region shows emerging awareness of the importance of research and learning but faces significant challenges in institutionalizing these practices. Organizations often rely on project-end evaluations rather than ongoing research. Digital tools and partnerships help stay updated, but there is limited formal, continuous knowledge generation and application. Financial and technological constraints, along with a lack of dedicated research capacity, hinder deeper investment.

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Positive examples

- **Project evaluations at completion are routine**, allowing adjustment of staff roles, contracts, and activities (Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire).
- **Use of digital communication**, social networks, and listening clubs to gather audience feedback and stay updated (Madagascar).
- **Partnerships with research institutions** or specialized agencies (e.g., Fondation Hirondelle and University of Michigan in Madagascar) to conduct impact and audience studies.
- **Collaboration with academic and research institutions** (e.g., Madagascar; University of Michigan, market research agencies) for impact and audience studies.
- **Organization of major press conferences and seminars** that serve as platforms for collective research, reflection, and strategy development (e.g., media development institution in Congo).

- **Media monitoring and research** to inform training and regulation efforts, integrating AI tools to enhance capacity (e.g., media development institution in Chad).

- **Digital communication platforms** (social networks, forums) help organizations stay connected and informed about media development trends.

Challenges

- **A lack of financial resources and institutional support** for sustained research activities; many organizations report that evaluations are mostly project-based or ad hoc.

- **Media organizations often lack dedicated units** or staff specialized in research and learning, leading to a reliance on external partners or informal data gathering.

- **Rapid technological changes** require continuous capacity building, but many organizations struggle to keep pace.

- **A need for pedagogical and ethical** research, emphasized by some interviewees, would strengthen journalism's professional standards but noted insufficient resources to realize this.

- **Fragile sustainability of media initiatives** due to unstable funding and poor material independence, impacting research investment.

- Most organizations do **not conduct regular, systematic research** to inform their strategy or programming.

- **Dependence on partners' platforms** for updated information limits autonomy and scope of learning.

- **Organizational learning is mostly limited to internal audits** every few years, with little proactive knowledge production.

> ***"Research helps us plan accordingly and identify gaps, but we need more media-sector specific studies.***

Recommendations

1. **Create dedicated research and learning departments** within media organizations, with clear mandates for regular data collection, audience studies, and impact assessment.

2. **Develop partnerships between media outlets and academic institution**s to foster applied research and create feedback loops for program improvement (e.g., as demonstrated by Madagascar's Studio Sifaka).

3. **Advocate for increased funding from international donors, governments, and private sector** to support media research initiatives as a vital element of democratic development.

4. **Invest in modern media monitoring infrastructure and technology**, including AI tools, to efficiently track media content and trends in real time.

5. **Promote continuous professional development programs** to build research and analytical skills among media practitioners, focusing on ethics, digital literacy, and innovation.

6. **Encourage knowledge sharing and networking platforms** at regional and continental levels to disseminate research findings, best practices, and emerging approaches.

7. **Prioritize sustainability by linking research outcomes to policymaking, media regulation, and funding mechanisms** to reinforce the impact and relevance of research.

8. **Develop and institutionalize research units or partnerships** within organizations to conduct ongoing studies.

9. **Allocate funding specifically** for audience research, impact evaluation, and media development learning.

Conclusion and key recommendations

The African media sector embodies both remarkable potential and persistent fragility. Across the continent, journalists and media organizations continue to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and commitment to public interest reporting, and often in environments marked by political interference, economic uncertainty, and personal risk. Technological change, particularly the rise of mobile and social media, is transforming how information is produced and consumed, offering unprecedented opportunities for wider reach, audience engagement, and civic participation.

However, these opportunities remain unevenly distributed. Structural barriers—ranging from restrictive laws and weak regulatory independence to the digital divide and financial precarity—limit the ability of media to operate freely, sustainably, and inclusively. Safety concerns, especially for journalists in conflict-affected areas and for women in the profession, further constrain the sector's capacity to fulfill its democratic role.

The findings of this report underscore that strengthening media ecosystems across French-speaking African countries will require coordinated and sustained efforts by governments, civil society, donors, and the media sector itself. Legal reforms, targeted investment in financial sustainability, inclusive digital transformation, journalist protection mechanisms, and enhanced professional capacity are all essential components of this effort.

With a growing youth population, expanding connectivity, and a rich tradition of storytelling, media in French-language regions of Africa holds the potential to be a driving force for transparency, accountability, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Realizing this potential depends on turning the OECD's six principles for effective media development into concrete, context-driven actions, ensuring that media across French-speaking African countries not only survives but thrives as a cornerstone of democratic societies.

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.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in 60 developing countries and emerging economies.

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