

Report

The State of *Media Development*

Global evidence on relevant and
effective media support

Supported by the



Imprint

Publisher

Deutsche Welle
53110 Bonn
Germany

Published

March 2025
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Responsible

Carsten von Nahmen

Authors

Ines Drefs
Rose Kimani
Dennis Reineck
Vera Freitag
Nick Benequista

Researchers

Jean Claude Bitsure
Ines Drefs
Giorgi Jangiani
Rose Kimani
Emy Osorio Matorel
Robi Koki Ochieng
Umesh Pokharel
Dennis Reineck
Jean-Pierre Uwimana
Samar Sabry

Editors

Laura Moore
Jan Lublinski
Alexander Matschke

Proofreading

Heidi Walsh

Layout

Jorge Loureiro

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Foreword

The last week of February 2025 saw an unprecedented online meeting on media development. Experts and managers from the media development sector had come together to bid farewell to one of the most important institutions in our sector: the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA). The organization had stopped its operations and closed its offices at extremely short notice due to an almost complete freeze on US funding for international development and cooperation.

Like CIMA, many media development and support organizations around the world were hit hard by the new US government's decision. This especially affected those in the Global South as well as the many media houses across the globe that these organizations had been, or still are, supporting.

Some participants were tearful, others just stunned by the rapid, almost surreal sequence of events. While the reason for the meeting was distressing, it also gave reason for hope: the global media development community not only comes together in moments of crisis, but the values that CIMA has always stood for will live on: an ongoing commitment, a collaborative and inclusive spirit, and robust professional standards.

Arguably, the most important standard established by the CIMA and the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) for our sector are the media development principles, in keeping with the Development Cooperation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment, guidelines developed by the Organization for Cooperation and Development (OECD).

As a historical success, the two organizations united the sector behind the OECD six principles. While these may initially seem obvious, they are not easy to fulfill when budgets are tight and a country's political and security situation is even tighter. More than ever, these principles should be the sector's basis and guardrail for future work, not only but especially in times of crisis.

These and other media development achievements have not become obsolete given the loss of US funding but are now more crucial for those of us who can still act.



At DW Akademie, we have for many years invested in research and advocacy work. We recently developed DW Freedom: The Media Development Think Tank that focuses on global trends and policy issues and complements our regional programs on the ground.

One of our main goals with DW Freedom is to conduct a regular assessment of both our own and our sector's work — i.e. to check where different stakeholders committed to media development stand regarding the OECD media development principles; how well the sector fulfills the principles in general; and what we as media developers are good at, and where weak spots are that need further improvement.

This study is the result of a global research effort. With the help of seven researchers from different world regions, we interviewed nearly 80 key experts from our sector and surveyed almost 80 media development organizations worldwide. The results were assembled in January 2025, giving us an idea of where the sector stood at the time, and providing an excellent point of reference for the future.

We have asked Nick Benequista, CIMA's Senior Director, to put these findings in the framework of the current crisis and to share his perspective in an introductory article. His pragmatic suggestions on what needs to be done in the near future offer important orientation and inspiration.

An element key to us in media development is Principle 5: local leadership and ownership. We have therefore made sure that our report reflects a strong geographical variety of perspectives.

My hope is that we will navigate through these difficult times together. We have, over the past decades, established expertise, contacts, principles, professionalism and collegiality in the media development sector. These will stay and help us to continue the work that has now become more important than ever.

Carsten von Nahmen
Managing Director, DW Akademie

A fragile media development consensus is broken. We can build it back stronger.



The fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 triggered the creation of media development as the sub-field of international cooperation, as we recognize it today. Since then, for more than 30 years, the US has always been the strongest proponent of this endeavor. What, then, happens to the media development sector without the US as its strongest advocate?

Media development survives by finding new champions: many smaller ones and even imperfect ones. These champions can be in governments and parliaments, in philanthropy, in private sector industries and commercial news outlets. The sector survives by building political agreements that can endure. For this, we will need to make the case for media development at both the regional and national levels, and be prepared to temper our principles with pragmatism.

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen first argued 43 years ago that a free press prevents famine. Since then, the case has been conclusively made that a vibrant and plural news media is fundamental to human progress.

With access to independent news, citizens are more politically active, including at the polls (Cagé & Rueda, 2016; Gentzkow et al., 2006). A perhaps obvious point, but one worth making in the current context, is that citizens with access to independent media are better informed and more resilient to manipulation (Snyder & Strömberg, 2010; Banerjee et al., 2023). Empirical evidence also confirms the connection between a free press, government responsiveness and lower corruption (Besley, 2002; Freille, 2007; Guseva et al., 2008).

Media freedom also provides a dividend to peace and security, both internationally and internally within nations. The evidence is clear that democratic countries which enjoy a plural and free press do not go to war against each other (Nord et al., 2024). Citizens who can settle their differences through debate and peaceful legal means are also less likely to take up arms against one another.

This evidence, and the growing sophistication of media support practices, have helped to elevate media development from a niche and slightly stigmatized sub-field of

international cooperation to a more respectable position on the international agenda. Fifty-one countries signed up to the Media Freedom Coalition; UNESCO declared journalism was a public good, like education and clean water (UNESCO, 2022); and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issued principles for media support re-asserting the essential role of news in development. The UN's new Global Digital Compact, a framework for global digital governance, has made a commitment to "promote diverse and resilient information ecosystems, including by strengthening independent and public media and supporting journalists and media workers."

By the end of 2024, a vision was taking shape for media development. At the top would be diplomatic pressure maintaining political commitment to media freedom. Government officials, media sector representatives, and civil society would work together to find locally-driven solutions to the challenges of media viability and public trust. International assistance would be catalytic in helping newsrooms to innovate, learn and adapt. Direct assistance would allow newsrooms in exile and on the frontlines to keep information flowing to some of the most information-deprived regions. The entire enterprise would be held together by the guiding principles that are the subject of this report, emphasizing commitments to doing no harm, local ownership, and editorial independence, among others.

In other words, we had begun to form a global consensus on the importance of independent media to global development. We had also begun to reinforce the structure to support it.

A US withdrawal from these issues will weaken the fragile consensus. The UN, which was already reevaluating its role in internet governance, could be tipped towards state-centric multilateralism from multistakeholderism in a win for governments wishing to have greater control over the digital public sphere (Komaitis, 2023). In the years to come, the OECD may become less bullish on media development and information integrity. And just practically, the diplomatic efforts to support press freedom will lose a tremendous capacity previously lent by the US State Department.

Part of the support structure will survive, but the loss of US support will severely reduce its scale. Prior to the funding freeze, the US, through USAID, the State Department and the National Endowment for Democracy, was annually spending 150–200 million US-Dollars, easily a third of all official development assistance to the media sector globally. Because the US has directed more of its support to closed autocracies than any other government funder, media outlets that operate fully or partly from exile and come from countries such as China, North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Russia, Belarus and Afghanistan, will be forced to downsize or shut down completely. International networks and initiatives that support learning, innovation, cooperation and coordination will also recede amidst the loss of funding.

What, then, is to be done?

A global consensus on media development may be lost for now, but we can rebuild it locally, nationally and regionally until we have a settlement so strong that it can't be broken again. The principles for effective media support remain an indispensable guide but need to be interpreted and operationalized.

Although the principles highlight the need for local ownership, we need to reexamine what that truly means as we build new allies and champions. In the past, we've appealed largely to lofty norms, but we need to speak more effectively to self-interest.

For instance, CIMA research has found that very few private sector actors give consideration to the democratic value of the media sector, but that they can be persuaded by the business case for media development (Dragomir, 2023). We also need better arguments and better incentives for reformers inside governments to make the case for media development strategies.

The growing friction in some countries and regions between small, fiercely independent news outlets and their larger, less independent media companies has also been an impediment to policy wins. While media companies captured by the state or malign actors may be beyond any reasonable appeal, others can lend their strength.

The donor principles acknowledge the need for more resources, though in retrospect the principles should have stipulated the importance of diversifying sources of support. We need new providers of official assistance to enter the field, and we need to stimulate greater philanthropic support, including from local sources.

The principles also highlight the need to direct resources to countries where “multiple concurrent crises (for example, political, economic, climate or conflict-related) risk creating information deserts.” Are the remaining resources from official development aid being directed where they are most needed?

Doing more with less will be essential. Efforts cannot be duplicated. Competition among implementers needs to be better driven by an ethos of demonstrating what works in different contexts. Even before this crisis, concerns were growing about the amount of international assistance reaching local actors on the frontlines. According to one OECD study, only 8 percent of international assistance is given directly to local organizations (Piron, 2023). This study finds that media development organizations are doing better than official donors by re-granting about 40 percent of their resources to local groups. Localizing assistance brings its own set of challenges, but it will be an important part of the response.

National and international journalism networks have proven to be a driver of innovation and a source of resilience. Here, we may need to shift from a paradigm of international assistance to one of true international cooperation by enlisting the aid of media stakeholders in the US and Europe as members and supporters of these networks.

Finally, we must be more pragmatic with our goals. The media development sector has long been driven by an idealism that is inspiring, but that can blind us to the fragility of our victories (Nelson, 2019). By seeking change that is incremental but resilient, we can rebuild a consensus that this time will endure.

Nick Benequista

Senior Director, Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA)

Executive summary

Key findings



OECD Principle 1 Do no harm to public interest media

- The media development sector is well-equipped when it comes to risk management: more than half of the surveyed organizations have effective risk mitigation strategies and over 40 percent have well-suited risk monitoring tools.
- However, room remains for improvement: a lack of awareness amongst international organizations of certain local risks is one specific issue. Another is the risk of donors jeopardizing the editorial independence of media outlets by pursuing an unduly political agenda. Media assistance must be cautious when it comes to navigating geopolitical interests.
- Interviewees also highlighted the risk of foreign funding being used to label recipient organizations as foreign agents. Another issue is brain drain to the detriment of media outlets if higher salaries are paid elsewhere, not least in the international development sphere.
- When it comes to discrimination, the results suggest that media development organizations have a strong focus on gender-sensitivity and diversity in projects and beyond. However, only 23 percent of organizations have project guidelines for disability mainstreaming.



OECD Principle 2 Increase financial and other forms of support

- This study underlines how worried media development organizations are about the persistently small share of overall official development assistance (ODA) invested in strengthening media systems and independent media. This is considered especially concerning in light of current democratic challenges and shrinking spaces for independent reporting worldwide.
- In wider development co-operation, media are still often seen as tools for strategic communication rather than as a key pillar for democratic development. Such views tend to hinder the media development sector's integration in other development fields. There is a need for awareness-raising and greater exchange with other development actors.
- 23 percent of international media development organizations' funding is allocated to core funding of public interest media. Acknowledgement of media as a public good and the associated need for core funding is considered key for effective support.



OECD Principle 3 Take a whole system perspective

- This principle demands a holistic and systemic approach to supporting public interest media. This study finds that the media development sector is quite well-positioned when it comes to underlying analyses of media and information environments.
- However, there is a mismatch between the assessments conducted and donor decision-making. Interviewees also criticized funding cycles of one year or less as unsustainable. The average funding cycle of the media development organizations surveyed was 22 months.
- A broad range of themes are supported by media development organizations across both traditional and newer media actors. There is nevertheless a need to consider further integration of newer actors into media development support.



OECD Principle 4 Strengthen local leadership and ownership

- This study finds that, according to international media development organizations' budget estimates, an average of 40 percent of their funding reaches local and regional actors directly.
- 75 percent of local and regional organizations agree that they are meaningfully involved in project implementation. However, only half feel that they are sufficiently involved in priority setting, hinting at room for improvement in this regard.
- International organizations in most cases still take the lead role in applications for ODA funding. In some regions, however, local and regional partners have built up sufficient expertise and experience to be lead applicants for ODA funding, and this is working well.
- The phenomenon of “parachuting in” external experts into partner countries rather than making use of local expertise is much less prevalent than it used to be but still exists. The results show that organizations focus on skills brought to the table rather than on the origin of the expert.



OECD Principle 5 Improve coordination of support

- Over 55 percent of respondents from all types of media development organizations agree that they are meaningfully involved in sector coordination. However, representatives from international media development organizations tend to see the degree of co-ordination in a more positive light than respondents from organizations based outside the Global North.
- Only 30 percent of local and regional organizations agree that there is swift coordination of support by international media development actors during times of crisis. This is linked to a seeming failure to learn from previous crises. Instead, local and regional organizations in various parts of the world are taking the lead in crisis response in their regions and actively collaborating to ramp up crisis preparedness.
- On a day-to-day basis, there is less collaboration than desired among donors, which can skew the market because particular segments are over- or underfunded. Media development organizations are doing a better job of coordinating with each other, even though this is sometimes hindered by competition or by the fact that some key decisions are made at donor level.
- As regards administrative requirements, 33 percent of all surveyed media development organizations think that donors or organizations they partner with offer efficient processes for managing funds. There is an urgent need to harmonize reporting requirements as well as to offer more flexibility in requirements depending on context.



OECD Principle 6 Invest in knowledge, research and learning

- This study finds that almost 60 percent of organizations have access to sector best practices and lessons learned, and precisely 50 percent have internal mechanisms to share their own lessons learned with others.
- However, there is also wide consensus in the sector that producing and sharing evidence is not a donor priority, with slightly more than 30 percent of organizations indicating that they have sufficient funding for these types of activities.
- There is considerable demand for annual reports from organizations such as Reporters Without Borders or Freedom House, but also for more actionable research on approaches that work. A mix between face-to-face conferences, newsletters and more in-depth webinar-type dives into specific topics emerged as the optimal way of keeping the sector informed.



OECD Principle 1

Do no harm to public interest media

71%

have gender mainstreaming guidelines.

56%

have risk mitigation strategies.

44%

have good risk monitoring tools.

"There should be a risk assessment conducted monthly or even every six months, especially in areas that suffer from ongoing conflict."

23%

have disability mainstreaming guidelines.



OECD Principle 2

Increase financial and other forms of support

45%

regionals/locals are aware of safety/security assistance programs.

39%

see media development well-integrated into governance programs.

"As long as media is the poor cousin in the governance world and comes lower than elections and corruption and the other sectors in governance, it will always be low priority."

19%

see media development well-integrated into general development efforts.

18%

report of sufficient funding.



OECD Principle 3

Take a whole system perspective

77%

support digital media.

54%

have average funding cycles exceeding one year.

41%

think media development takes long-term, sustainable approach.

30%

have up-to-date data for their context.

"I've read brilliant analyses of [media] landscapes, but don't think that this research is often put into practice or used or taken any notice of."



**OECD
Principle 4**

**Strengthen local leadership
and ownership**

79%

internationals involve local staff
in project management.

69%

regionals/locals play meaning-
ful role in project design.

*“At the core, the idea is: Nothing
about us without us. And we
need to make sure that the inter-
vention is most helpful for the
community we’re trying to serve.”*

40%

average funding channeled
directly to local/regional actors
by international organizations.

23%

average funding allocated to
core funding of media.



**OECD
Principle 5**

**Improve coordination
of support**

58%

regionals/locals feel involved in
sector coordination.

*“We don’t typically have direct
access to the donor, but the
international media development
organizations feel more comfort-
able giving us instructions rather
than requesting changes from
the donor. This is the problem.”*

34%

see efficient processes for
managing funds.

30%

see swift sector coordination
in crisis.



**OECD
Principle 6**

**Invest in knowledge,
research and learning**

58%

have access to sector best
practices and lessons learned.

50%

have mechanisms for sharing
lessons learned with others.

*“When we research a topic and
then share that information with
allies, [...] with organizations that
are working along the same lines,
it adds a lot of value to the work
that each of us is doing.”*

31%

report of sufficient funding
for research.

Introduction and overview

In 2016, organizations from around the globe gathered in Indonesia for the Jakarta World Forum for Media Development. Future Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa from Rappler was there, as were Justin Arenstein from Code for Africa and Leon Willems from Free Press Unlimited. As Chairperson of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Willems had successfully led the campaign for including access to information and the safety of journalists into the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The then director of GFMD, Ayman Mhanna, had set up a new election process for the GFMD steering committee in which a new generation of media development experts from all world regions took over, under the chairmanship of Ricardo Corredor from the Colombian Gabo Foundation (Lublinski, 2016).

A sector in the making – and in crisis

The Jakarta forum was the culmination of over a decade of sector cooperation, coordination and consolidation. Here, then, was a sector in the making. The GFMD, of course, had existed since 2005, so Jakarta may not be seen as the sector's birthplace, but there and then, participants could sense that something had grown together that was bigger than the sum of its parts.

Nine years later, the media development sector finds itself at a juncture. As addressed by DW Akademie's Managing Director Carsten von Nahmen in the Foreword, and by Nick Benequista, Senior Director of the dormant think tank Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), in his introductory article, the withdrawal of US funding is having dire consequences for media development worldwide.

Almost concurrently, the sector has achieved, under the leadership of CIMA and GFMD, an important milestone in that the OECD in 2024 published the Development Cooperation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support

to Media and the Information Environment (OECD, 2024). The multilateral recognition of the sector's support for freedom of expression, rule of law, good media education, viable media business models, capacities of journalists and media managers, as well as diversity of views in society, stands in stark contrast to a unilateral withdrawal of funds.

As a result, the sector is called upon to stand together and renew its pledge to fight for access to information, to foster free speech and to elevate voices that are not sufficiently heard.

The state of media development vis-à-vis the OECD principles

This report gathered evidence on how the sector is faring, and drew on the six principles for relevant and effective media support outlined by the OECD. How well is the media development sector fulfilling these principles? Where is it making important contributions? And what points are in need of further improvement?

It focuses on media development organizations rather than on donors or the media sector. These are also important stakeholders and are the focus of other reports.¹

The organizations in this report take on a bridge function between donor wants and practitioner needs. They include international organizations predominantly headquartered in Europe and North America, regional civil society organizations that operate in multiple Global Majority countries, and national or local organizations based in specific locations.

¹ For donors, please refer to GFMD's forthcoming donor survey, for the media sector, turn to UNESCO's forthcoming World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development report.

The State of Media Development Report is structured according to the OECD principles recognizing that the future of the sector hinges not just on money, but on common values and standards that every donor and media development organization should uphold.

Though each one represents more than just the heading, these are the main lines of the six OECD principles for effective media support (see Annex for the full principles):

1. Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media.
2. Increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment, in order to strengthen democratic resilience.
3. Take a whole of system perspective on supporting the media and information environment to make support more relevant, effective and sustainable. Consider the media and information environment as a development sector in itself, a critical part of efforts to promote and protect democracy, human rights, gender equality and development as well as a sector which can support implementation of other development goals.
4. Strengthen local leadership and ownership, empowering media partners as well as other actors in the information environment such as civil society organizations and online content creators to meaningfully participate in policies and programs.
5. Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment, both among donor agencies and between development and diplomatic efforts to support media freedom, especially in contexts of crisis.
6. Invest in knowledge, research, and learning.

As readers familiar with the principles will know, each has a sub-set of indicators that reflect different aspects of the umbrella formulations listed above.

To identify the most important points of each principle, two workshops with experts from different organizations active in the sector were held at the DW Global Media Forum in June 2024. Building on the results of these exchanges, this report focuses on the key aspects that were regarded as most relevant for the future readiness of the media development sector.

To give an example, the chapter on OECD Principle 5 focuses on the inclusion of regional/national/local organizations in decision making. Here, the experts prioritized sector coordination, cooperation during crises and bureaucracy reduction. By focusing on these three aspects, the workshop participants left other

sub-principles by the wayside: coordination with tech developers, the alignment of diplomatic efforts with development interventions and outreach to new donors.

Methodological approach and evidence base

For the purposes of this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. An online survey was sent to all 203 GFMD member organizations and to additional partner organizations from the 11 largest international media development organizations. In total, representatives from 77 organizations (16 international, 21 regional, 40 national/local) took part.

Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with 76 individuals who work in the sector. Interviewees included representatives of organizations based in countries across the globe as well as non-affiliated consultants with a good overview of the sector (see Annex for more details on methodology).

The empirical base for this report was laid between December 2024 and February 2025. The data was gathered at the brink of the current tectonic shifts in the media development sector, prior to and at the beginning of US President Donald Trump's second term in office. Hence, the findings should be read as a baseline describing the state of media development prior to the withdrawal of US funding. However, this report does take these recent developments into account with the Foreword by Carsten von Nahmen and introductory article by Nick Benequista and later through interviews with regional experts affiliated with the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD).

As part of the quantitative survey, the authors asked respondents to formulate their primary wish for the media development sector. The answers foreshadowed the content of this report, citing issues like additional funding, strengthening of local partners, boosting capacities and taking a more long-term approach to media development. These are all subjects that are closely connected to the OECD principles and thus will reemerge in this report.

The report team sincerely wishes to thank the seven regional researchers who conducted, transcribed and translated the interviews and boosted survey participation in partner countries: Jean Claude Bitsure, Giorgi Jangiani, Emy Osorio Matorel, Robi Koki Ochieng, Umesh Pokharel, Samar Sabry and Jean-Pierre Uwimana.

We are also grateful to the participants of the two workshops held in 2024 to identify priority topics for this report: Htaike Htaike Aung (Myanmar Internet Project), Blandine Angbako (Centre ESD), Soumaja Berjeb (IPSI), Andrea Cairola (UNESCO), Faruq Faisal (ASK), Heather Gilberds (CIMA), Sofie Jannusch (CAMECO), Natalia Kurdiukova (Kharkiv Media Hub), Odanga Madung (Odipo Dev), Mira Milosevic (GFMD), Kate Musgrave (UNESCO), Nadim Nashif (7amleh), Zenzele Ndebele (CITEZW), Michelle Nogales (Muy Waso), Paul Rothman (ICFJ), Isabelle Schlapfer (Internews), Martin Scott (University of East Anglia), Hamouda Soubhi (FMAS), Maha Taki (IFPIM), Zoe Titus (Namibia Media Trust), Erick Huerta Velázquez (REDES A.C.), Leon Willems (FPU) and Claire Woodward (Thomson Reuters Foundation).

Additional thanks go to Mira Milosevic and Ivana Bjelic Vucinic of GFMD for supporting the dissemination of the questionnaire. We also acknowledge the funding for this report by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Finally, we would like to thank the many people who took part in the interviews and surveys and whose insights were essential to the report.



PRINCIPLE 1

Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media

Originally closely connected to issues of conflict-sensitivity and peacebuilding (see Anderson, 1999), the “do no harm” principle has since evolved to apply to a wide variety of donor interventions, and stipulates that all stakeholders involved in each program be safeguarded from any type of negative consequences.

OECD Principle 1 attaches particular importance to ensuring that assistance “does no harm to public interest media.”¹ The OECD highlights this as a “minimum standard which all development co-operation providers are expected to respect.”

While exposing partners to harm is probably not done intentionally, it does happen in the media development realm, illustrated by cases of abuse and exploitation in the workplaces of exiled media supported by official development assistance (ODA) (Mon & Dunant, 2024).

“Do no harm” becomes particularly important in crises, when lives are in peril and media workers are forced to flee their countries. In recent years, the media development sector has reacted to a rising need for safety resources, crisis response capacities and support for exiled journalists.

¹ Public interest media are defined as media creating and distributing content that:

- “Exists to inform the public on matters that concern them.
- Provides fact-based information in a trustworthy manner.
- Commits to the demonstrable pursuit of truth, for example through sourcing practices and the representation of the audiences it hopes to serve.
- Is editorially independent.
- Is transparent about processes, finances, and policies used to produce it” (IFPIM, n.d.)

Examples include initiatives like the international ACOS Alliance, the US Journalist Security Fellowship, the Dutch Reporters Response Fund and the German Hannah Arendt Initiative. An initiative launched to explicitly cater to the needs of journalists in exile is the JX Fund, founded in 2022. It has since supported 85 outlets with 132 grants (JX Fund, 2025).

As part of this study, we wanted to find out:

- which tools and strategies are being used and have proven useful in preventing or mitigating harm.
- examples of harmful practices that implementers may or may not be aware of and that still exist in media development.
- what media development organizations could do better.

How to prevent harm and mitigate risks: Tools and strategies

Risk mitigation strategies are key to honor the “do not harm” principle. This study found that, generally, media development organizations are quite well-equipped to ensure that no harm is done. More than half of the survey respondents indicated that their organizations have effective risk-mitigation strategies in place (56 percent).

They named contingency plans and risk matrices, anti-fraud policies, codes of conduct, safety protocols or hands-on safety trainings as examples of what they were doing to mitigate harm. They also mentioned legal support as well as physical safety and mental health programs.

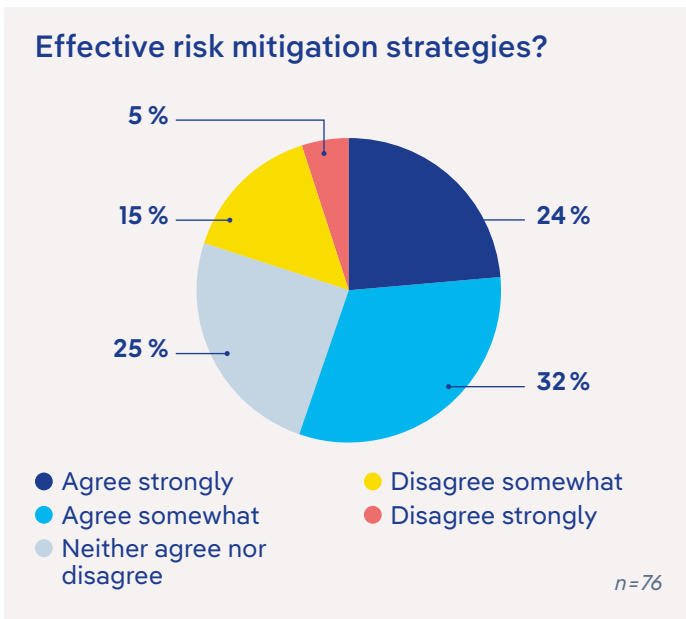


Figure 1: Item: Our organization has effective strategies to deal with risks to the safety and security of beneficiaries (people and organizations being supported); Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

In terms of the tools used to monitor and prevent harm, however, less than half of the surveyed media development organizations have well-suited instruments (44 percent).

Specific tools mentioned for risk monitoring included regular SWOT assessments (analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). Respondents also named participatory tools that allow individuals to point to risks and share concerns, a method called Accountability to Affected Population (AAP). In addition, they mentioned security and risk assessment checklists. Further, several organizations employed designated security teams or individual security officers in the places where they work.

The results from the key informant interviews showed that developing and implementing a risk matrix together with international funders helps to effectively minimize potential dangers and strengthen operations.

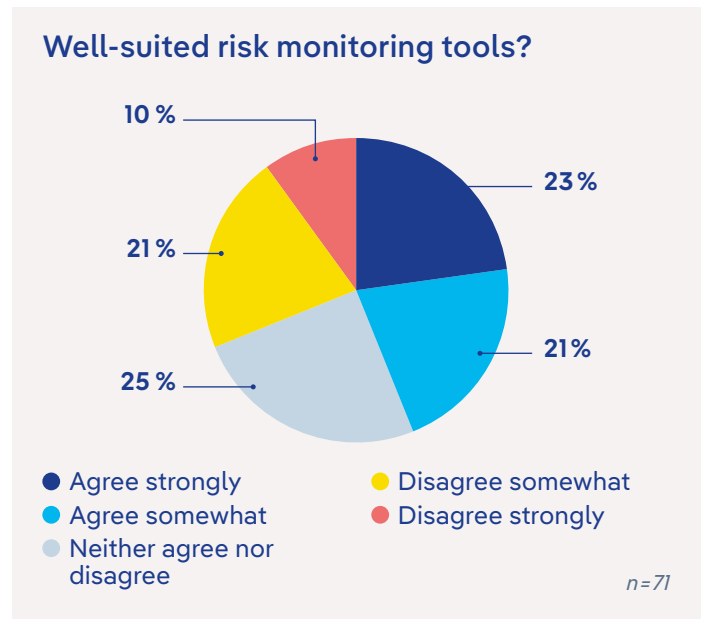


Figure 2: Item: Our organization has well-suited tools to monitor and prevent harm to public interest media organizations' survival; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

A representative of a media development organization in the MENA region pointed out, however, that assessments should happen more frequently:

“There should be a risk assessment conducted monthly or even every six months, especially in areas that suffer from ongoing conflict.”

An interviewee based in Southern Africa suggested to include the monitoring of challenges to safety and security as a high-level indicator in every project design, “so that when you implement, you have got safety nets inbuilt in the project, rather than thinking of them as an afterthought.”

Structural safeguards for equality and equity

Regarding the “do no harm” principle, the sub-aspect of gender and diversity came prominently to the fore as priorities. How are organizations dealing with these issues?

52%

Average percentage of female or diverse members of management at media development organizations (n = 73)

53%

Average percentage of female or diverse staff at media development organizations (n = 73)

A hard indicator of whether organizations take issues of equality seriously is the composition of their staff or their management. If equality is put into practice, then this should be reflected by a corresponding proportion of staff and management identifying as female or diverse.

This study shows that 53 percent of staff and 52 percent of members of management at the surveyed media development organizations identify as female or diverse. There is, however, a disparity between international and regional organizations on the one hand and national/local organizations on the other:

While international (61 percent) and regional (63 percent) organizations’ proportions of female or diverse staff is over 60 percent, national and local organizations (46 percent) dip below half. The same could be observed for management, with the respective proportions estimated at 59 percent for international and 58 percent for regional organizations, and under half for national and local organizations (46 percent).

71%

Percentage of organizations with project guidelines for gender mainstreaming (n = 76)

23%

Percentage of organizations with project guidelines for disability mainstreaming (n = 76)

Preventing discrimination is more than a matter of personal choice. Structural safeguards need to be in place to make sure no harm is done. This applies to both the organizational level and project realities on the ground.

Thus, the survey asked about the types of project guidelines and organizational policies the media development organizations had in place. According to the results, close to three quarters (71 percent) mainstream gender throughout their projects. At the same time, less than a quarter of them mainstream disability.

Further, 36 percent of the surveyed organizations apply project guidelines for improved inclusion, specifically for conflict-sensitivity, minority representation, integration of internally displaced people or involvement of youth.

68%

Percentage of organizations with policy promoting equality in organizational structure (n = 76)

58%

Percentage of organizations with human resources policy promoting equality (n = 76)

While project guidelines are important, project cycles are finite and certain safeguards need to be in place at the organizational level. These include making sure that equality is reflected in the organizational structure and in an organization’s human resources policy.

The results show that more than two thirds (68 percent) of the organizations have a policy that promotes equality in the organizational structure. More than half (58 percent) have a corresponding human resources policy.

The “do no harm” principle is largely in place, but...

When asked about concrete situations in which work with international partners or funders had put beneficiaries at risk, many interviewees from local organizations were not aware of cases. In one interview, an independent consultant said: “I’ve never really seen anything shocking.” Another one stated: “I think this principle is largely protected and supported by media development organizations.”

While immediate cases of harm done seem to be relatively rare, several interviewees reflected on the “do no harm” principle at more general levels related to, as one interviewee put it, “the architecture of aid.” The following paragraphs deal with the issues raised in the interviews, moving from the specific to the general.

Safety concerns: Contextual knowledge is key

From the perspective of local media development organizations, international partners and funders were not always very perceptive of the concrete risks beneficiaries are facing. Sometimes, this already became apparent in calls for application that offer short-term funding for training sessions.

A media development consultant in Asia with a specific perspective on Pakistan said in this regard: “So you want to train citizen journalists to go and do something, but the notice for applications does not really seem mindful of the context. So it might be that you train them, but [in doing so] you invite risks and safety concerns, threats. So, are you doing something about that or will you just give them the training and then leave them?”

In other instances, critical situations may emerge unexpectedly, but international partners often place strict limitations on how their grants may be used. This can lead to an exclusion of security-related expenses.

One interviewee from a pan-African media development organization gave the example of some grants only covering project costs (e.g., research, advocacy, training), but not allowing for funds to be used for legal defense, journalists’ protection or cybersecurity upgrades. This posed a problem. Especially in unforeseen emergency situations such as digital shutdowns or escalating conflicts.

A major harm: Encroachment on editorial independence

The OECD principles also name non-interference in actual reporting as a prominent aspect of “do no harm”: “Avoid approaches that risk editorial independence.” This issue was brought up most frequently across all interviews.

International support for media does not seem free of having a certain influence on editorial decisions, thereby potentially harming editorial independence. In some instances, this may happen rather subtly, in others more overtly. One media development consultant interviewed spoke of a “donor syndrome” and asserted, “When you

receive money from donors, you always try to please them in some ways, even in your coverage.”

The gravest kind of encroachment on editorial independence reported in the interviews were examples of what a North American media development expert referred to as, “donors putting pressure on independent media outlets, that are grantees, to censor.” The expert also confirmed: “Unfortunately, that still exist out there.”

A much more common type of influence, however, seems to be exerted through topic-specific funds. One strand of media assistance dedicates donor money to, for example, fostering reporting on climate change, migration or public health. Many interviewees from local media development organizations expressed their discontent with such arrangements that were sometimes needed to keep their organizations viable, describing them as “thematic foci dictated by donors.”

Interviewees criticized that funding tied to specific topical interests often kept them from their primary mission. One East African expert pointed out that it forced his organization to constantly pivot its programs, creating instability in long-term planning and making it difficult to build a consistent brand and thorough expertise:

“

It’s really hard to build a brand around a theme that you focus on. Always, when a new interest comes in, you switch gears, you switch interests, you become sort of an appeasement tool and that, for me, makes it very harmful.

A Western European interviewee pointed to the irony of media outlets being successful in fundraising to an extent that it kept them from covering important topics such as elections. One media organization, for example, “couldn’t investigate on the elections because they didn’t have a grant specifically for this. Even though they had raised money from ten different funders, they couldn’t work on what was most important for the country at that point.”

The interviewees offered further examples of topic-specific funds that can cause a loss of trust from the public, pressures from the government and/or self-censorship. These included:

- sensitive topics (such as religion or historical events)

- topics of less imminent importance (such as COVID 19 in places with an acute cholera pandemic) as well as
- topics to advance an overt political agenda (such as “counter narratives” to violent extremism)

One interviewee cited the 2025 Civitates call for proposals “Strengthening independent public interest journalism in Europe” as a good model to safeguard editorial independence. It reads: “Civitates is committed to absolute editorial independence for its grantees. Civitates will not support outlets based on a prioritization of some editorial focus areas over others. By no means will Civitates infringe on media freedom and editorial independence.” (Civitates, 2025)

Donor logos: The risk of being labelled “foreign agent”

Having international funders can already pose risks for local organizations when the cooperation is attacked by domestic political actors insinuating that external funding means carrying out foreign agendas. One of the primary concerns mentioned by interviewees in this respect was what they referred to as “reputational damage.”

An interviewee in East Africa pointed out that taking money from international donors could lead to political scrutiny, government hostility, and in extreme cases, legal restrictions or targeted harassment. In this situation, donors insisting on “branding” and having their logos displayed prominently would increase the risk for local organizations.

A media development expert in Asia explained: “What catches the eye is public displays of logos and names of organizations that are supporting a particular media civil society organization because that can sometimes be misused against them to create reputational damage.”

Another interviewee from Southern Africa put it more drastically:

**“
In our situation, [donor] branding becomes
a matter of life.**

He pointed to examples from Zimbabwe and Eswatini where governments had used the display of donor logos as a justification to label media organizations as “foreign agents,” restricting their operations and access to official accreditation.

Market distortion

Some interviewees commented on the “do no harm” principle at a broader level, questioning and critiquing some of the structures international media development is embedded within.

A problem that a media development consultant interviewed considered “systemic throughout the aid business,” for example, is that:

**“
NGOs in general, northern based or
UN-based NGOs, have siphoned off talent
from developing country professions in all
sectors – and the same goes for the media.**

When international media development organizations or other international NGOs open field offices and offer high salaries, they risk doing harm to public interest media by recruiting journalists from domestic newsrooms that cannot pay competing remuneration.

One interviewee from Eastern Europe stated that in Moldova, for example, donors and large organizations had absorbed most of the available human resources, leaving media organizations in an impossible position to hire staff.

Interviewees from international media development organizations did show awareness of this problem. One expert even called it “unethical” but also explained the decisions were beyond their own control: “People are free to earn money.”

The interviews further stressed that international organizations not only competed with in-country organizations for talent, but also for funding.

An expert from a Southeast European media development organization criticized that donors often favored international organizations over local ones, even when local organizations had the capacity to lead projects and manage funds effectively.

Another interviewee recalled an instance where an international media development organization had presented itself as a more suitable manager of funds than the local organizations at a regional donor coordination meeting. The interviewee considered this highly problematic: “When you have those sorts of statements being said by influential people, that is an active harm”.

The politicization of media assistance

Numerous interviewees considered the even bigger picture by reflecting on the politicization of media support, i.e. its alignment to the political goals of a particular group. In their view, politicization put journalists’ safety and the independence of media at risk.

Implications of media assistance being increasingly entangled with geopolitical agendas had already been noticeable at various levels, interviewees remarked. International media development organizations, for example, find themselves more frequently approached by “government entities who are particularly interested in tackling very specific forms of disinformation,” namely that of information interference and manipulation by other state actors.

Local media development organizations have faced the abrupt halt or even suspension of funding, for example in connection with the Hamas-led terror attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

In the context of that attack, an interviewee criticized that a donor had demanded journalists’ trade unions from the Palestinian territories to issue a condemnation of Hamas which “would endanger the lives of journalists.”

What to do?

Considering these findings one question remains: What can the media development sector do to better meet Principle 1: “Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media”? Summarized below are our key recommendations, derived from the data we collected.

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- Jointly **develop risk assessment matrices with partners** and carry them out regularly.

- If your organization does not have risk monitoring tools or strategies in place, **reach out to GFMD or other organizations for exchange**. There are good examples in the sector.
- **Include safety and security indicators** at the design stage to mitigate risks proactively.
- **Re-negotiate with the funder** if you see security concerns with a given project (or at least give it a try): Many organizations found that it is quite possible to re-negotiate if you have convincing reasons.
- Weigh up the **pros and cons of opening field offices** as an international organization and work with **transparent salary grids** to avoid market distortion and brain drain.
- Prepare for media development to become more politicized and **define your organizations’ red lines**.

Inspiration for donors:

- **Commission risks assessments** and have them **inform your fundings calls**.
- Demand that **indicators for monitoring safety** are included in the project design.
- Establish dedicated **emergency response funds** for media organizations at risk.
- Allow for **flexibility** when the security situation demands a **reallocation of funds**.
- **Minimize public branding** on projects to avoid political association.
- **Do not jeopardize the editorial independence** of the public interest media you support. It’s their greatest asset.
- Ensure that funding is directed towards achieving **genuine developmental goals**, such as promoting press freedom, developing media capacities or improving access to information **rather than using it as a tool to serve specific political interests**.
- Funding allocated for particular societal projects and programs should be **as neutral as possible** and **not linked to any political agendas**. This also applies to awareness raising efforts in the field of development cooperation.



PRINCIPLE 2

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

“At a time when societies desperately need reliable facts to be able to constructively discuss and respond to the enormous challenges of the coming decades, independent media worldwide are fighting for survival,” reads the Media Viability Manifesto (Moore, Köhler & Cook 2024).

Today, the bulk of advertising revenue is being consumed by large tech companies, mostly based in Silicon Valley, and the attention of citizens is being drawn away from relevant news by social media.

Against this backdrop, the 2024 Manifesto draws a clear pathway to an equitable future where public interest media are “financially and editorially independent and economically sustainable.” This is to ensure that they can continue to be honest brokers for reliable information and constructive platforms for freedom of expression.

The Manifesto resulted from a collaborative effort by a core group of 13 media development organizations as well as 73 others, proving that the sector can draw resources together for a common vision.

The vision for a viable and sustainable future of public interest media is echoed by OECD Principle 2, which demands donors to “increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment, in order to strengthen democratic resilience.”

Principle 2 also highlights that financial support is not enough. Other forms of support remain important building blocks towards a healthy and vibrant information ecosystem, such as strengthening capacities and fostering enabling environments for the realization of freedom of expression.

Beyond increasing the overall volume of donor investment, media development also needs to be an integral part of international development co-operation and particularly of governance programs, humanitarian aid and peace-building efforts.

How have budgets for media support developed?

Let us first focus on the financial side, bearing in mind that the 2025 US funding freeze is not reflected by the figures noted in this study. In 2024, CIMA published a study (Myers & Gilberts) showing that between 2010 and 2019, “funding to the media sector as part of official development assistance (ODA) stagnated at roughly 0.3 percent, or, on average, between 300 million and 400 million US-Dollars annually of the roughly 200 billion US-Dollars allocated to foreign aid from official donors.” Another estimate (GFMD, 2025) for the five years thereafter saw media development funding at an annual average of 620 million US-Dollars, perhaps driven by the COVID pandemic, but still at around 0.3 percent of the overall development aid.

Although several years have passed since 2019, these data indicate that ODA spending on media assistance and development was already fairly low in comparison to overall development budgets in the past. An interesting question is whether this has since changed. Did factors like the rise of digital authoritarianism, the fight against mis- and disinformation or the need for quality information during the COVID pandemic increase donor spending on media assistance and development?

As mentioned in the introduction, this study does not replicate the CIMA (Myers & Gilberts, 2024) study and does not focus primarily on the donor side of the media development sector. Rather, the answer to the overall budget question may be judged via the proxy of budget changes that media development organizations have been experiencing.

Therefore, we asked organizations to tell us by how much (percentage-wise) their budgets had increased or decreased (or stayed the same) in the period between 2019 and 2024. According to this metric, media development organizations saw an average decline of their annual budgets by 4 percent in this period. It is important to bear in mind that this figure is not weighted for budget size, i.e. the overall budget increases mentioned in the CIMA report may not have been evenly distributed across the sector. This was also reflected in the qualitative data where most organizations interviewed reported a stagnation in total available funds.

In light of the massive democratic backsliding as well as debt crises and hyperinflation in many countries, this was considered “very worrying” and “an inadequate response,” as interviewees put it. Even organizations who were able to increase their funds over the last five years, pointed out that, overall, media development was underfunded. One expert pointed out:



We need more money in the [media development] sector.

In the interviews, several media development consultants picked up on the issue of “acknowledging that public interest news and public interest media are public goods and thus worthy recipients of funding.” One lamented that donors only paid “lip service” to the importance of independent media as a pillar of good governance and democracy, as rhetoric did not translate into greater official support. Others also saw a responsibility on the part of the implementing organizations.

For instance, as one interviewee remarked, in terms of researching and substantiating the amount of funding needed: “They have no clue whether they offer sufficient or insufficient [support] and nobody has any clue. And this is because we don’t actually have a good picture of what the financial need means.”

Another consultant argued that the reason why donors did not give sufficient support was partly because “the NGOs have still not managed to make a clear distinction between non-profit and profit-making media and got hung up about sustainability.” She said there needed to be an open conversation about the fact that some media, just like other public services, “will always need outside funding and will never be profitable.”

For one interviewee from an international media development organization this related to nothing less than “the fundamental question of how media survive and how it’s possible to post quality content in the future.”

Where support is lacking

This study finds that most organizations are convinced that the funding they receive is not sufficient to meaningfully support public interest media and the information environment. Only 18 percent of the surveyed organizations reported this to be the case. 59 percent believed support was insufficient, 23 percent were unsure. There was a stark difference in this regard between international organizations and regional/local organizations: While 44 percent of the international players reported having sufficient funding, this was only the case for 12 percent of the regional/local organizations.

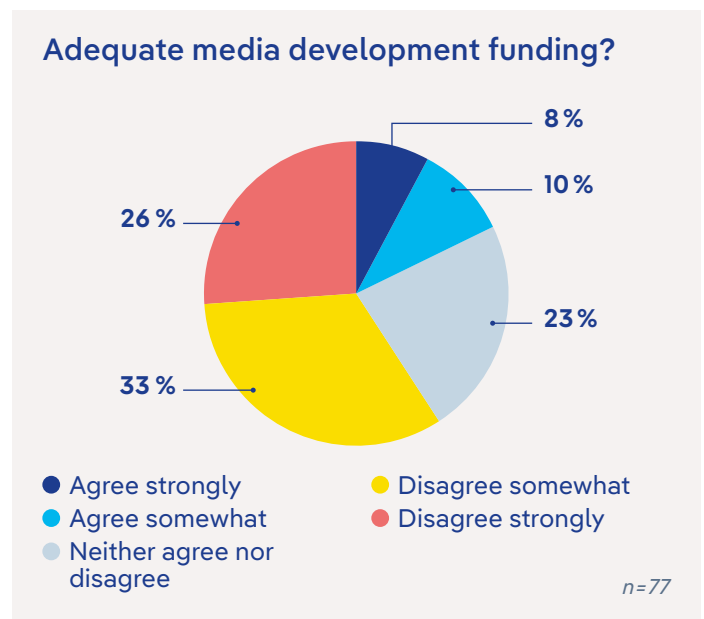


Figure 3: Item: *Our organization receives enough funding to be able to meaningfully support public interest media and the information environment*; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

OECD Principle 2 is not merely about financial support and integration into the wider scheme of international support. It is also concerned with the types of support given. Thus, we used the key informant interviews to find out where support is sorely lacking.

Answers revolved around a few recurring issues, of which one was particularly salient: The need for core funding. Across all world regions, representatives from media organizations highlighted the importance of funding for administrative or operational costs. This could include, for instance, office equipment, recruitment, payment of salaries or other internal running costs.

One representative of an East African media development organization had observed that funding from development agencies was often earmarked for specific projects, with little flexibility for core operational costs:

“

I've seen this in Africa. Particularly the small media organizations, the ones that are not making enough money, asking for support to buy equipment because equipment that is used in media is expensive. This would really be helpful to media organizations and could take them to the next level. At times, it's just a lack of a computer or lack of a camera or lack of having a good phone.

An interviewee from a pan-Arab media development organization was painfully aware of such difficulties. Therefore, this organization had placed core funding at the center of its fundraising strategy because “it would have been impossible to succeed without core funding”.

Despite its importance, the share of funds dedicated to support media organizations' basic operational and administrative costs seems to be relatively small.

23%

Average percentage of funding of international media development organizations allocated to core funding of public interest media ($n = 14$)

On average, the surveyed international media development organizations indicated that 23 percent of their funding was allocated to core funding of public interest media, while the rest had to be allocated to project activities.

Managing projects, however, requires capacities. The interviewee from the pan-Arab media development organization also criticized that this link was being ignored: “The support is conditional on being directed towards activities, without considering that the diversity of the organization's activities requires an increase in the workforce.”

Another issue interviewees recurrently raised was a funding gap regarding traditional media. Many experts had observed a shift in funding priorities towards digital media instead of support for the digital modernization of existing print and broadcast outlets. The experts said this had problematic implications. For one, it was deemed to be out of touch with media usage patterns in many regions where radio and TV remain the dominant news sources.

A media development consultant in Latin America, for instance, observed that media support was increasingly related to tech and artificial intelligence, which she called “this new shiny thing which very few organizations are doing.” She believed the first step would be to “help the media in this effort of becoming better digitalized with better means to be more aware about the changes that are happening.”

A representative of an international media development organization also pointed to “technology transition” as an area currently underfunded, especially considering that it involves high costs for things like data storage and digital security.

According to interviewees, the “abandoning of traditional media” had created a vacuum that was exploited by authoritarian forces and far-right movements. Traditional TV channels in Georgia, for example, were left relying solely on political party funding when funding shifted primarily to online media.

Similar developments of media capture were observed with community media in Latin America where “powerful people in the region,” such as communications directors of local politicians, increasingly took advantage of community media's shortage in funding, according to one interviewee.

Insufficient funding was also brought up in relation to short-term funding peaks. Several interviewees reported about temporary funds that were made available in sudden conflict situations or around key events but then got withdrawn without foresight. This funding fluctuation was deemed detrimental to sustainable development. As an interviewee from a media development organization in Southeast Asia pointed out:

“

Persuading funders and donors that the crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar are ongoing remains difficult. If there is an immediate influx of funding for six months, followed by a sudden disappearance of support, and then a brief resurgence of funding five years later, it becomes impossible to establish sustainable support systems for local organizations. This results in sporadic, short-term initiatives rather than long-term structural development, which is crucial for lasting impact.

The key informant interviews revealed many more areas where financial support was deemed lacking. Key issues that were repeatedly raised across all interviews included:

- a lack of venture capital/innovation funding. (“The problem is that there are new things and fields we want to experiment with, and we’re aware that we might succeed or fail, but donors prefer to support things they are certain will succeed.”)
- insufficient support to certain groups of media workers, e.g. freelance journalists, radio and television technicians, older-generation journalists, citizen journalists, YouTubers, financial administrators or executive directors of media organizations.
- a lack of support for reforming legal and regulatory frameworks for media. (“Legal support and advice to individual journalists and advise to governments is an underfunded and valuable sector.”)

Security assistance for journalists and media professionals

One of the most important forms of support in the face of rising authoritarianism and armed conflict around the world is journalistic safety. Data from Reporters Without Borders (2024) illustrate its importance, with 67 killings and 771 cases of detainment of journalists being reported for 2024.

In the survey, we asked local and regional organizations whether they were aware of initiatives offering safety and security assistance, such as relocation programs of media professionals under threat in their countries or regions.

25%

Proportion of media development organizations that give active safety/security support to media and journalists ($n = 69$)

45 percent of them were aware of such initiatives, suggesting that more awareness need to be raised for such programs. Roughly a quarter (25 percent) of the surveyed media development organizations went beyond simple awareness in that they were actively involved in offering such types of support.

Funding sources

Not only state actors support media and the information environment, but also philanthropic initiatives. In fact, financial support by private foundations is “a particularly significant stream of income for non-profit news organizations”, as remarked by media scholar Martin Scott and his colleagues (Scott et al., 2019).

To get a better picture of the media development sector’s overall funding situation, we asked media development organizations about their funding sources. Results suggest that local media development organizations have a diverse funding mix while international media development organization rely mainly on public funding.

The funding sources of local media development organizations in this study include a relatively wide range of entities, such as:

- public funders (such as state agencies, embassies or supranational organizations)
- philanthropic foundations (such as Open Society Foundation, Bill Gates Foundation, Hewlett Foundation or Elevate Prize Foundation)
- German political foundations (such as Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung or Heinrich Boell Stiftung)
- corporate initiatives (such as Google News Initiative or Meta Journalism Project) as well as
- individuals' support via membership fees or donations.

The rationale behind this diversification is clear: To reduce dependency on a single donor. While this also requires an increase of specialized staff to manage donor requirements, it does seem to pay off. An interviewee in the Middle East explained:

“

Five years ago, the funding relied on a single donor, which posed a significant risk because 80 percent of the budget depended on that one source. When we considered the potential risks in case of a government change, everything could shift, which could force us to shut down our organization. Therefore, we worked on diversifying our funding sources. As a result, the organization's budget grew with the increase in the number of donors.

At the time of the interviews, many local media development organizations were anticipating that big tech companies would scale down or discontinue their journalism programs. The withdrawal of foreign aid by the Trump administration, however, did take them by surprise. An interviewee in Southern Africa whose interview was conducted after the news broke remarked:

“

I can assure you, none of us anticipated that you will wake up one day and there will be no USAID. So of course, in future, we will anticipate such developments. But for now, that was not done, and it has its own effect. We are still monitoring it and we are trying to see how we will respond to it.

International media development organizations, in turn, seemed to heavily rely on public funding only. Several reported that they had or have strategic partnerships with ministries, but that they were not very experienced with private funding.

One interviewee admitted: “It’s not very smart and it needs to be diversified.”

When it comes to fundraising from individuals, there seems to be some hesitance among organizations. One interviewee remarked that, “it’s not the kind of sector where you have people in the street giving 100 bucks every month and supporting the way Médecins Sans Frontières or Oxfam are supported.”

However, one international organization based in Western Europe is already profiting from individual donations. An interviewee explained: “We have seen that if we put a lot of effort into it, we can find more income from individual people in [a European country]. As our name becomes more known and as they understand better what we do, it pays off.”

Integration in other development fields

Two important sub-indicators of OECD Principle 2 stipulate steps towards mainstreaming media assistance.

Firstly, by “incorporating it into all responses to democratic backsliding, rising authoritarianism and mis- and dis-information” (i.e. governance programs). And secondly, by “integrating it into development co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding policies or strategies.”

39 percent of survey respondents affirmed the assumption that media assistance is well-integrated into governance programs, leaving more than 60 percent of the respondents doubtful or sure that this was not the case.

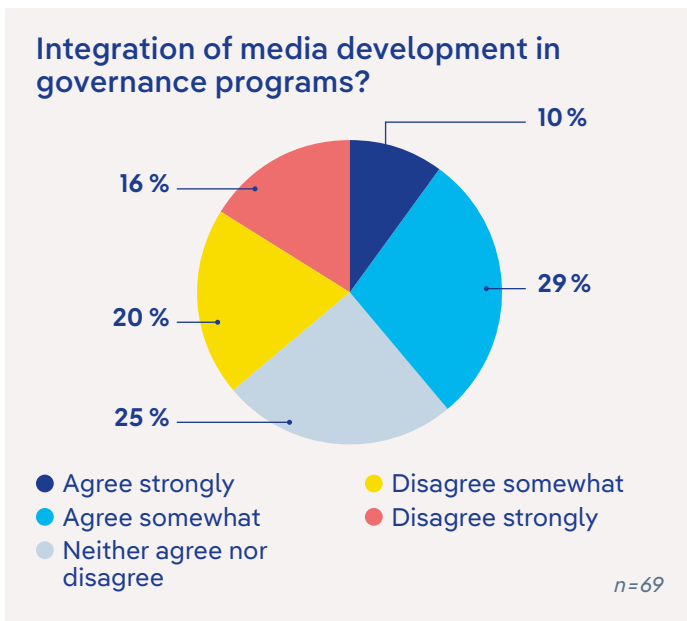


Figure 4: Item: In our country/region, support to public interest media is generally incorporated in development projects protecting democracy and combatting mis- and disinformation; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

The interviews shed some light on why this might be the case: Many interviewees expressed a sense that independent media were not sufficiently recognized as an important part of democratic governance, as this statement by a media development consultant illustrates:

“As long as media is the poor cousin in the governance world and comes lower than elections and corruption and the other sectors in governance, it will always be low priority.”

What was seen as the core problem in terms of media’s integration into other fields of development was that “media are mostly seen as a public relations arm” rather than a key pillar of democracy and societal development.

A representative of an international media development organization, for instance, explained: “When organizations come to us that are not media organizations and they say ‘Oh, it would be interesting to work with you,’ then they’re looking at media as a tool for their own agenda. They want to have access to media for their topics. They want the media to write more about whatever they find important.”

Survey results show that this misperception was deemed even more common in the broader fields of peace-building and humanitarian assistance. Here, less than 20 percent of the surveyed organizations were convinced that media assistance was part and parcel of general interventions, with over 80 percent unsure or convinced that this was not the case.

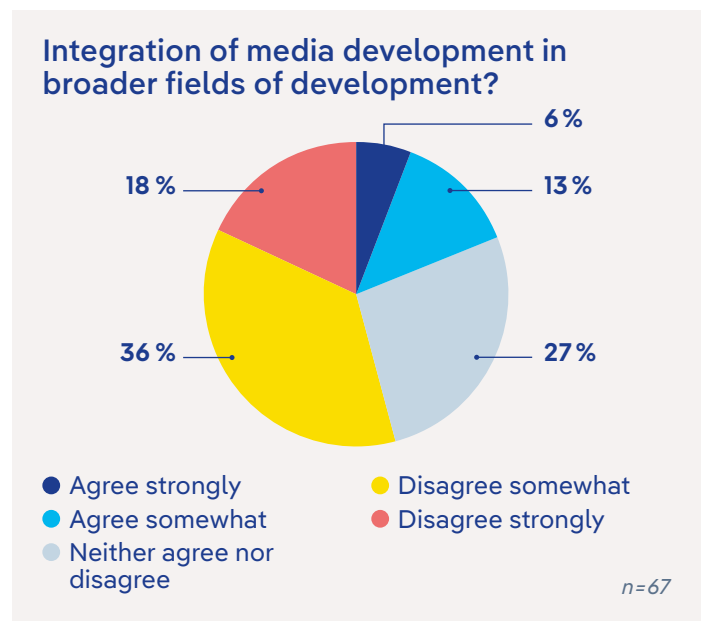


Figure 5: Item: In our country/region, support to public interest media is generally incorporated in development projects protecting democracy and combatting mis- and disinformation; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

The media development organizations that had most experience with these programs seem to be those few international ones that engaged in producing their own content. As one representative explained: “90 percent of the EU funding we get is FPI [Service for Foreign Policy Instruments], it’s crisis money. And we have to argue that within the crisis, within a fragile context, media is important.”

At a practical level, media development’s insufficient integration within broader democracy and development strategies can have dire consequences, for example when actors confuse independent reporting with strategic communication.

One interviewee in the MENA region deemed it a major risk, “that these other people in the humanitarian sectors are not part of our conversations and that they can derail the whole process.” A solution to this was seen in a stronger exchange.

Here, the organizations were quite self-critical and saw themselves as having a duty, or as one interviewee put it:



I think the responsibility falls on media development to make other stakeholders aware that your development interventions on poverty and climate, on health and education also need to include the media, independent media and not just as sort of development communication or PR.

Another idea on how media assistance could be mainstreamed came from a representative of a media development organization in Southern Africa: “Suppose we say that for every grant that is received in Africa, 1 percent of that grant goes to media support. So, if it is for the new standard-gauge railway, we have 1 percent of the money allocated to it going to media and the media therefore support the scrutiny and accountability.”

What to do?

What, then, can the media development sector do to better meet OECD Principle 2: “Increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment”? Below are our key recommendations derived from this study.

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- As a sector, try to **quantify the increase in financial support that is needed** for public interest media to strengthen democratic resilience. This may help donors turn lip service into action.
- Have an **open conversation** with donors about the fact that **public interest media** need to be considered **public goods** which merit support, irrespective of their profit-making abilities.
- Invest in your **partnerships with traditional media** and assist them with their **digital transition**.
- **Diversify your funding sources** and do not shy away from **new fundraising terrains** such as the private sector.
- Make it your mission to **explain the difference between media as a democratic institution and media as communication tools** to donors and colleagues from other development fields.
- Make an effort to **reach out to and network with actors from other development fields**.

Inspiration for donors:

- **Follow suit on official announcements about the importance of media** as a pillar for democracy and commit more financial resources to their support.
- **Help to get media development mainstreamed** into governance support and other development fields by raising awareness about media’s democratic role in related areas.
- Create **dedicated codes** for reporting on and tracking **aid flows into the support for public interest media** to establish a database that allows for reliably judging the development of media development funding.
- Allow for **more core funding** and ensure a **balance between core and project funding**. This safeguards that media organizations can both fulfill their primary tasks and excel in projects.
- Encourage funded organizations to diversify their funding sources to **avoid dependence on a single donor**.
- Contact other (philanthropic or private) donors to **see how your funding strategies for public interest media can complement each other**.
- **Combine aid with diplomatic pressures** and help reform-oriented governments to stay on course, e.g. as part of the Media Freedom Coalition.



PRINCIPLE 3

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

In 2020, the US-based International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) launched the VIBE Barometer, a tool for assessing the quality of national information ecosystems. VIBE is based on four principles that add up to information vibrancy: information quality, multiple channels, information consumption and engagement, and transformative action.

“People need to generate, access, engage with, and disseminate high-quality news and information in order to make informed decisions, hold those in power accountable, and take actions that will improve their lives,” IREX wrote in 2017.

Underlying this concept is the assumption that only a holistic perspective enables actors to identify the needs of a given ecosystem. This includes avoiding engaging in narrow projects offering piecemeal solutions that are neither sustainable nor effective and potentially even harmful.

OECD Principle 3 addresses this concept: “Take a whole of system perspective on supporting the media and information environment to make support more relevant, effective and sustainable. Consider the media and information environment as a development sector in itself, a critical part of efforts to promote and protect democracy, human rights, gender equality and development as well as a sector which can support implementation of other development goals.” (OECD, 2024)

As part of this study, we focused on four sub-indicators for this principle:

- the availability and implementation of “solid and up-to-date diagnostics and thorough analysis of the media and information environment”
- a “long-term approach to media assistance” the support for a “diverse range of media, journalism, and information stakeholders”
- “the broader enabling environment for public interest media”

Analyses of the broader media environment: How common are they?

A whole of system perspective presupposes sufficient reliable data. They enable donors and media development organizations to formulate valid assumptions about media and information environments. Hence, they are imperative if media assistance is to be effective.

If contextual information is, on the other hand, sketchy, inconsistent or simply wrong, this can lead to erroneous strategies that waste resources, fail to deliver the expected impact or even cause unintended harm.

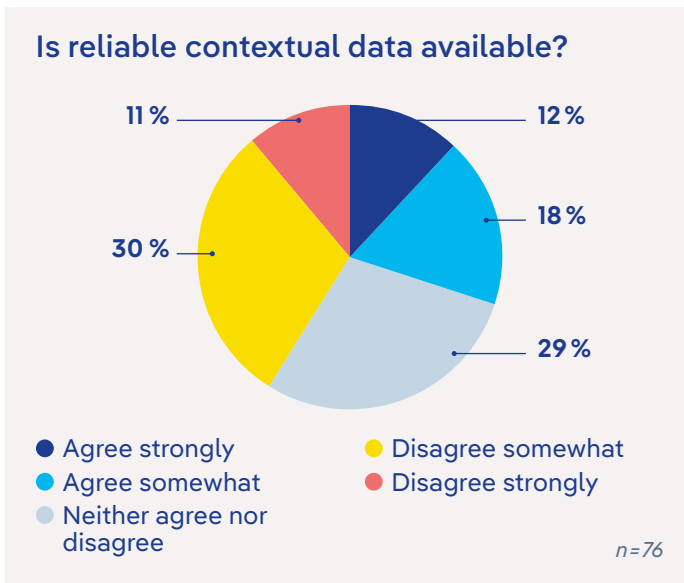


Figure 6: Item: For the contexts we work in, solid up-to-date data and analysis of the media environment (including information needs) exist; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

Unfortunately, this study shows that many media development organizations lack good quality data. Less than one third of the organizations (30 percent) felt that there was solid, up-to-date facts about things like the information needs of audiences. Again, there is a discrepancy between international (44 percent), regional (20 percent) and national/local (30 percent) organizations in whether they have reliable data at their fingertips. This suggests that this is not just a matter of the existence of data, but also of its availability.

To a certain degree, this discrepancy is reflected in the interview data. In general, there is recognition for international media development organizations' efforts in assessing the broader media and information ecosystem. A media development consultant in Asia stated, for example:

“

Speaking specifically from the perspective of media development organizations themselves, I feel that the whole system approach is very much present and exercised. I have seen that in a number of cases, for example by Free Press Unlimited, DW Akademie, BBC Media Action, IMS, GFMD. Before the work starts there's baseline reporting, there's contextual analysis, there's evidence gathering through consultations.

Representatives of international media development organizations themselves are quite confident regarding their compliance with Principle 3. The necessity for a whole of system approach is seen as not that new. For instance, interviewees pointed to the endorsement of UNESCO's 2008 Media Development Indicators. The UNESCO Indicators allow for comprehensive assessments of media landscapes at the national level.

Interviewees also mentioned needs assessments, due diligence assessments and eligibility assessments as possible ways to understand the broader media and information environment. However, there were also critical comments and pointers to blind spots related to such analyses usually raised by representatives of national/local organizations.

Mismatch between assessments and donor decision-making

Even though many interviewees from national/local organizations acknowledged that analyses such as needs assessments were widely used, some questioned the extent to which they really informed funding priorities.

An interviewee in East Africa stated: “I've not seen much of an evidence-based approach in terms of how they fund. I think what I've seen most donors do is fund based on what is the fad right now”.

Another interviewee, also from East Africa, had the impression that specific interests determined what exactly is being analyzed: “They [international media development organizations] would try to make it a point that needs assessments are done every time, but it's done within a specific framework or subject or a tagline.”

A representative from a Central European-based international organization confirmed that this can indeed be the case: “Very often you have expectations from the donors that are not related to a comprehensive analysis of all these layers.”

Apparently, there is a gap between local media analysis and donor decision-making. A media development consultant in Western Europe summarized it this way:



I think that our sector is very good at the research side. It's just not very good at the implementation side. I mean, I've read brilliant analyses of [media] landscapes, but don't think that this research is often put into practice or used or taken any notice of.

This is seen as limiting the effectiveness of media development interventions and preventing sustainable improvements in the media landscape. A solution was proposed by a representative of a media development organization in Southern Africa. He suggested that donors jointly fund independent research by different scholars to dissect the different parts of the media and information environment. The findings and recommendations could then be presented at a round-table event where donors can jointly agree on what falls within their respective programmatic areas.

Are analyses driven by local organizations?

Only 20 percent of the regional and 30 percent of the national/local organizations felt that there is solid, up-to-date data at their fingertips; this might also have to do with the fact that they are more often the ones who research rather than the researchers themselves.

The extent to which local media development organizations engage in analyses of the broader media and information environment seems to vary significantly. While some interviewees reported that their organizations had never done such research, others said they conduct it regularly.

This, however, usually happens in connection with specific programs, as an interviewee in West Africa pointed out: “The research we've done so far has been part of projects, funded projects, but we've always made sure that it didn't just end on delivering it to the partner.”

Interviewees stated that to be able to realize research, they would require core funding rather than project funding. As a research ambition, one expert mentioned, for example, an in-house monitoring system on gender violence in the media.

Duplication and fatigue

Representatives of local media development organizations voiced their frustration about repeatedly being asked by international organizations to take part in studies with similar questions about needs or impact.

One expert described this as a “fatigue” that local partners and actors experience “because they see like eight different assessors coming asking questions about ‘So what do you need? What are your challenges? Does it make any sense?’”

Interviewees working for international organizations said they were aware of this. One expert suggested more information exchange:



I feel there's a lot of duplication of that work. Many of us do needs assessments, ecosystem mappings, these kinds of things. I feel this is something we really could do better as a community of actors. There's so much more sharing that could happen.

One interviewee from an international media development organization saw competition among the organizations as the main inhibiting factor for data sharing: “You do the needs assessment, you have the power to go to the donor and say, ‘You should this, you should do that.’” She therefore proposed the formation of an independent body or consortium of actors doing joint assessments.

Data gaps around audience research

Interviewees also raised gaps in country data as a critical issue, especially regarding audience research.

The results show that international organizations do undertake efforts to gain their own insights. The results, however, are not always comprehensive and often lack contextual depth, as a representative of a media development organization in South Asia remarked:

“*For instance, these assessments may not always dive deep enough to uncover the full scope of issues. Additionally, certain geographic regions may be overlooked or underrepresented, leaving critical areas unaddressed. These gaps can result in missed opportunities to understand local contexts more thoroughly.*”

Especially audience members in rural areas and/or those who speak local indigenous languages are insufficiently represented in the assessments, interviewees said.

Good things take time – but how much?

Beyond having good quality data, OECD Principle 3 calls on donors to adopt a long-term, sustainable approach to media development. In the survey, we asked organizations whether they thought that this was the case. We also asked them to indicate the length of their average funding cycles to gauge whether organizations need to manage many short-lived projects or whether they can plan over longer stretches of time.

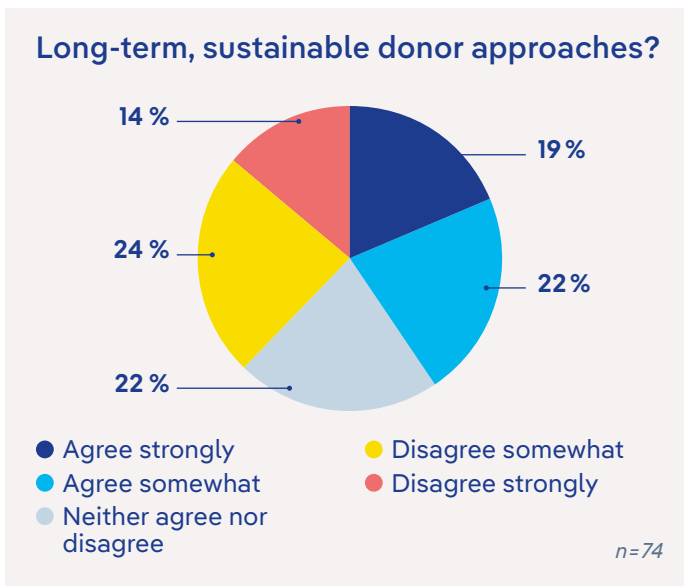


Figure 7: Item: Generally, media development adopts a long-term approach, acknowledging that empowering relevant stakeholders and systems needs time and sustainable strategic programming; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

This study finds that less than half (41 percent) of the media development organizations think that donors adopt a long-term approach. The majority feel that the fact that empowering relevant stakeholders and systems needs time, and sustainable strategic programming is often not acknowledged by funding agencies. Again, there is a mismatch between what the international organizations indicated (53 percent) and what regional (26 percent) and national/local organizations (43 percent) reported. While 53 percent of international organizations think that donors adopt a long-term approach, only 26 percent of regional organizations and 42 percent of national/local organizations feel the same way.

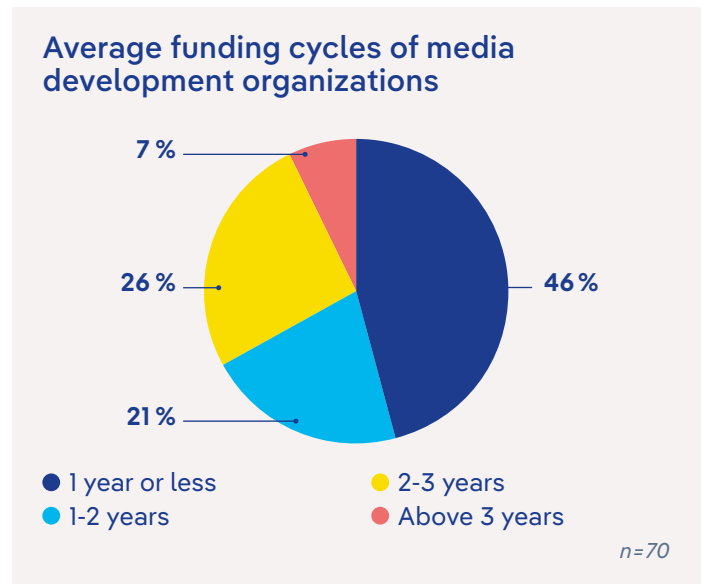


Figure 8: Item: How long is the average funding cycle of most projects at your organization?; Scale: open

The average duration of the funding cycle of the media development organizations surveyed is less than two years (22 months). Unsurprisingly, there were no large disparities between different types of organizations. This confirms that media development projects lean towards short-term funding. A closer look reveals that there are three distinct groups of organizations: Almost half of media developers (46 percent) face very short average funding cycles of one year or less. The short-term funding cycles were also repeatedly criticized in the key informant interviews. An interviewee from a media development organization in the MENA region, for instance, asserted: “Six months to a year is too short. This is something we can’t do. Honestly, the major donors working with us have gained trust in us, and they now work with us on medium and long-term projects.” Especially donor agencies from Scandinavian countries seem to be maintaining long-term

partnerships that, as some interviewees reported, have in some instances existed for decades. International media development organizations often see it as unpleasant to pass on the constraints exerted by donors with shorter funding cycles: “Of course, local partners are asking for longer term grants... [but all] they can get is an annual grant. That is because we need to annually report on it. Even though the project might be two or three years, we can’t give them two- or three-years’ commitment of money. It’s cumbersome, but it’s part of the donor requirements that we signed up for.”

Who and what are part of a whole of system approach to media support?

Another aspect of this approach is the diversity of actors that media development interventions address. Prior to digitalization, incumbent media outlets like newspapers, television and radio broadcasters dominated the media sector. Meanwhile, not only digital media outlets have gained in prominence but also smaller entities like small start-ups and podcasters, or even individual influencers and storytellers. Has the media development sector taken this into account?

Yes, it has. No new actors are neglected by the entire sector. Even storytellers are included by almost a third of the organizations (30 percent) in their project work. The same applies to actors such as individual content creators (40 percent), start-up media (43 percent) and podcasters (47 percent). Digital media are the target group that receives the most attention (77 percent). Traditional media only come after that. Broadcast media are addressed by almost two thirds (66 percent) of organizations, while even print media are covered by over half (52 percent). Respondents mentioned several other types of beneficiaries such as journalism schools, community media, citizen journalists and women-owned media.

In summary, the media development sector is taking the tectonic shifts within the media sector into account, while not entirely neglecting the incumbent journalistic media that still provide citizens with reliable, quality information. Supporting new actors, however, comes with its own challenges of defining journalistic professionalism, as the interviews revealed. A representative of a media development organization in the Baltics told us:

Media and information stakeholders supported



n=76-77

Figure 9: Item: Which of the following media and information stakeholders do you support?; Scale: yes/no



Sometimes donors say, ‘Let’s support influencers,’ but then the question arises: What kind of influencers? Who are influencers? This is such a wide term, and most of those people usually don’t have any codes of practice or ethics. I wouldn’t blame donors; it’s a situation where everyone is trying to understand the new role of media and how they can develop in this, for lack of a better word, crazy world.

Inclusiveness within the media development sector means including all stakeholders in deliberation and decision processes. According to our data, representation at multi-stakeholder forums is quite good, with almost half of the organizations reporting being included in the most important forums on policy, norms, experience exchanges and/or information sharing in their region. However, the proportion of international organizations (56 percent) is higher than that of regional, national and local organizations (46 percent), suggesting that greater efforts are needed to ensure that underrepresented voices are heard within the media development community. This was also confirmed by an interviewee in Southeast Europe who reported that local media development organizations are frequently excluded from coordination meetings and discussions on media development strategies: “Usually, donors do not invite us to attend and speak. The only time it happened in the past decade was last month, and it was only because one of our partners organized such an event for donors who support disinformation projects. In this way, we had the opportunity to talk to all donors and discuss the need for coordination.”

48%

Percentage of media development organizations that are included in important multi-stakeholder fora (n = 71)

Which elements of the broader information ecosystem do media development organizations contribute to? Media education (73 percent), access to information (66 percent), media research (65 percent) and journalism safety (57 percent) featured most prominently. Consultancy on legal frameworks (46 percent), media monitoring (44 percent), support of journalistic associations (42 percent), advocacy coalitions (38 percent) and support for media representative bodies (35 percent) were least represented. When

asked to name additional areas of support, respondents mentioned issues such as media viability/sustainability, peer and mental health support, as well as gender equality.



Figure 10: Item: To which of the following elements of a broader enabling environment for public interest media does your organization contribute (via capacity building, consultancy or advocacy)?; Scale: yes/no

What to do?

Considering the findings above, we gathered the following key recommendations for the media development sector to better meet Principle 3: “Take a whole of system perspective on supporting the media and information environment.”

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- **Make the data** you collect as part of analyses of the media and information environment **available to other organizations** to avoid duplication and research fatigue.
- **Actively communicate findings** on the media and information environment within your own organization and other (partner) organizations to ensure that they are implemented.
- Before starting your own analysis, **check** whether **similar research efforts** have already been carried out.
- Be open to **joint work on analyses across the media development sector** and help shape them.
- **Discuss specific needs for assessments** with your partners to ensure they produce actionable results.
- Go the extra mile to **ensure that all relevant stakeholders are included in assessments**, e.g. people in rural areas or speakers of local languages.
- **Talk to the donors** you have partnerships with **about funding cycles** and their implications for impact and project success.
- Check your **blind spots** in support for the broader enabling environment. **Advocacy coalitions, journalistic associations** and **media representative bodies** are underserved.
- There is an increasing diversity of media, journalism and information stakeholders. Try to **understand the work realities of new actors**, such as influencers, podcasters or content creators, and develop **mechanisms to determine** under which circumstances they are **suitable partners**.

Inspiration for donors:

- If possible, **abolish funding cycles of a year or less** where costs and benefits are disproportionate for grantees. Instead, invest in long-term partnerships.
- **Base your funding priorities on systematic assessments** of the media and information environment as well as of the audiences' needs to avoid wasting resources.
- Consider **establishing an independent body or consortium of actors to conduct these assessments**.
- **Exchange with other donors** on assessment results and **create synergies** when deciding on resulting funding priorities.



PRINCIPLE 4

Strengthen local leadership and ownership

In 2013, the development organization Panos Institute disbanded its headquarters in London. Had it failed? Were its managers, employees and founders no longer convinced that media development was worthwhile? On the contrary. It was restructured and is now the Panos Network, a decentralized group of institutes based in several countries in Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe. Each institute conducts valuable media development work under local rather than European leadership.

Panos epitomizes OECD Principle 4 which calls upon media development stakeholders to “strengthen local leadership and ownership, empowering media partners as well as other actors in the information environment such as civil society organizations and online content creators to meaningfully participate in policies and programmes.” This principle aims to foster meaningful participation of local actors in setting project priorities such that any interventions are relevant to local realities and meet the most important needs as determined by those living in that context, including underrepresented and marginalized groups. It also proposes more control, both conceptually and financially, of any selected projects by local actors, such that strategic decision-making, project and financial management and evaluation are largely in the hands of local actors. The rationale for strengthening local ownership and leadership is that it is a vital part of ensuring that development assistance makes a long-term difference.

Ways suggested by Principle 4 (see sub-principles 4) to meet the above goals include enhancing good practices for the meaningful participation of local actors; ensuring that assistance responses are bottom-up, evidence-based and demand-driven; tailoring assistance with particular attention to underrepresented and marginalized groups; working to ensure that a more significant share of ODA for media development reaches local and regional actors directly; and increasing the availability and accessibility of direct and flexible support, including core and long-term funding.

In view of the above, this study section asked interviewees and survey respondents about their role in ODA applications, their involvement in different parts of the project cycle, focus on underrepresented and marginalized groups, and share of ODA reaching local and regional partners directly.

Localization in the sense of increasing local ownership and leadership has three levels: First, empowering local organizations in countries around the world; second, meaningfully involving staff within international organizations based in these countries; and third, providing citizens with the information they need to make important decisions in their daily lives.

When it comes to empowering local organizations, there are again two types of actors in media development: public interest media as the primary target group that engages in quality journalism and provides citizens with reliable, timely information; and civil society organizations that strengthen the capacities of media practitioners and bolster the enabling environment.

An important change within the media development sector over the past few years has been the increased attention that core funding of public interest media has received. This is closely connected to the creation of the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM) in 2021, which injects money directly into existing public interest media.

The Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) has for many years been successful in this field. While it has a more commercial approach, it has the same objective: to invest directly into media outlets rather than have that money pass through multiple relay stations before reaching the actual target group.

Funding that directly reaches local and regional actors

A study commissioned by the OECD (Piron, 2024) found that only up to 8 percent of official development assistance (ODA) in the media development sector is directly channeled to media organizations in partner countries, such as journalists, media outlets and civil society organizations. As with the study conducted by CIMA (see chapter on Principle 2), this figure was based on the OECD Creditor Reporting System which is currently the only source for primary financial data but contains considerable gaps. Thus, our study sought to obtain secondary data from international organizations, asking them the percentage of their budgets that reached local and regional partners directly, and the percentage that was allocated to core funding of public interest media. This data is not weighted for the size of the organizations' budget and is thus a rough estimate of the proportion of funding flowing directly to organizations in partner countries.

On average, international media development organizations reported that about 40 percent of their funding reaches their local and regional partners. About half of that money was reported to flow into core funding of public interest media, with the overall average standing at just under 23 percent. Of course, these findings are at odds with the OECD study figure mentioned above. Although these data were drawn from different sources, this study's figures suggest that more money arrives at partner organizations than the OECD database numbers suggest.

40%

Average percentage of funding of media development organizations reaching local and regional actors directly (n = 14)

23%

Average percentage of funding of media development organizations allocated to core funding of public interest media (n = 14)

Meaningful involvement of local and regional organizations

For regional, national and local media development organizations, prioritizing local ownership and leadership implies having a meaningful role across all phases of the project cycle, from conceptualizing projects to evaluating them.

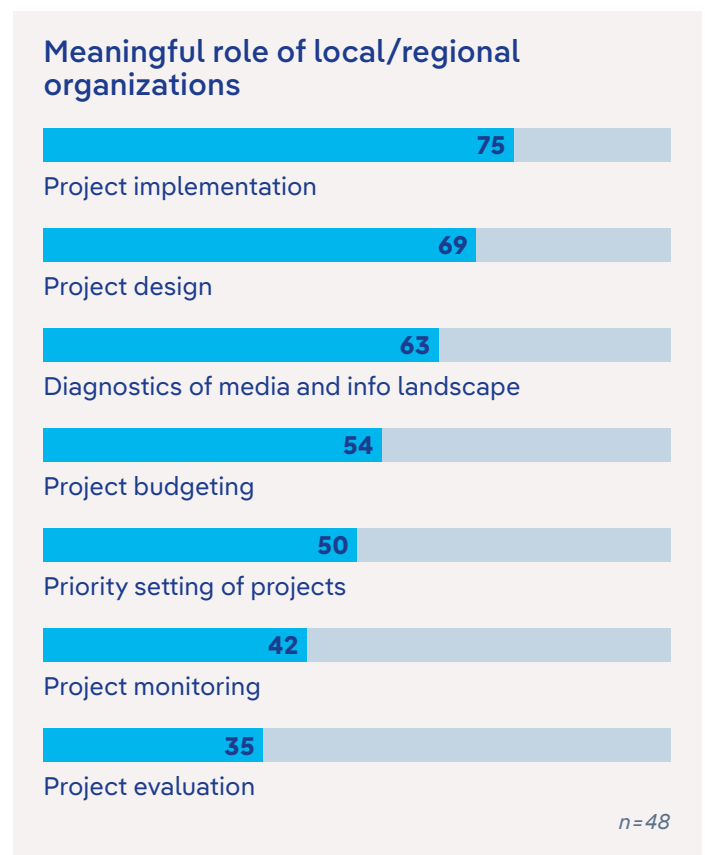


Figure 11: Item: In which of the following fields would you say that you are given a meaningful, participatory role (as opposed to simply doing what the donors or organizations we partner with want); Scale: yes/no

When asked to indicate aspects where they played a relevant role, organizations in partner countries reported having a decisive stake in project implementation (75 percent), design (69 percent), diagnostics of the media and information landscape (63 percent) and in budgeting (54 percent). They were least involved in setting the priorities of projects (50 percent), monitoring (42 percent) and project evaluation (35 percent).

This suggests that donors and international media organizations should focus more on meaningfully involving partner organizations in monitoring and evaluation and in determining the priorities of media development interventions in their own countries and regions.

The importance of meaningful involvement of local and regional organizations, starting from the nascent stages of project planning, was underlined by various interviewees. One expert from Eastern Africa explained that in some cases, local organizations were brought in only after the project idea had been conceptualized, thus putting them in the position of having to “align with predefined priorities rather than shaping the projects based on actual local needs.” This resulted in “misalignment between donor strategies and ground realities.”

Another interviewee from the same region shared an experience where “the project was conceptualized, designed, framework set, theory of change determined and then [I was] just told ‘now this is the way it’s gonna run.’” This led to a project that had “success without sustainability.”

Such experiences illustrate the power dynamics that impact working relationships between organizations at different levels and ultimately limit project impact. At the core, the “why” should be kept front and center, as captured by a media development expert from the MENA region:

“

I think it’s a waltz. Kind of two steps in, one step back and then the other way... at the core, the idea is: Nothing about us without us. And we need to make sure that the intervention is most helpful for the community we’re trying to serve rather than we need to show that we’re working on something.

But how are local, national, regional and international media development organizations working together? What role do they each play in funding applications? And is “parachuting” experts from one country into another still an issue? These are aspects the interviews delved into.

One thing that became clear from conversations with media development organizations, whether they work locally, regionally or internationally, is that local ownership and how it is applied needs to be a nuanced and ongoing discussion, bearing in mind that different approaches are appropriate for different contexts.

Funding applications: Who takes which role?

Regarding the roles organizations take in funding applications, interviewees from different world regions said that for philanthropic and regional donors, they either apply individually or in consortia with other organizations in their regions. For ODA funding, they tend to be co-applicants with international organizations. In some cases, the call for proposals requires that the lead applicant is from an ODA donor country. This “limits local organizations’ ability to secure independent financial resources and strategic control,” as one expert in Southern Africa stated. On the other hand, many smaller local and regional organizations lack the structures or capacity to prepare funding applications to the extent required, leading them to rely heavily on international partners for this.

In some cases, this works reasonably well. One interviewee from an Eastern European organization explained: “We prepare the concept, we prepare the ideas of activities... and they [international partner organizations] know how to put it into the application form and then they share the draft. And we propose our comments and ideas. So, then it’s a cool working process but they play the leading role because they have more capacities. Not because we don’t want to be the leading partner. But just because they have more capacities in that.”

However, while participating as a co-applicant allows for collaboration and shared expertise, several interviewees pointed out that it limits decision-making autonomy. An interviewee from an organization in the MENA region commented that “we would be open to being considered a lead applicant in some cases, as this would provide us more autonomy in managing the projects and ensuring that the initiatives are aligned with our organization’s specific goals and local context. Being a lead applicant could also help us establish stronger ownership and responsibility over the implementation and outcomes of the projects.”

There is therefore a wish for more capacity and more control in funds management. An expert from Western Africa commented:

“

If our international donors/partners really want to help us, they would help us develop our local skills. That is to say, train our local trainers who would take over from their own international experts.

While the data show that international organizations often still play the role of lead applicant in ODA funding applications, there is also a sense that the trend is slowly shifting as local and regional organizations develop their capacities. An international organization representative shared an example of a multilateral donor project carried out in a partner country where the lead is to be a regional organization:

“

They are the lead and we are co-applicant with [another partner organization] and so it's the first time that an organization from the South for us is the lead and we are co-applicant. And yes, I must say, at first we [were hesitant] but we had several discussions with them. They were able to show us that they already manage [multilateral] money, that they have experience... but it's the first time in 30 years... I think it's good. And you know, it totally makes sense... but I think this is something 10 years ago we would have been like, no, this is not going to fly. We don't want to take the risk.

This trend is expected to grow.

The phenomenon of “parachuting in” foreign experts

As far as “parachuting in” external experts to partner countries rather than using local expertise is concerned, most interviewees believe that such use of foreign experts is not happening on as large a scale as it used to, although it still exists.

They pointed out that in some countries and regions, there has been continued growth in skill and knowledge over the years. Therefore, it makes most sense to call on internal rather than external experts.

In some regions, however, capacities still need to be developed, and some niche topics lack local experts. In addition, instead of looking at the issue in a binary way, i.e. “local is good and foreign is bad,” the priority should be on effectiveness, as one interviewee emphasized:

“

What is needed is to find the best expert in topic A, another best expert or expert in topic B. If the best experts are from the global North yes, if the best experts are available locally then better. So, it's not a question of where they come from. [The question] is: what value do they bring to the discussion? The ability to achieve the result at the best, at the most complete, effective, efficient and sustainable way.

What inhibits local ownership and leadership?

Several challenges, however, still hinder the strengthening of local ownership and leadership, that is, putting local interests and considerations first; although it has been a subject of discussion and efforts for at least 20 years. Interviewees highlighted several challenges:

Lack of trust: Funders often do not trust smaller, newer organizations which do not have specific administrative capacities, even if they are efficiently working at the grassroots level. This results in a preference for working with intermediary organizations that may not always be a good fit for the context.

Funder decisions: In some instances, an international organization with no prior experience of a particular region or context and no long-standing relationship with local partners is selected by funders—often from its own country of origin—to carry out a project. While this may be a more comfortable arrangement for the funders, it sidelines those who are most experienced.

Mental barriers: In some regions, there is still a tendency to defer to foreign rather than local knowledge and expertise. The idea that “if you are international, you must know more than we do” was mentioned critically by several Latin American interviewees.

Shifting values: As geopolitics shift and less democratic values gain influence both globally and in many donor countries, international media development organizations find themselves having to justify their work and foci to funders at home. As explained by a Western European organization representative: “Now there is this movement [of the far right] and we are also preparing for this because

if we are asked we might have to answer: ‘OK, you are addressing local needs fine, but how are you addressing [funder country] needs?’ Obviously, this makes it just more complex.”

Good practices around local ownership and leadership

There are, however, ongoing good practices, such as:

- international organizations advertising for local experts and collaborating with national partners to source local experts
 - taking a regional approach to sourcing experts (not only from a country but also from a region when applicable)
 - international organizations offering local partners several experts to choose from. One interviewee explained their organization’s approach: “We always tend to do like a speed dating before... we don’t just allocate a consultant and say ‘this is your consultant.’ They’ll meet and talk to perhaps two or three and they’ll decide what’s the best fit for this organization. Because if the media organization is not going to buy into it, there’s no point in doing it. If they don’t have trust in the in the consultant, it’s not going to work”
 - in cases where donor priorities and recipient priorities differ, listening to local organizations and going back to the donor to negotiate for a change of focus when a project idea is not relevant for the context. This can be very worthwhile but demands some courage, as one interviewee mentioned: “It means you need to kind of have the guts to go back to the donor and explain... In the end it has to be useful and you don’t want to waste money and energy and time.”
- Apart from the above-mentioned existing good practices, other ways to strengthen local ownership and leadership could include:
- capacity-building for grant-writing and compliance
 - apprenticeship models for reporting training to build capacity
 - consortium applications with both local and international organizations, with different partners bringing in their unique capacities to enhance an intervention
 - establishment of a local fund to unlock money from local sources

The role of international organizations’ local staff

Beyond public interest media and media development NGOs, international organizations also employ staff in partner countries.

73%

International organizations reporting that local staff is given a meaningful role in conceptualizing projects (n = 14)

79%

International organizations reporting that local staff is given a meaningful role in managing projects (n = 14)

When asked to indicate whether their local staff was given meaningful roles in conceptualizing projects and managing them, the majority of respondents (73 percent and 79 percent) felt that this was the case. It would have been interesting to corroborate these findings by asking the local staff directly, but that was beyond the scope of this study.

From the interviews, there are several examples of positive shifts happening in international organizations, such as:

- a “location-agnostic” approach to hiring, and a deliberate move to hire from outside of an organization’s [OECD] home country
- positions that were formerly staffed by expatriates are now staffed by local experts
- deliberately including local and regional staff in the key decision-making organs in the organization
- moving decision-making as close to the ground as possible, rather than centralizing decision-making in the home country of the international organization

– change of mindset: for one long-standing international organization, an interviewee said: “We don’t think of it as local staff. We probably have 30 nationalities, ethnicities in the organization. So our Africa director is African, our Latin America director is from [a country in Latin America]. It’s not a hard and fast rule, but I think we are sort of quite fluid. We’ve got some Indians in India, we’ve got Malaysians in Malaysia...”

These are promising signs that give hope for more equitable, truly international organizations in the future.

Focus on underrepresented or marginalized groups

Human-rights-based approaches encourage focusing on underrepresented and marginalized segments of the population in countries where media development organizations work. To what extent does media development take this seriously?

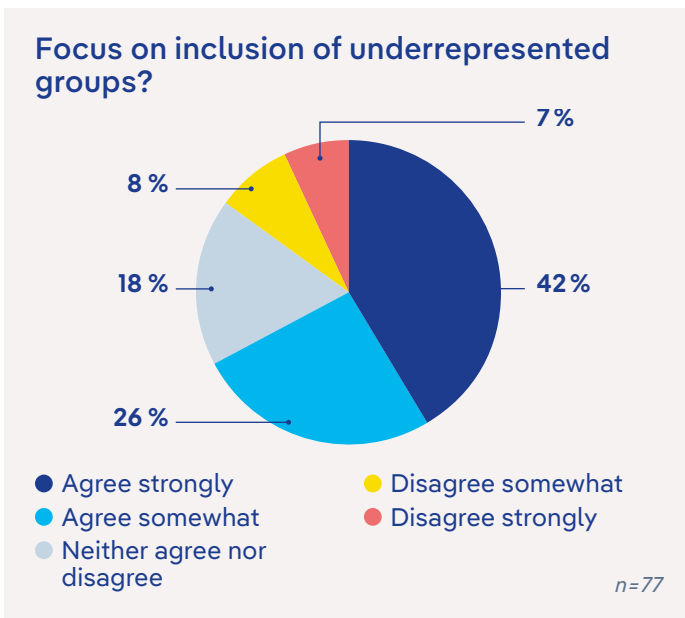


Figure 12: Item: Our organization focuses strongly on providing underrepresented and marginalized groups with reliable information and opportunities to voice their opinions; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

This study finds that roughly two thirds (68 percent) of the surveyed organizations have a strong focus on underrepresented or marginalized groups. Amplifying their voices and providing them with reliable information seems to be a key cornerstone in media development work world-wide.

Organizations are impacting their communities in different ways, such as:

“**Developing a series of training processes for communicators in the communities, so that we can teach them what an algorithm is, how it works and how they can help their community train the trainable algorithms, to consume less junk content and have more access to quality informative content, more local content.**”

Organization from Latin America

“**Raising awareness through capacity building, campaigns, advocacy, research, fact-checking, and technological innovation... focus on promoting human rights, ensuring individual safety, and strengthening collective efforts.**”

Organization from MENA

“**Training programs for community radio stations and the development of a gender policy for community radio.**”

Organization from Southern Asia

“**For journalists in exile, fellowships run for three months and provide participants with a monthly stipend, as well as safe housing – not just for themselves but also for accompanying family members, including spouses, partners, and children.**”

Organization from Southeast Asia

These examples underline the fact that local ownership and leadership entails “tailoring assistance to each individual context and with particular attention to underrepresented and marginalized groups.” (OECD Principle 4)

What to do?

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- Keep in mind that engagement in early-stage planning results in more commitment to outcomes, so **involve local and regional partners in project priority-setting** rather than bringing them in when the project concept is already set.
- Local and regional partners should play a more meaningful role in developing and finalizing the project framework and milestones and subsequently, **in monitoring and evaluating** them.
- Even after a project begins, **listen to local and regional partners on what is most important** to them and have some flexibility to adapt accordingly.
- As part of joint project implementation, have an **organizational development** component that focuses on developing capacities, such that in the long run, a local or regional organization has enough capacity to competitively apply for a grant.
- Similarly, international media development organizations should **invest in supporting capacity development where it may be lacking** in terms of local expertise, and prioritize and trust local expertise more.
- As far as possible, **make use of existent expert local and regional expert networks** before opting for an expert from outside the region.
- For local and regional experts and media development organizations, **invest in further developing own capacity** through taking advantage of available information e.g. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
- As part of growth in expertise and leadership, local and regional media development experts and organizations may consider formally **developing local and regional expert networks that are easy to contact**.
- Work towards **more equal decision-making power for all partners** involved in a project, regardless of whether they played the role of the lead applicant or co-applicant in the project funding application.
- For international media organizations, consider focusing on **increasing the amount of funding available to partners rather than on expanding own organizational structure**.

Inspiration for donors:

- Require **documented involvement of local and regional partners in project conceptualization**, and not just implementation.
- Have more **flexibility in funding that allows for adaptation of projects** in response to locally expressed priorities.
- Require, in the long term, **capacity-building of local and regional partners** such that they can play a leading role in future projects.
- From the ODA funding provided directly or through international media development organizations, set a **minimum percentage of funding that should reach local and regional organizations**.
- Where possible, in addition to the formal written application process, **scope the field to ensure that funding goes to organizations with genuine impact**, rather than those with the best proposal-writing skills.



PRINCIPLE 5

Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment

In 2019, over 50 nation states gathered in the UK at the Global Conference for Media Freedom. It was the first multilateral conference of this scale exclusively dedicated to issues of media freedom. The most important outcome was the establishment of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) Working Group on Media Development, a partnership of over 50 countries to advocate for media freedom (MFC, 2025). MFC member states draw on civil society and legal support, as well as on collaboration with international bodies like UNESCO.

Though an early evaluation report found that the coalition had only partially achieved its objectives, it did note that the coalition had “taken some positive steps towards its ambitious goals, including attracting a relatively large membership and establishing collegiate ways of working.” It also registered early successes such as member states making improvements regarding media freedom as a result of joining the coalition (Myers et al., 2022).

Other important bodies for sector coordination include the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and the Action Coalition on Information Integrity in Elections under the auspices of UNDP.

Of course, the OECD Principles themselves, which this study aims to monitor, are witness to an increased awareness that media development constitutes a sector with common standards, goals and values. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Principle 5 recommends improving “coordination of support to the media and information environment, both among donor agencies and between development and diplomatic efforts to support media freedom, especially in contexts of crisis.”

Who is part of media development coordination?

Donor and sector-wide coordination certainly takes place at the international level. But coordination should not be restricted to multilateralism. Organizations also need to align at the regional, national and local levels to ensure that activities on the ground are complementary rather than redundant.

Local/regional: Meaningful involvement in sector coordination?

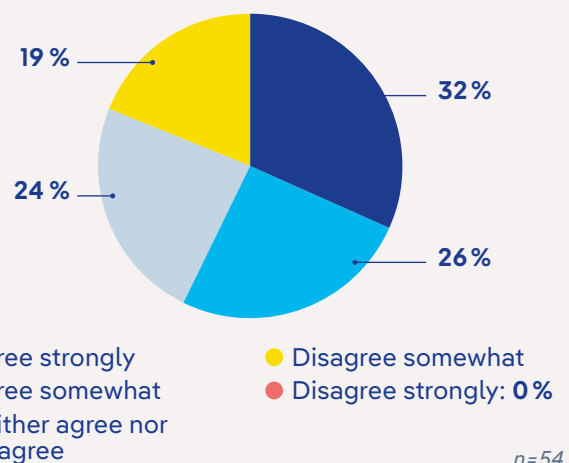


Figure 13: Item: Our organization is meaningfully involved in media development coordination efforts in our country or countries; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

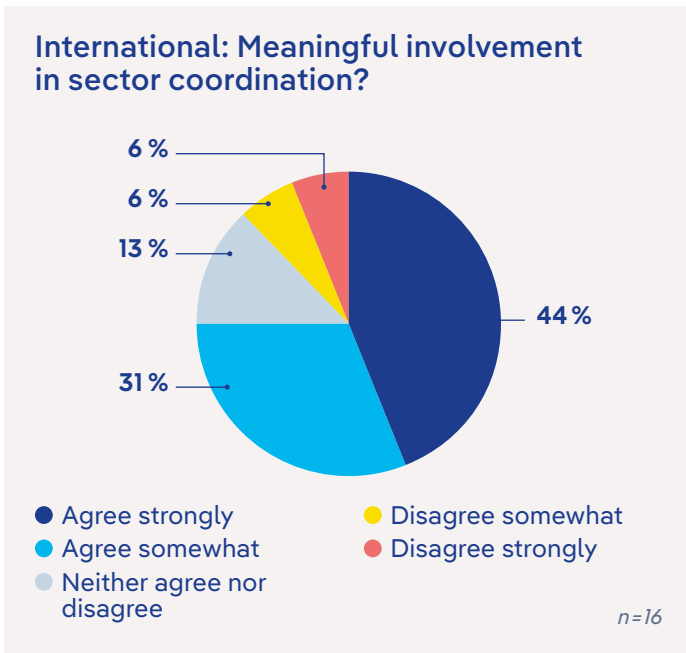


Figure 14: Item: We meaningfully involve regional/local partners in media development coordination efforts in the countries we work in; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

Over half of the respondents (58 percent) from organizations based in non-OECD countries report a meaningful participation in media development coordination. This figure is net positive but the proportion of international organizations reporting that they meaningfully involve their regional/national/local partners in coordination efforts is considerably higher: 75 percent. This suggests a mismatch between the perceptions of both types of organizations.

Some contributing factors to this mismatch may be instances such as those mentioned by an Eastern European interviewee:

“*In the past, donors organized meetings from time to time, but they do not invite local organizations. They invite only international organizations and donors. In 2010, we were invited to present our projects, and they mapped the sector to avoid duplicating projects. They are not doing this right now. My understanding is that they don’t ask us, so I don’t know how they get this information.*

This lack of involvement of local organizations impacts on the legitimacy and contextual appropriateness of whatever initiative may be planned. Coordination carried out in this manner is quite likely to lack local ownership and leadership, which underlines the fact that strengthening local ownership and leadership (Principle 4) is not only about projects, but also about whole-sector strategy.

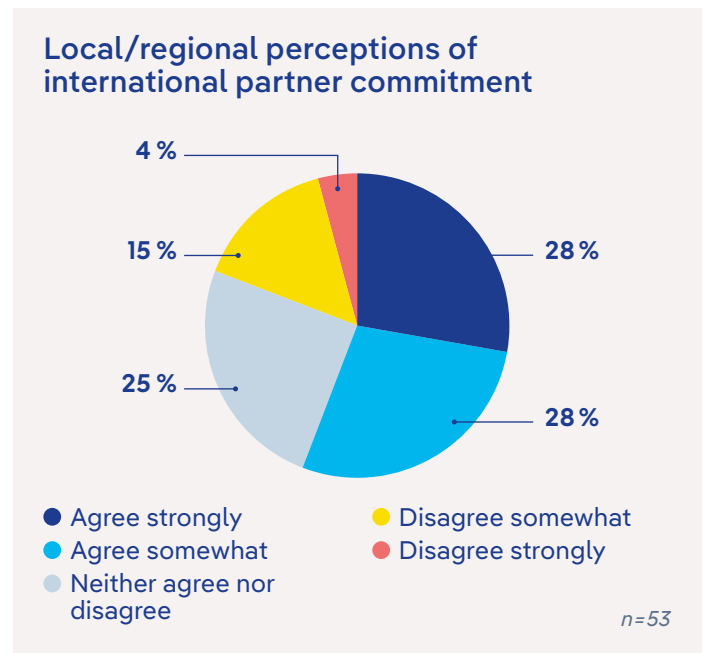


Figure 15: Item: Donors and international organizations take their responsibilities towards us as a regional/local organization seriously; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

The same mismatch can be observed concerning the question of whether donors and international organizations take their responsibility towards regional/local organizations seriously. While only 56 percent of regional/national/local organizations think this is the case, 81 percent of international organizations are convinced they take this role seriously.

Thus, international organizations and donors are called upon to ensure that duty of care is upheld in relation to organizations being contracted in partner countries. This seems to be the case for the majority, but not all partner organizations.

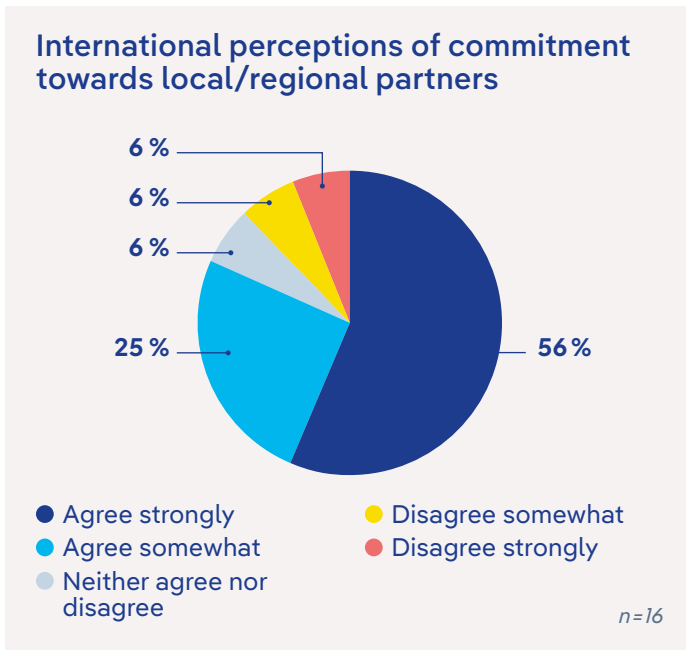


Figure 16: Item: We take our responsibilities towards regional/local organizations seriously; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1-5

Effective coordination in crises?

Coordination is particularly important in cases of crisis, as has been witnessed over the past five years by events in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine and other parts of the world. Do media development organizations feel that the sector coordinates effectively in such times of acute need?

This is definitely not the case. Less than one third (30 percent) of the surveyed organizations believe that swift coordination to support affected media outlets in situations of crisis is the rule. As with donor and foreign agencies in general, the media development sector is often caught off guard by rapid developments that jeopardize people and organizations but also destroy what has been achieved within short periods of time.

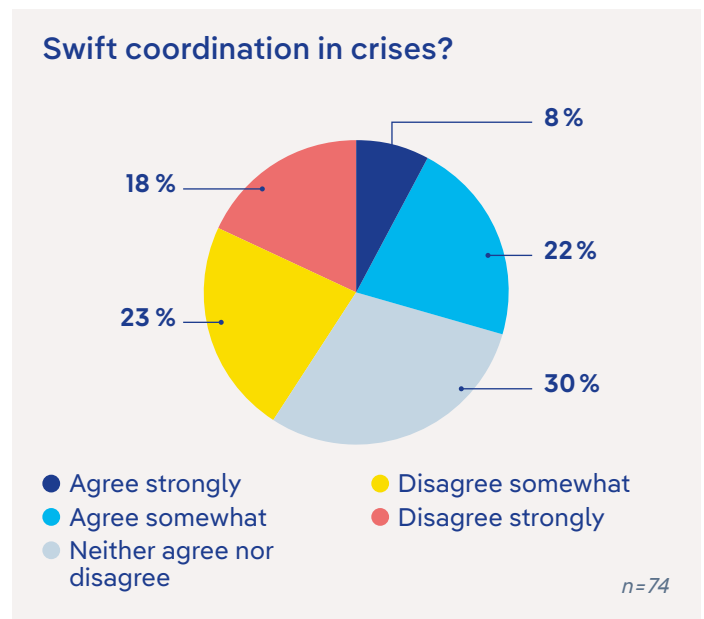


Figure 17: Item: In cases of crisis, media development organizations and donors swiftly coordinate to support affected media outlets; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1-5

Interviewees linked this unpreparedness and slow response to a seeming failure by international actors to learn from previous crises. As a media development consultant in Eastern Europe commented: “Like in the Georgian context, because of backsliding on democracy completely and the government derailing on the support of the media sector... when crises like this happened, you could just usually use the example of other countries, such as Belarus, Serbia, Russia and you can see the general data and the research. So... someone working on Belarus issues [could have shared] how it started in Belarus... with donors who were planning projects in Georgia. That would have been very nice.”

On the other hand, local and regional organizations do not stand back and wait for international help: they have developed crisis coordination and emergency support mechanisms and support each other when regional crises arise.

For instance, in Latin America: “We have many crises, and [a regional organization] has played an important role in coordinating the actors within these crises in order to continue doing in-depth journalistic work in the midst of extreme circumstances...”, one interviewee reported.

Regarding the MENA region, an interviewee said: “We were the ones who helped journalists in [a particular crisis]. We did new things for the organization like fund-raising because they are our colleagues who have been trained by us for 20 years. We trained 900 journalists...”

In Eastern Europe, remarked another interviewee, “the exile media situation in 2022 was a good example. The organizations collaborated to help Russian journalists relocate and handle legal issues. We coordinated effectively with donors and government institutions. The scope of work was huge, which is why a lot of organizations combined their efforts. Usually, on a daily basis, they would compete with each other, but in this case, they understood the common need. Coordinating with donors was also crucial.”

An interviewee in Southern Africa commented that:

“

We had the issues of internet shutdowns in this region, which were pronounced from 2021 to date, you talk of Eswatini, Zambia, Zimbabwe, talk of Mozambique is the most recent. And our approach was to galvanize the space of African voices, petition at different levels, target the mobile network operators [who] were... forced to shut down, and then go to court [in] that jurisdiction to force the internet shutdown to end. That’s how we ended the shutdown in Zimbabwe in 2019, in 2021 in Zambia, the throttling recently in Mozambique... So the strategy was to use case studies across countries facing the same issue. It’s utilizing organic knowledge and relationships.

Thus, crisis coordination by regional and local actors currently seems to be the most effective way in which crises are being dealt with.

There are, however, also positive examples of crisis coordination by international actors as, for example, in Tunisia. During the revolutionary uprisings in the MENA region from 2011 on, a bilateral donor funded the position of a media coordinator in Tunisia. According to an interviewee, the person “had [...] to coordinate the media sector to make the bridge and the relationship with the Tunisian media institution [and] the authorities, and that was very efficient, very well done and very useful... and if the donors could learn from this and make sure that in some of these big moments or big crisis there is one position...with no hidden agenda and so forth, it would be great”.

In the case of Afghanistan, once international media development organizations started offering support, they formed coordination committees to, as one interviewee

said, verify and “keep logs of who was being evacuated and supported,” which minimized duplication of efforts.

Journalists’ safety is also an area in which international media development organizations seem to be doing relatively well in coordinating action. According to interviewees, there is a strong informal network of staff in organizations working on journalism safety and who discuss and refer cases to each other on a trust basis.

Collaborative crisis response with a trusted local organization in the lead is also a model that can be explored further. A good example mentioned by several interviewees was the Lebanon Media Recovery Fund. As part of this initiative, a local organization, the Samir Kassir Foundation, led crisis response in collaboration with international actors following hugely destructive explosions in the port of Beirut in 2020. Response efforts targeted journalists. The foundation mobilized international funding, set priorities for the fund, managed and accounted for it.

Coordination is, however, not only important during crises. Representatives of all types of media development organizations underlined the importance of continuous coordination to ensure maximum impact. Unfortunately, regular coordination does not always take place. Several challenges were identified, including:

- Limited coordination among donors due to “political agenda positioning.” According to interviewees, this has sometimes led to “a flood of resources in whatever topic is fashionable,” as well as multiple funders “supporting the same partners in a country, not necessarily thinking about...what segment of the media market they’re supporting.” This results in organizations being overfunded for one topic while being underfunded for other important topics or organizational needs. Another result is skewed media markets that are strong in some aspects but underdeveloped in others, interviewees remarked.
- Competition rather than collaboration among media development organizations. Because of how the sector is structured, media development organizations sometimes compete for the same pot of funds. This is a disincentive for collaboration and learning because no organization would like to share their failures with a competitor who may use the information to their own advantage.
- Descriptive rather than strategic coordination. Since many media development organizations receive funding that is already earmarked for specific projects,

coordination on the ground consists of exchanging information on current activities rather than collaborative strategic planning and early-stage preparatory thinking. This argues for giving more decision-making power closer to where project implementation happens.

- More focus on the “what” than the “how.” In some instances, coordination has been more at the conceptual level rather than the practical level. While conceptual clarity is valuable, if it does not result in tangible action, then it has limited impact. As remarked by a representative of an organization from the MENA region, while there is relatively effective coordination of discussions, “There is always a gap between the discussion and the steps that follow [and] we... end up stuck at the discussion stage without any real outcome.”

Administrative requirements: How to ease them?

One topic also featured in OECD Principle 5 is the streamlining of administrative requirements and incorporation of adaptive and flexible fund management processes.

It was to be expected that especially partner organizations with limited capacities would rally around this cause. However, the survey and the interviews rendered a quite incoherent picture.

Whereas only 40 percent of the respondents in the online survey reported their organizations face a heavy administrative burden, many interviewees reported otherwise.

40%

Percentage of media development organizations that say administrative requirements are a burden (n = 73)

This may be due to social desirability, i.e. that the surveyed organizations that receive funding from international organizations or donors do not want to appear ungrateful and as if funding is a heavy burden rather than an asset to them. Local (34 percent) and regional (26 percent) appraisals of whether the administrative requirements constitute a heavy burden were extremely at odds with international organizations (69 percent) and seem to support this assumption.

Efficient fund management processes?

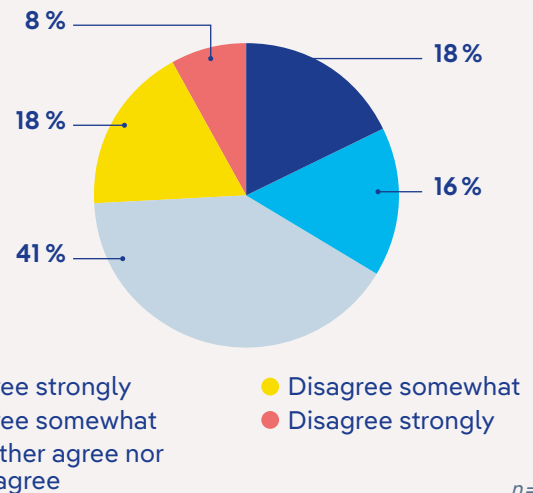


Figure 18: Item: Our donors/organizations we partner with offer efficient processes for managing funds; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

Additional evidence in line with this take is the widely acknowledged fact that processes for managing funds are often inefficient. Only roughly a third (34 percent) of all surveyed media development organizations thought that donors or organizations they partnered with offer efficient processes. 25 percent of international, 32 percent of regional and 38 percent of national/local organizations felt that this was the case. This data seems to be more in line with what organizations based in partner countries reported.

Some interviewees saw the administrative requirements as a necessity they were well-equipped to deal with and as an opportunity to assess how project implementation was proceeding; others saw them as unnecessarily repetitive and taking away precious time from the actual implementation of activities.

Pain points as far as administrative requirements are concerned include:

- repetitive due diligence requirements (with the same documents required by different donors in the same time period)
- a lack of harmonization of standards by different funders
- funders asking for data that is not useful for the organization itself

- complex procurement procedures
- inadequate or inexistent funding for the required administration (i.e. funders' requirements of a high amount of documentation and reporting with no provision of resources for it)

For organizations that do not have dedicated people for monitoring and reporting, staff juggle multiple roles to fill in the administrative gap while still handling project implementation. This may lead to burnout and reduced project effectiveness, as one interviewee cautioned:

“

Most of our time is invested in administrative tasks rather than actual activities. This is a common issue when working with donors, especially those that are very bureaucratic, as they require a lot of paperwork instead of focusing on the actual work... It means that we don't pay as much attention to the actual work or activities on the ground. Our priorities shift towards completing the paperwork.

Another challenge centers around donors not adapting their requirements to local contexts. For instance, according to interviewees, donors tend not to cover project costs related to exchange rate fluctuation. Another example was of a journalist who was only able to participate in a training if she could bring her child along. However, there was no provision for extra transport and meal costs needed for this. Overall, interviewees felt that there is an expectation that the organization accounts for the funds as they were originally budgeted, with little flexibility regarding changing circumstances.

The administrative requirements and how to deal with them highlighted the intermediary role of international media development organizations: International organizations tend to see their role as "navigating the complexities of bureaucracy and ensuring funds are made available without burdening partners with every detail," as one interviewee said. On the other hand, interviewees from local and regional organizations wished that international organizations would also play a negotiation role with the funders to find ways to reduce the administrative burden. An expert working for a Southern Asian organization summarized:

“

We don't typically have direct access to the donor, but the international media development organizations feel more comfortable giving us instructions rather than requesting changes from the donor. This is the problem.

What to do?

This chapter has looked at sector coordination and the question of administrative requirements. The following recommendations address these aspects.

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- **Meaningfully involve regional/national/local organizations in coordination.** This would require asking these organizations what is most important for them coordination-wise.
- **Lobby for the invitation of local and regional partners to coordination meetings** if they have not already been invited by donors.
- For local and regional organizations, **develop your own country and regional media development agenda** so that local and regional efforts work towards the same goals and priorities can be articulated by different organizations in the field.
- For local, regional and international organizations, **come to a consensus on what meaningful coordination entails** and implement it.
- For international organizations, **regularly check back with local and regional partners** on how well you are doing in fulfilling your responsibilities towards these partners.
- For international organizations, **invest more decision-making power in those on the ground** or working closest to the specific market you are working in.
- **Support and collaborate with local and regional organizations already coordinating in the countries or regions**, such as SembraMedia and Connectas in Latin America, ARIJ in the MENA region, AMIC in Asia and others; they already have a network of organizations that they coordinate, have established legitimacy

over the years and are familiar with the peculiarities of the context. A good example of cross-continental collaboration is the Asian Media and Communication Centre (AMIC), which has initiated the Africa-Asia-Pacific dialogue on media development issues. As a representative explained, “we want to learn more about what’s happening in Africa and explore what we can share and exchange because we have many commonalities with Africa. If you recall, we had the Bandung Conference [the first large scale Afro-Asian conference] of 1955, and when we went to Bandung two years ago, we rekindled interest in the Bandung Declaration and the need for more collaboration between Asia and Africa. So, that’s an area I hope the principles will address, as well as the topic of decolonialization.”

- **Learn from past crises to move faster in upcoming crises** and make a point of sharing the lessons with those in crisis, instead of starting from scratch each time. While no two contexts are exactly alike, this would reduce the time it takes to act in urgent situations.
- **Work from a shared vision of the market.** Media development organizations should look at the bigger picture and craft a shared vision for a particular market they are working in, instead of working in project-focused pockets.
- **Local and global coordination.** Rather than approaching coordination as an either/or issue (done either by local organizations or by international ones), collaborate more between local and international organizations because each brings different strengths to the table.
- **Embrace small steps towards coordination.** This does not have to be a formal, high-level collaboration; it could be as simple as creating a shared group on a messaging app to exchange information and seek insights before implementing a project in a particular context.
- **Allocate resources for coordination.** In addition to budgeting for activities, set aside resources for coordination.
- **Openness to coordinating with new actors.** As the media and information environment undergoes a rapid evolution, organizations, actors and approaches that were traditionally not seen to be part of the media development sector now have an increasing importance and impact. Also, new players are coming up, so it is important to consider the whole spectrum of actors and approaches to mitigate blind spots. As stated by a representative of a Latin American organization, “the actors

are talking to others, as someone says, with the ‘usual suspects.’ Why isn’t that conversation happening with us and why don’t those funds also reach those of us on the ground doing the work?”

- **Consider new, innovative ways of collaborating in crises**, e.g. by introducing the collaborative use of online tools to amplify topics that need attention.
- For international media development organizations playing an intermediary role, **negotiate with donors** on behalf of beneficiary organizations when particularly burdensome or unreasonable reporting data are required. Where the demands are non-negotiable, invest in building capacities to meet them in a way that does not take away from an organization’s core priorities.
- **Invest in developing strategic coordination networks**, such as the Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) initiative in which over 10 organizations have come together to create a common framework for joint action in the field of media viability.

Inspiration for donors:

- If not already doing so, **invite local and regional organizations to coordination meetings.**
- Have regular **donor roundtables with local and regional organizations**, and not just with governments.
- Set and finalize **reporting requirements in collaboration with the project implementing organizations** so that an unrealistic burden is not imposed on them.
- **Think long-term in terms of desired impact** and small steps that lead to it, and use this to determine the evidence needed to show impact rather than mere proof of activity, i.e. prioritize documentation around effectiveness rather than day-to-day expenses.
- **Harmonize reporting requirements across donors** such that the same documentation is acceptable for multiple donors, for instance for due diligence reports and financial audits.
- Consider **basket funding** for some large-scale projects or organizations; in this case, require only one set of reporting.

- Have more **flexibility with respect to different contexts/adapt to local contexts**. For instance, when working in fragile and war contexts, carry out sufficient context analysis and risk assessment to avoid setting requirements that cannot be sufficiently met by the implementing organization.
- **Have longer reporting cycles**, such as quarterly rather than monthly or even weekly reporting.
- Where possible, ask for **reporting data that is relevant to the organization**, e.g. changes in audience reach, in revenue, and so on for a media organization.
- After a rigorous selection process, **have more flexible reporting procedures** to allow organizations to actually do the work they have been selected for.
- **Provide core funding** to organizations to enable them to hire for tasks such as monitoring and evaluation.
- Give **younger and/or newer organizations** a chance by granting them **more trust**.



PRINCIPLE 6

Invest in knowledge, research and learning

In 2021, the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) launched the International Media Policy and Advisory Centre (GFMD Impact). The initiative aims to bring together key media development and journalism support stakeholders to boost the effectiveness and impact of sector support. The program has provided donors, funders, policymakers and practitioners with an evidence base to make informed decisions about media development and journalism support strategies, programming, funding and advocacy.

Mark Nelson, then Senior Director of CIMA, the now-hibernated US-based think tank that has spearheaded such research over the past two decades, reiterated the initiative’s importance for the media development sector by underlining that, “we must share knowledge and learn about what works and what doesn’t, as well as catalog that knowledge, in order to achieve better results and articulate those results.” (GFMD, 2021)

This spirit of sharing and wanting to know about effective and impactful support practices is at the heart of OECD Principle 6 that urges donors and media developers to “invest in knowledge, research, and learning,” and to not only learn for themselves, but also contribute to a learning agenda that enables the entire sector to continue improving support.

Availability of research

A wealth of data is produced in media development projects as a part of needs assessments, baseline studies and general monitoring and evaluation efforts. This evidence base can be used to optimize effectiveness and efficiency.

However, organizations need to go beyond low-level project-specific research and share what they have learned with others. This contributes to a sector-wide

culture of learning and knowledge-sharing, ensuring that media development draws from a common base of evidence and continues to improve.

This presupposes that best practices and learnings from media development approaches are sufficiently available. The study finds that more than half of the organizations surveyed (58 percent) affirm that such insights are generally accessible.

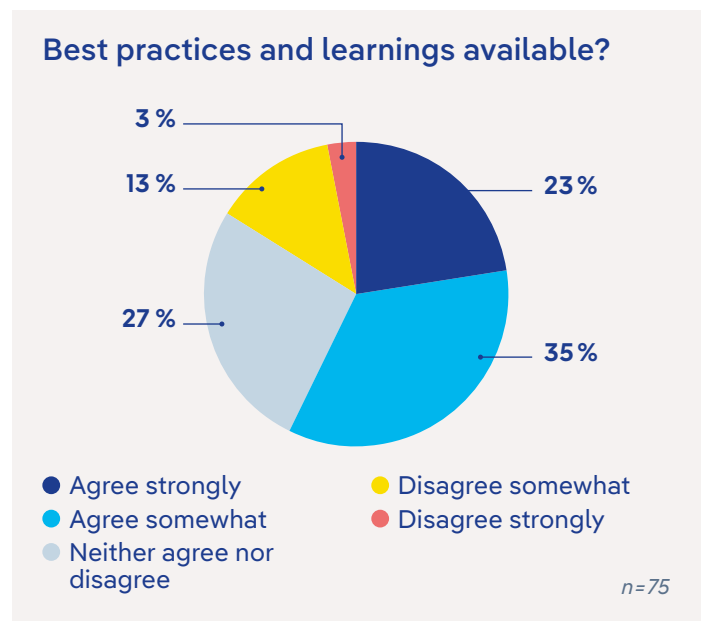


Figure 19: Item: Best practices and learnings from media development approaches are sufficiently available to us; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

This applies to all levels of organizations and shows that there are no disparities regarding the availability between international and regional/national/local organizations. But efforts can certainly be stepped up, given that over a quarter of organizations are unsure (27 percent) and 16 percent indicate that they do not think that best practices and lessons learned are readily available.

What type of research do organizations find useful?

In addition to the many region-specific examples of useful research mentioned in the key informant interviews, such as the capacity gap analysis for Eastern Europe conducted by the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (2023), multi-regional studies enable media development practitioners to draw comparisons and generalize lessons learned from different contexts.

Another project focusing on gathering evidence is the PRIMED project spearheaded by BBC Media Action; it prioritized sector learning on issues like financial viability and coalition-building (BBC MA 2024).

These kinds of resource intensive efforts often occur under the auspices of international organizations. However, there are exceptions. The global Project Oasis that maps independent digital media organizations, news creators and publishers-in-exile across 68 countries is helmed by SembraMedia (2025), an initiative based predominantly in Latin America. SembraMedia also conducted the Inflection Point study on digital media entrepreneurs in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa. (SembraMedia 2021)

Regular global reports that interviewees found particularly helpful are those by organizations like Reporters without Borders, Freedom House, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the International Center for Journalists, International News Media Association and IREX. Experts also mentioned more foundational work focused on democracy, such as that done by V-Dem.

Some of these reports source studies conducted at the country level by media development organizations and thus serve as a platform to make such results more widely accessible. Beyond these bird's eye reports, interviewees found more fine-grained needs assessments to also be valuable. Finally, they considered classic market research into audience behavior to be of use and stressed the importance of studies that tested new approaches.

Generally, research found to be particularly useful by media development practitioners focused on topics such as regulation, digital transformation and innovation, viability and sustainability, democratization and audience behavior.

Criteria for useful research

When asked to name important criteria that useful research should adhere to, interviewees emphasized that it should be applicable and actionable rather than theoretical. Results should be valid and methods transparent.

Among the media developers interviewed was a preference for research that uses mixed methods (quantitative for scale and representativeness, qualitative for depth and lucidity). Representatives of larger organizations further mentioned a need for more rigorous approaches like randomized control trials, the gold standard method for researchers wanting to prove that interventions are having an effect. However, interviewees admitted that these types of studies are not feasible for all organizations.

The familiar metaphor “standing on the shoulders of giants” also reminds one that research rarely raises completely new questions. Rather, new studies need to take previous ones into account. One expert emphasized that the sector needs to acknowledge the valuable research already being done before moving on and producing more, and put the results to use during project implementation. Another interviewee warned of tendencies towards “reinventing the wheel.”

Interviewees also emphasized the importance of making the research available to the intended target audience:



There is research that is aimed at impacting policy, and behavior and decisions. Where you kind of prove a point. You have other types of research that are more kind of to draw lessons for our own [...] knowledge and programming. 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 your intent, in terms of making sure that X person or Y institution reads it and uses it. So, my comment [...] is more related to making it more accessible for those who need to read it, rather than just having yet another report.

Principle 3 looked at whether media development organizations are included in multi-stakeholder forums to advocate for freedom of expression and access to information. Several interview partners, however, suggested that this aspect was also part of increased knowledge sharing as addressed by Principle 6. Hence, it would be good, they suggested, to feed research into discussion rounds like these so that important stakeholders take note of the evidence and make decisions based on it.

The media development sector needs to go beyond value-driven appeals and base its advocacy on “facts rather than feelings,” as one interviewee in Eastern Europe phrased it. Another expert pointed to an example from Southern Africa, where a study involving LGBTQI+ persons targeted by hate speech contributed to advocacy and policy recommendations for countering the issue.

When it comes to boosting the organizations' knowledge and programming, interviewees gave several examples of actionable research:

- In Guatemala, study results fed into the design of a game aimed at boosting the Media and Information Literacy of young people.
- In Moldova, a journalism center collected audience research data for media institutions that could not afford it. This provided support to better align their content with audience needs.
- In Tanzania, a national media developer has conducted evaluations of news media organizations to identify key viability and sustainability challenges to inform its interventions.

Research independence

Another consideration is independence when researching. Since most information gathered in the media development sector is produced by the implementing organizations themselves, one interviewee spoke out for more research by truly independent academics. This would prevent “tick box exercises” in regular monitoring and evaluation reports. The interviewee highlighted the evaluation report for the Media Freedom Coalition (Myers et al., 2022) as an example for good independent research.

Several interviewees from larger organizations said that they faced the dilemma between having to convince donors of their work and trying to contribute to a learning agenda where even failure can help everyone move ahead.

An interviewee described it this way:



There's [...] a general need to do better on documenting what works and what doesn't work. [...] If I'm pretty blunt there's a little bit of a tension between kind of the reporting to all of our donors, where you clearly have an incentive to show that what you do works [...] and then having a very kind of honest, sometimes difficult conversation about what's working, what isn't working. And so [...] how to distinguish those two things to make sure that the latter does happen. I feel it doesn't really happen a lot at this moment.

Not enough funding for research

A prerequisite for improving the evidence base for media development is sufficient funding for research and the sharing of findings with peer organizations.

Sufficient funding for research and knowledge sharing?

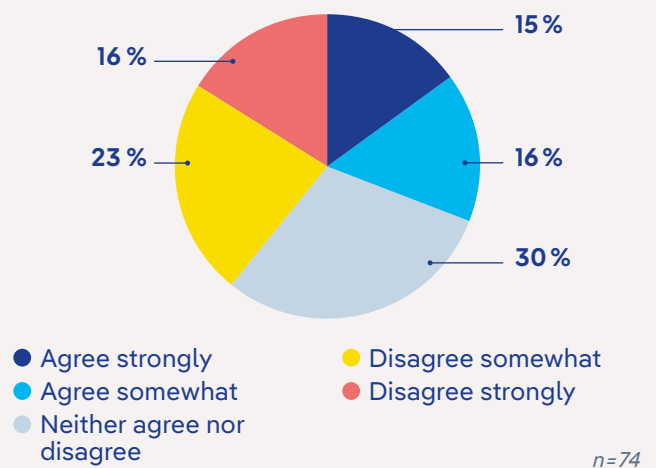


Figure 20: Item: Donors/organizations we partner with provide funding for us to carry out research and to share findings about what works to the sector as a whole; Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

However, less than one third of the organizations (31 percent) reported that they receive any funding to carry out research or find out what works with the media development sector. There are no big differences between the types of organizations, suggesting that donors do not provide sufficient research funding to enable the sector to develop and pursue a common learning agenda at all levels.

These findings are in line with what media development practitioners observe on the ground. There was an overwhelming sense among the interviewees that donors and international media development organizations do not prioritize research and learning, especially when it comes to a common long-term learning agenda. A media development expert from Eastern Europe stated:

“

Research is poorly integrated into other activities in the program. It's poorly integrated into the priority setting, so it's just one of the outputs of the programs. [...] It also has a very small impact on the next programs. [...] I just think the importance of this part is not reflected in the donor agenda right now.

One reason for the neglect of research and learning is a lack of funding, which is also connected to a trade-off between funds for implementation and funds supporting that implementation. According to one interviewee, in some cases, “media for development” projects—ones that focus on content production to raise awareness on issues like health or climate change—have higher research budgets than projects that focus on strengthening the media—in other words, media development.

Multiple interview partners suggested that donors tend to regard research as a luxury. Another factor inhibiting research seems to be competition between organizations that prevents them from sharing their lessons learned with others. In francophone Africa, almost no organization interviewed conducted regular research, highlighting an uneven distribution of capacities that also needs to be addressed.

As mentioned above, interview respondents did identify fields in which useful research is being conducted, but the scope of that research is seen as limited. Due to budgetary and resource constraints, data comparable to the fiscal intelligence of the World Bank or public health data used

by World Health Organization (WHO) seem unrealistic for the media development sector.

For individual markets, some of this data exists in fields like audience research on information demands and preferences, as well as media market data for transparency about advertising flows and market shares. One interviewee highlighted a project by the Open Society Foundation to track budgetary data of all media outlets in Romania over a ten-year period. However, most interviewees believed that the lack of this kind of data “is clearly a big gap in many, many markets.”

Mechanisms for sharing research and lessons learned

Another way to make sure that knowledge is gathered and made available to peer organizations is by having some kind of mechanism in place. This could be a newsletter, a series of publications or simply a social media account for sharing lessons learned with others.

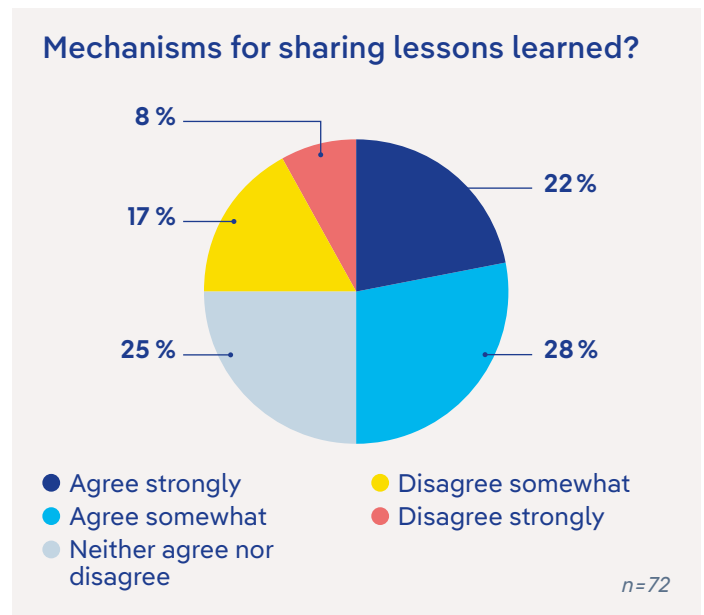


Figure 21: Item: *Our organization has mechanisms in place to share our lessons learned with other media development organizations;* Scale: Likert scale (agreement) 1–5

Activities like these, however, need to be prioritized by management to ensure that organizations routinely share what they have learned rather than keeping it to themselves. 50 percent of the media development organizations surveyed have something in place for this, and there is no major difference between international actors and organizations based in partner countries. If funding is increased and knowledge sharing is prioritized by donors, further improvement can be reached.

It was no surprise that the larger organizations have more capacities not only for producing and disseminating their own research, but also for processing research that comes from outside. Larger organizations tend to have dedicated departments for producing evidence, though representatives of some reported having reduced capacities in this field due to their donors' shrinking budgets. One African interview partner queried that data often lands in donor countries rather than with local organizations that could make good use of it.

The respondents were ambivalent about whether conferences are a good way to share and learn about what works and what doesn't. Some said that time spent at conferences for deeper dives into methods and approaches was much more effective than the many newsletters, articles and reports that they were unable to process during their busy work schedules. Others argued that there were too many conferences and that face-to-face encounters should be special occasions, and that the bulk of information should be conveyed via more efficient online channels. Generally, smaller organizations have less resources for conference visits, so donors and international media development organizations should make a point of including them in conferences.

Newsletters and mailing lists of networks like GFMD seem to be the most important source for sector insights in all world regions, followed by conferences and webinars. Of course, more thorough reports and articles are also read, but require recipients to take more time to process them.

In African countries, a considerable amount of information seems to be exchanged via more informal channels like social media and personal conversations. This needs to be considered when disseminating research results.

The benefits of having a common evidence base do not only apply to political decision makers and donors. Media development organizations themselves profit from knowledge sharing, as a representative of a media development organization in Latin America remarked:



If we have to look for a way to cooperate better, as more coordinated organizations, more collaborative, often these research spaces are interesting because when we research a topic and then share that information with allies, [...] with organizations that are working along the same lines, it adds a lot of value to the work that each of us is doing.

What to do?

Based on the above, it appears that many efforts within the sector are being made to produce valuable research and learning, despite the lack of budgetary support from donors. International media developers do fund research but need to be more inclusive in how they go about it. The following are our recommendations.

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- Improve the **accessibility of research output**, providing easily digestible results through media development networks (like GFMD Impact), in newsletters and through locally relevant communication channels.
- **Local agendas** should be factored into research by providing grants for local research, meaningfully involving partner organizations in one's own research and making sure that data lands where it can be used to inform implementation.
- Ensure that **policy-related research** is geared towards proving the point you are trying to make, choosing efficient and effective methods and a style that help feed the results into multi-stakeholder deliberations and round tables that matter.
- Consider **local research results** rather than trying to re-invent the wheel.
- **Develop capacities** for research, particularly in regions where little research has been done over the past few years.
- Where possible, prioritize **independence and transparency** in research.

- Build a **common research and learning agenda** rather than competitively keeping lessons learned and data to oneself.

Inspiration for donors:

- **Prioritize research and learning** and demand organizations to factor these into their media development projects.
- Demand that project design is **based on evidence** and ensure that monitoring and evaluation are geared towards broadening that evidence base.
- Encourage funded organizations to **conduct research**, to share their findings and to build expertise in this realm.
- Encourage international organizations to **meaningfully involve** local and regional organizations in designing, conducting and presenting research at conferences.
- Consider **multi-lateral coordination** in data collection, creating international mechanisms (such as OECD Guidelines) that prompt member states to gather and publish relevant data on media development.

“All is not lost”

Five regional perspectives on the US funding freeze

At the end of January 2025, without warning, the new US administration froze billions of dollars in development aid projects. This sent shockwaves throughout the global media development sector. Whether in Ukraine, Colombia or Pakistan, many independent media houses there and around the world had been operating with US government funds through organizations such as Internews or IREX. For some of these outlets, the funds had constituted a significant portion of their financing. In early March 2025, just ahead of the publishing deadline for this report, we asked five experts from different world regions to comment on the current situation. All are closely connected to the media development sector in their own region. Three are also GFMD IMPACT regional coordinators and two sit on the steering committee. They explain why a united media development sector is more crucial than ever, which of the OECD principles could especially apply now, and why every crisis also offers new opportunities.

“
Put up a united front and think of this as a long struggle.”



Waqas Naeem

Programme Officer at International Media Support in Pakistan and GFMD IMPACT regional coordinator for Asia and the Pacific

The sudden freezing of US development aid has brought a “sense of despair and despondency” to the Asian media sector, says Waqas Naeem. His greatest concern is the fate of media operating in exile, and particularly those originally from Afghanistan and Myanmar. “Both of these countries and their independent media were big beneficiaries of US funding,” he explains. “The media in exile are already in such a precarious situation because their news gathering is really difficult.” The funding freeze is “like a carpet being pulled from under their feet and there really is nothing to fall back on.” For other media outlets in the region, the expert hopes for “organic resistance,” such as from civil society movements that are used to having to “survive in terrible circumstances,” and “push back against authoritarian regimes and dictatorships.” One positive aspect, he points out, is that even prior to the US funding freeze, there had been an increased understanding of the importance of diversifying funding. Direct revenue from audiences through subscriptions and philanthropic foundation funding could now come to the forefront, he says. He notes that media development organizations from Western Europe and North America are already speaking to one another. His appeal: “Voices from the Global South must be included in these discussions.” Naeem wishes for unity within the sector: “**The ultimate risk of the Trump administration’s measures is a domino effect around the world with authoritarian regimes.**” Other governments “might also want to jump on the Trump bandwagon and do the same.” As a result, media should now speak to their audiences and convince them of how much they matter: “If they go away, there’ll be an information vacuum and there’ll be nothing to replace it.”

“
When independent media is weakened, it means the ability of citizens to speak truth to power is also limited.”



Vusumuzi Sifile

Executive Director of the PANOS Institute Southern Africa, Zambia and GFMD Steering Committee Member

Whether it was USAID, Internews or NED, in Southern Africa, US development funds constituted a significant chunk of the financing for independent media, explains Vusumuzi Sifile. Now, with limited resources, he worries they will “have to be spread so thinly, which may really minimize impact,” and especially with growing authoritarianism by different actors in Southern African countries, he adds. “Independent media has been the voice that is been trying to speak truth to power.” Sifile recommends that the media development sector does a quick assessment and generates evidence to come up with relevant interventions that build on the work already done, pointing to the sustainability component of some of the support programs. He says this has helped media houses develop alternative revenue streams, grow their audiences and adopt sustainable energy solutions. The media expert hopes that this might increase media outlets’ capacity to continue operating on a smaller scale while still achieving their objectives. With reference to the OECD’s principles, Sifile says there is a need for “better coordination,” and that this should help different funders to harmonize their priorities: “**When the funding is not well coordinated it’s targeted at a smaller community of media development actors who end up trying to scatter themselves and end up being inefficient.**”

“
It’s hard and it hurts, but I believe it can flourish and lead to more diversification.”



Emy Osorio Matorel

Advisor for Digital Analysis and Strategy at CAMECO and GFMD IMPACT regional coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean

For independent media in Latin America and the Caribbean it was like another blow, explains Emy Osorio Matorel. “Grief and sadness” from last year were not yet over when the Open Society Foundation (OSF) significantly reduced its funding for independent and non-profit journalism in the region. In January 2025, Meta ended its collaboration with fact-checkers in the US. Latin American fact-checking media such as Argentina’s Chequeado, Colombia’s La Silla Vacía or Mexico’s Animal Político fear they might be next. After the US funding freeze, media professionals in Latin America are now hoping for quick help, and this cannot come soon enough, the expert points out. Media she had contacted in recent weeks joked: “It might be like during the COVID-19 pandemic, where aid arrived two years later, when we had already figured out how to manage things.” However, Matorel highlights a unique aspect of independent media in Latin America: solidarity and collaboration through alliances and networks. “There is a lot of cooperation between media, whether geographically or thematically. For example, many deal with migration, drug trafficking and other common issues.” This solidarity is what Latin American media are now hoping from international donors, Matorel says. It’s not always about money, although that is missing the most right now, but it’s also about joint discussions and brainstorming on what to do next, she says. This includes through forums like GFMD: “I think that ‘reassurance’ is what many need at this moment, as they feel alone right now, and I think that’s what can help the most.” She believes that in the future, independent media from Latin America and the Caribbean will be more critical about the funds they receive and will always think about accountability. The situation, she says, could even lead to more diversification, and not only regarding donors: **“I think that prioritizing, which has been a struggle for many media outlets and organizations, will become more important.”**

“
I think it is a good moment to make it more about viability and for donors to coordinate around this.”



Giorgi Jangiani

Country Lead at Thomson Reuters Foundation, Georgia and GFMD IMPACT regional coordinator for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus

As one of the largest donors in the region, the USA has left a huge vacuum for media organizations in Southern and Eastern Europe, says Giorgi Jangiani. “Everyone is trying to figure out how to fill this 50 percent market gap.” He is especially concerned about exiled media from Belarus and Russia, which are heavily dependent on international donors: “For them, this is a matter of existence today or tomorrow.” The situation is also dire in countries like Serbia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, where many media operate on what are known as “service contracts,” receiving payment only at the end of the contract term. Now, says the expert, they might not get paid even though they’ve delivered their services. He fears media might abandon their original missions: **“How many will stay as public interest media, and how many will switch to service contracts and digital advertising?”** Nevertheless, he remains optimistic about the media development sector’s achievements: “This is a good moment to talk about the Media Viability Manifesto and push forward this agenda.” He believes the OECD Principles, which describe media as part of democratic development, could now be more guiding than ever. Key lessons from the past include better coordination among donors, longer funding periods and more flexibility to ensure greater security. The principle of “local ownership” is particularly important, Jangiani says. Media with successful business models can serve as examples for other countries. He sees potential, especially in the interplay between new technologies and media to come up with innovative digital products: “This could be the time for private companies or private donors to stand up and take the initiative.”

“

We can trust that crises are an invitation to creativity and innovation.



Ayman Mhanna

Executive Director at Samir Kassir Foundation, Lebanon and GFMD Steering Committee Member

In the Middle East and North Africa, a region where societies are so heavily affected by the extent and range of crises, a severe reduction of investigative and accountability-oriented journalism will have a heavy impact, believes Ayman Mhanna. Nowhere else is investigative journalism more needed than here, he points out. When asked if all is now lost, the expert has a clear answer: “Absolutely not.” After all, he says, the media sector has done important work in recent years: “Today, there are media outlets that are trying to diversify their revenue model.” Although media houses in the MENA region are still “far from reaching total viability,” there is hope that the crisis will lead to new creativity and innovation. “Local leadership of media development projects” is now more important than ever, he points out. Media houses should speed up their use of smart AI to improve their editorial processes. “I am not minimizing the crisis, but I know that the most reliable independent media outlets and media development organizations will survive, make sacrifices, and continue their mission.” Mhanna believes the current situation is also a moment for OECD member states “to test their commitment to the principles.” A crucial question, he says, is: “Will their priority, moving forward, be to save jobs at the headquarters of European and North American based media development organizations or to encourage more independent, accountability-focused independent work on the ground?” Mhanna’s appeal to organizations from the global North is to rethink their

own working methods, structures, and the purpose of their work. His recommendation: **“Move away from any role that requires a heavy overhead, overly pricey rent, headquarters’ costs, and any feeling of entitlement, and turn into effective enablers for the best journalism to take place in countries where accountability is needed the most and cannot find other avenues except through quality journalism.”** In the end, he says, the funding freeze is not only an attack on media development but “on the very fundamentals of liberal democracy.”

Conclusion

When we set out to write this State of Media Development report, little did we know that the storm on the horizon would close in on the sector with such unprecedented speed and vehemence. We are now in a situation that is entirely different to the one at the beginning of 2025. Thus, the results in this report are to be seen as a baseline to refer to when taking stock of where the sector stood before the US funding freeze took effect. The editorials and additional regional perspectives provide further context regarding the implications of these cuts for the sector as a whole.

Thus, the report maps out where the sector stood vis à vis fulfilling the OECD Principles on Relevant and Effective Media Support at the beginning of 2025.

It shows where media development organizations were faring well in fields like:

- gender balance and sensitivity as well as diversity inclusion
- focus on digital media
- dedication to elevating the voices of marginalized segments of the population
- meaningfully involving local organizations in project design and implementation, as well as local staff in project design and management
- crisis coordination by local and regional organizations
- developing capacities by providing media and journalism education
- making best practices and lessons learned available to peer organizations

It also highlights the specific pain points of the sector, such as:

- mainstreaming disability inclusion
- lack of funding in general and for research in particular
- lack of core funding for public interest media
- flexibility in safety-related re-allocation of funds
- short-sighted rather than long-term perspective of donors as reflected in short funding cycles
- lack of integration in wider development and associated programs
- lack of support for traditional media's digital transformation
- lack of up-to-date data for local organizations' contexts
- lack of data-sharing regarding information ecosystems to avoid duplication
- lack of flexibility in reporting procedures
- slow sector coordination in crises
- neglect of advocacy activities at the regional and local levels
- lack of strategic inclusion of new types of actors (such as start-ups or content creators)

These are specific fields that need to be improved.

It should be remembered that there is a fairly wide range of standards where the sector's organizations occupy a middle ground: not absolutely excelling but not severely underperforming. These fields include:

- risk mitigation
- integration of media development in governance programs
- proportion of funding that reaches local organizations directly
- awareness of security assistance programs
- diversity of funding
- inefficiency of administrative processes
- making use of existing local and regional expert networks
- access to sector best practices and lessons learned
- in-house mechanisms for knowledge sharing
- inclusion of local, national and regional organizations in priority setting
- inclusion of all organizations in multi-stakeholder consultations

The modest outcomes also leave ample room for improvement.

Although the sector is in dire straits, the OECD Principles remind us that panic is a bad advisor, as a German saying goes. While steps forward need to focus strongly on funding, additional money comes with the responsibility to continue to live up to the principles. The recommendations below provide guardrails for the media development sector – for implementers and donors – for moving forward. After all, the sector must earn and justify the (predominantly) public money invested in it and, as this report proves, it deserves this support.

Recommendations at a glance



OECD PRINCIPLE 1

Do no harm to public interest media

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- Jointly **develop risk assessment matrices with partners** and carry them out regularly.
- If your organization does not have risk monitoring tools or strategies in place, **reach out to GFMD or other organizations for exchange**. There are good examples in the sector.
- **Include safety and security indicators** at the design stage to mitigate risks proactively.
- **Re-negotiate with the funder** if you see security concerns with a given project (or at least give it a try): Many organizations found that it is quite possible to re-negotiate if you have convincing reasons.
- Weigh up the **pros and cons of opening field offices** as an international organization and work with **transparent salary grids** to avoid market distortion and brain drain.
- Prepare for media development to become more politicized and **define your organizations' red lines**.

Inspiration for donors:

- **Commission risks assessments** and have them **inform your fundings calls**.
- Demand that **indicators for monitoring safety** are included in the project design.
- Establish dedicated **emergency response funds** for media organizations at risk.
- Allow for flexibility when the security situation demands a **reallocation of funds**.
- **Minimize public branding** on projects to avoid political association.
- **Do not jeopardize the editorial independence** of the public interest media you support. It's their greatest asset.
- Ensure that funding is directed towards achieving **genuine developmental goals**, such as promoting press freedom, developing media capacities or improving access to information **rather than using it as a tool to serve specific political interests**.
- Funding allocated for particular societal projects and programs should be **as neutral as possible** and **not linked to any political agendas**. This also applies to awareness raising efforts in the field of development cooperation.



OECD PRINCIPLE 2

Increase financial and other forms of support

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- As a sector, try to **quantify the increase in financial support that is needed** for public interest media to strengthen democratic resilience. This may help donors turn lip service into action.
- Have an **open conversation** with donors about the fact that **public interest media** need to be considered **public goods** which merit support, irrespective of their profit-making abilities.
- Invest in your **partnerships with traditional media** and assist them with their **digital transition**.
- **Diversify your funding sources** and do not shy away from **new fundraising terrains** such as the private sector.
- Make it your mission to **explain the difference between media as a democratic institution and media as communication tools** to donors and colleagues from other development fields.
- Make an effort to **reach out to and network with actors from other development fields**.

Inspiration for donors:

- **Follow suit on official announcements about the importance of media** as a pillar for democracy and commit more financial resources to their support.
- **Help to get media development mainstreamed** into governance support and other development fields by raising awareness about media's democratic role in related areas.
- Create **dedicated codes for reporting on and tracking aid flows into the support for public interest media** to establish a database that allows for reliably judging the development of media development funding.
- Allow for **more core funding** and ensure a **balance between core and project funding**. This safeguards that media organizations can both fulfill their primary tasks and excel in projects.
- Encourage funded organizations to diversify their funding sources to **avoid dependence on a single donor**.
- Contact other (philanthropic or private) donors to **see how your funding strategies for public interest media can complement each other**.
- **Combine aid with diplomatic pressures** and help reform-oriented governments to stay on course, e.g. as part of the Media Freedom Coalition.



OECD PRINCIPLE 3

Take a whole system perspective

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- **Make the data** you collect as part of analyses of the media and information environment **available to other organizations** to avoid duplication and research fatigue.
- **Actively communicate** findings on the media and information environment within your own organization and other (partner) organizations to ensure that they are implemented.
- Before starting your own analysis, **check** whether **similar research efforts** have already been carried out.
- Be open to **joint work on analyses across the media development sector** and help shape them.
- **Discuss specific needs for assessments** with your partners to ensure they produce actionable results.
- Go the extra mile to **ensure that all relevant stakeholders are included in assessments**, e.g. people in rural areas or speakers of local languages.
- **Talk to the donors** you have partnerships with **about funding cycles** and their implications for impact and project success.
- Check your **blind spots** in support for the broader enabling environment. **Advocacy coalitions, journalistic associations** and **media representative bodies** are underserved.
- There is an increasing diversity of media, journalism and information stakeholders. Try to **understand the work realities of new actors**, such as influencers, podcasters or content creators, and develop **mechanisms to determine** under which circumstances they are **suitable partners**.

Inspiration for donors:

- If possible, **abolish funding cycles of a year or less** where costs and benefits are disproportionate for grantees. Instead, invest in long-term partnerships.
- **Base your funding priorities on systematic assessments** of the media and information environment as well as of the audiences' needs to avoid wasting resources.
- Consider **establishing an independent body or consortium of actors to conduct these assessments**.
- **Exchange with other donors** on assessment results and **create synergies** when deciding on resulting funding priorities.



OECD PRINCIPLE 4

Strengthen local leadership and ownership

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- Keep in mind that engagement in early-stage planning results in more commitment to outcomes, so **involve local and regional partners in project priority-setting** rather than bringing them in when the project concept is already set.
- Local and regional partners should also play a more meaningful role in developing and finalizing the project framework and milestones and subsequently, **in monitoring and evaluating** them.
- Even after a project begins, **listen to local and regional partners on what is most important** to them and have some flexibility to adapt accordingly.
- As part of joint project implementation, have an **organizational development** component that focuses on developing capacities, such that in the long run, a local or regional organization has enough capacity to competitively apply for a grant.
- Similarly, international media development organizations should **invest in supporting capacity development where it may be lacking** in terms of local expertise, and prioritize and trust local expertise more.
- As far as possible, **make use of existent expert local and regional expert networks** before opting for an expert from outside the region.
- For local and regional experts and media development organizations, **invest in further developing own capacity** through taking advantage of available information e.g. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
- As part of growth in expertise and leadership, local and regional media development experts and organizations may consider formally **developing local and regional expert networks that are easy to contact**.
- Work towards **more equal decision-making power for all partners** involved in a project, regardless of whether they played the role of the lead applicant or co-applicant in the project funding application.

- For international media organizations, consider focusing on **increasing the amount of funding available to partners rather than on expanding own organizational structure**.

Inspiration for donors:

- Require **documented involvement of local and regional partners in project conceptualization**, and not just implementation.
- Have more **flexibility in funding that allows for adaptation of projects** in response to locally expressed priorities.
- Require, in the long term, **capacity-building of local and regional partners** such that they can play a leading role in future projects.
- From the ODA funding provided directly or through international media development organizations, set a **minimum percentage of funding that should reach local and regional organizations**.
- Where possible, in addition to the formal written application process, **scope the field to ensure that funding goes to organizations with genuine impact**, rather than those with the best proposal-writing skills.



OECD PRINCIPLE 5

Improve coordination of support

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- **Meaningfully involve regional/national/local organizations in coordination.** This would require asking these organizations what is most important for them coordination-wise.
- **Lobby for the invitation of local and regional partners to coordination meetings** if they have not already been invited by donors.
- For local and regional organizations, **develop your own country and regional media development agenda** so that local and regional efforts work towards the same goals and priorities can be articulated by different organizations in the field.
- For local, regional and international organizations, **come to a consensus on what meaningful coordination entails** and implement it.
- For international organizations, **regularly check back with local and regional partners** on how well you are doing in fulfilling your responsibilities towards these partners.
- For international organizations, **invest more decision-making power in those on the ground** or working closest to the specific market you are working in.
- **Support and collaborate with local and regional organizations already coordinating in the countries or regions**, such as SembraMedia and Connectas in Latin America, ARIJ in the MENA region, AMIC in Asia and others; they already have a network of organizations that they coordinate, have established legitimacy over the years and are familiar with the peculiarities of the context. A good example of cross-continental collaboration is the Asian Media and Communication Centre (AMIC), which has initiated the Africa-Asia-Pacific dialogue on media development issues. As a representative explained, “we want to learn more about what’s happening in Africa and explore what we can share and exchange because we have many commonalities with Africa. If you recall, we had the Bandung Conference [the first large scale Afro-Asian conference] of 1955, and when we went to Bandung two years ago, we rekindled interest in the Bandung Declaration and the need for more collaboration between Asia and Africa. So, that’s an area I hope the principles will address, as well as the topic of decolonialization.”
- **Learn from past crises to move faster in upcoming crises** and make a point of sharing the lessons with those in crisis, instead of starting from scratch each time. While no two contexts are exactly alike, this would reduce the time it takes to act in urgent situations.
- **Work from a shared vision of the market.** Media development organizations should look at the bigger picture and craft a shared vision for a particular market they are working in, instead of working in project-focused pockets.
- **Local and global coordination.** Rather than approaching coordination as an either/or issue (done either by local organizations or by international ones), collaborate more between local and international organizations because each brings different strengths to the table.
- **Embrace small steps towards coordination.** This does not have to be a formal, high-level collaboration; it could be as simple as creating a shared group on a messaging app to exchange information and seek insights before implementing a project in a particular context.
- **Allocate resources for coordination.** In addition to budgeting for activities, set aside resources for coordination.
- **Openness to coordinating with new actors.** As the media and information environment undergoes a rapid evolution, organizations, actors and approaches that were traditionally not seen to be part of the media development sector now have an increasing importance and impact. Also, new players are coming up, so it is important to consider the whole spectrum of actors and approaches to mitigate blind spots. As stated by a representative of a Latin American organization, “the actors are talking to others, as someone says, with the ‘usual suspects.’ Why isn’t that conversation happening with us and why don’t those funds also reach those of us on the ground doing the work?”

- **Consider new, innovative ways of collaborating in crises**, e.g. by introducing the collaborative use of online tools to amplify topics that need attention.
 - For international media development organizations playing an intermediary role, **negotiate with donors** on behalf of beneficiary organizations when particularly burdensome or unreasonable reporting data are required. Where the demands are non-negotiable, invest in building capacities to meet them in a way that does not take away from an organization's core priorities.
 - **Invest in developing strategic coordination networks**, such as the Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) initiative in which over 10 organizations have come together to create a common framework for joint action in the field of media viability.
- Inspiration for donors:**
- If not already doing so, **invite local and regional organizations to coordination meetings**.
 - Have regular **donor roundtables with local and regional organizations**, and not just with governments.
 - Set and finalize **reporting requirements in collaboration with the project implementing organizations** so that an unrealistic burden is not imposed on them.
 - **Think long-term in terms of desired impact** and small steps that lead to it, and use this to determine the evidence needed to show impact rather than mere proof of activity, i.e. prioritize documentation around effectiveness rather than day-to-day expenses.
 - **Harmonize reporting requirements across donors** such that the same documentation is acceptable for multiple donors, for instance for due diligence reports and financial audits.
 - Consider **basket funding** for some large-scale projects or organizations; in this case, require only one set of reporting.
- Have more **flexibility with respect to different contexts/adapt to local contexts**. For instance, when working in fragile and war contexts, carry out sufficient context analysis and risk assessment to avoid setting requirements that cannot be sufficiently met by the implementing organization.
 - **Have longer reporting cycles**, such as quarterly rather than monthly or even weekly reporting.
 - Where possible, ask for **reporting data that is relevant to the organization**, e.g. changes in audience reach, in revenue, and so on for a media organization.
 - After a rigorous selection process, **have more flexible reporting procedures** to allow organizations to actually do the work they have been selected for.
 - **Provide core funding** to organizations to enable them to hire for tasks such as monitoring and evaluation.
 - Give **younger and/or newer organizations** a chance by granting them **more trust**.



OECD PRINCIPLE 6

Invest in knowledge, research and learning

Inspiration for media development organizations:

- Improve the **accessibility of research output**, providing easily digestible results through media development networks (like GFMD Impact), in newsletters and through locally relevant communication channels.
- **Local agendas** should be factored into research by providing grants for local research, meaningfully involving partner organizations in one's own research and making sure that data lands where it can be used to inform implementation.
- Ensure that **policy-related research** is geared towards proving the point you are trying to make, choosing efficient and effective methods and a style that help feed the results into multi-stakeholder deliberations and round tables that matter.
- Consider **local research results** rather than trying to re-invent the wheel.
- **Develop capacities** for research, particularly in regions where little research has been done over the past few years.
- Where possible, prioritize **independence and transparency** in research.
- Build a **common research and learning agenda** rather than competitively keeping lessons learned and data to oneself.

Inspiration for donors:

- **Prioritize research and learning** and demand organizations to factor these into their media development projects.
- Demand that project design is **based on evidence** and ensure that monitoring and evaluation are geared towards broadening that evidence base.
- Encourage funded organizations to **conduct research**, to share their findings and to build expertise in this realm.
- Encourage international organizations to **meaningfully involve** local and regional organizations in designing, conducting and presenting research at conferences.
- Consider **multi-lateral coordination** in data collection, creating international mechanisms (such as OECD Guidelines) that prompt member states to gather and publish relevant data on media development.

Annex

Methodology and limitations

The research questions for this report were drawn directly from the OECD Development Cooperation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment. The study did not take a comprehensive approach, but instead prioritized topics within the six OECD Principles according to aspects the participants of the two workshops regarded as relevant. The workshops were conducted June 18 and June 20, 2024, during the Global Media Forum in Bonn.

The representatives of the first workshop were from international media development organizations:

Andrea Cairola, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), France
Heather Gilberds, Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), United States of America
Sofie Jannusch, Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), Germany
Mira Milosevic, Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), United Kingdom
Katelyn Musgrave, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United States of America
Paul Rothman, International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), United States of America
Isabelle Schlöpfer, Internews, United Kingdom
Martin Scott, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom
Maha Taki, International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM), France
Zoe Titus, Global Forum for Media Development and Namibia Media Trust, Namibia
Leon Willems, Free Press Unlimited, Netherlands
Claire Woodward, Thomson Reuters Foundation, United Kingdom

The representatives of the second workshop were from local and regional media development organizations:

Blandine Angbako, Centre d'Education pour une Société Durable (Centre ESD), Côte d'Ivoire
Htaike Htaike Aung, Myanmar Internet Project, Myanmar
Soumaya Berjeb, Institute de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information (IPSI), Tunisia
Faruq Faisel, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh
Erick Huerta Velázquez, Redes por la Diversidad, Equidad y Sustentabilidad A.C. (REDES A.C.), Mexico
Natalia Kurkiukova, Kharkiv Media Hub, Ukraine
Odanga Madung, Odipo Dev, Kenya
Mira Milosevic, Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Serbia (currently UK)
Nadim Nashif, 7amleh, Palestine
Zenzele Ndebele, Centre for Innovation and Technology Zimbabwe (CITEZW), Zimbabwe
Michelle Nogales, Muy Waso, Bolivia
Hamouda Soubhi, Forum des Alternatives Maroc (FMAS), Morocco

The participants of both workshops were asked to discuss and identify key priorities within the OECD Principles. These aspects guided the research aims of this report and served as a basis for developing the research instruments (questionnaire and guides for key informant interviews).

We chose a mixed methods approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition to desk research, an online survey and key informant interviews were conducted. We structured the survey questionnaire and interview guides according to the OECD Principles, focusing on the priorities identified in the workshops.

The statistical population of the **online survey** consisted of all organizations engaged in media development worldwide. The de facto sample comprised all 200 members of GFMD. We also asked the 11 largest international media development organizations to send the questionnaire to their partner organizations and request their participation. We excluded organizations that were solely media outlets,

without any stake in capacity development, advocacy or improving the enabling environment for media.

The final sample consisted of 77 organizations, of which 16 were international, 22 regional and 40 national/local organizations. 43 identified as GMD members, 34 were non-members. The uptake in the different world regions varied:

- Asia, Pacific and Oceania:
5 organizations
- Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia:
14 organizations
- Europe (Central, Northern, Southern, Western):
12 organizations
- Latin America and the Caribbean:
6 organizations
- Middle East and North Africa:
10 organizations
- North America:
4 organizations
- Sub-Saharan Africa:
26 organizations

Because fewer organizations from some regions took part, we did not break down data according to regions, but according to types of organizations. We used SPSS for statistical data analysis and rounded up numbers for legibility reasons. As a result, some numbers do not add up to exactly 100 percent.

We conducted **key informant interviews** with a purposive sample of three distinct groups:

1. 59 interviews with representatives from regional/national/local organizations in the five world regions mentioned above (approximately ten interviews each per world region, differentiating between anglophone and francophone Africa). Participants were chosen to represent different sub-regions within their respective world regions and according to their experience in the field;
2. 9 interviews with representatives from international media development organizations in Europe and North America. The 12 largest media development organizations were targeted, but three could not participate due to time constraints;
3. 8 interviews with media development consultants and coordinators from all seven world regions: five GFMD coordinators from Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe

and the Caucasus, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa, an expert from the MENA region, as well as think tank representatives and consultants from Europe and the United States.

This resulted in a sample size of 76 for the interviews, thus covering the perspectives of local and regional organizations, international media development organizations and individuals with a good bird's eye view of developments in their respective world regions. Because not all organizations approached were willing to take part, we asked regional researchers to use their networks to find other organizations that did want to participate, while ensuring that the overall distribution was not biased towards individual countries in their regions. The interviews were transcribed, translated and coded with MAXQDA.

The data upon which this report is based has several limitations, the most important ones being issues of representativity, timing and agency.

In terms of the representativeness of the findings, the survey aimed at a complete count of all media development organizations. However, it was difficult to ascertain the size of the total statistical population. In addition to the 200 GFMD members, it is unclear how many other organizations are part of the sector. Based on the number of GFMD members who took part, the survey achieved a response rate of 22 percent, which is fairly good for an online survey. The response rate could be higher had more resources been available. While key informant interviews do not claim to be representative, we aimed for a balanced regional ratio. Because it was difficult to convince organizational representatives in certain world regions to take part, some participants were chosen at short notice and had less experience in their profession.

The partial reluctance of those initially approached may also be related to the timing of the study. With the turmoil surrounding the US partial withdrawal from development funding, some organizations were fighting for survival. This was particularly true for North American entities, but many organizations based in different parts of the world had also relied on US funding for their daily business. Thus, it is understandable that some representatives did not want to take part in the interviews. The events also had an impact on the final interviews that were conducted in February, when respondents were asked to look primarily at the sector's achievements and shortcomings over the last few years and not let the breaking events blur their overall view.

DW Akademie is a key player in the media development sector and actively implements projects in approximately 70 developing countries and emerging economies. This brought challenges with it. The fact that DW Akademie is the commissioning party may have influenced how partner organizations responded. In some parts of the world, it was hard to attract interview participants because they were critical of German foreign policies. We made efforts to mitigate these factors, for example by commissioning regional researchers to interview partner organizations; we also ran the survey through trusted channels like GFMD and the international partners of local and regional organizations.

Finally, it is clear that the data gathered for this report mostly reflects a pre-2025 reality. It showcases what was working well but also identifies the sector's needs based on where it stood prior to the US funding freeze. Currently, funding is the priority; the report can help advocate for this because it highlights the sector's relevance. At the same time, it can sensitize media development stakeholders to the standards that additional funding would need to adhere to. Future research will serve to identify the impact of the new realities on the media development sector and can draw on this study as a baseline.

OECD Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment

1. Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media.

This may include:

- Ensuring that engagement reinforces democratic norms, human rights standards and principles, media freedom, media sustainability, journalist ethics, journalist safety, information integrity and editorial independence.
- Avoiding approaches that displace local actors, distort salaries, risk editorial independence, confuse information with institutional communication, imply contradictory injunctions of stated interests and values.
- Ensuring that assistance is gender sensitive, gender transformative and intersectional to promote equality and equity in media content, media coverage, reporting and editorial practices, self-regulatory equality policies, business and management strategies and public policy making.
- Endeavouring that any use of media to achieve other development goals (“media for development)” upholds journalistic standards of quality, professionalism, and independence, and supports core media resilience.
- Taking all precautions to ensure the safety and security of project beneficiaries and implementers, for example by developing and implementing risk mitigation strategies.
- Requiring that implementers have record of upholding the highest professional standards of journalism and program implementation in the media sector.

2. Increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment, in order to strengthen democratic resilience.

This may include:

- Increasing the overall volume of financial and other support to the media and information environment.
- Acknowledging that public interest news and public interest media are public goods and thus worthy recipients of public funding.
- Incorporating assistance to media and the information environment as a vital element of development co-operation providers’ response to democratic backsliding, rising authoritarianism and mis- and disinformation, as well as a contribution towards democracy and development.
- Prioritising support for countries where multiple concurrent crises (for example political, economic, climate- or conflict-related) risk creating information deserts.
- Integrating support to public interest media and the information environment within wider and coherent development co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding policies or strategies (e.g., in efforts to tackle climate change or conflict, supporting for anti-corruption efforts, and promoting free and fair elections, citizen engagement, and gender equality, etc.).
- Supporting initiatives that offer security assistance, such as health insurance, life risk funds, or relocation to journalists and media professionals working in high-risk environments.

3. Take a whole of system perspective on supporting the media and information environment to make support more relevant, effective and sustainable. Consider the media and information environment as a development sector in itself, a critical part of efforts to promote and protect democracy, human rights, gender equality and development as well as a sector which can support implementation of other development goals.

This may include:

- Pursuing a holistic and systemic approach towards the media and information environment, which takes into account its legal, political, economic, gender, technological and societal dimensions.
 - Adopting a long-term approach to media assistance, acknowledging that empowering relevant stakeholders and systems needs time and long-term strategic programming.
 - Developing solid and up-to-date diagnostics and thorough analysis of the media and information environment in each country based on data and evidence, as well as an assessment of the potential and specific needs of the people, particular audiences and public interest media organisations in each context.
 - Supporting a diverse range of media, journalism and information stakeholders, which may include print, broadcast, new and social media, long- and short-form video production, podcasting, start-up media, not-for-profit hybrids, storytellers, individual content creators, minority-language media, gender sensitive and gender transformative media, investigative journalism, media associations and others.
 - Supporting innovation in media business models to improve organisations' financial resilience and sustainability, allowing organisations to survive whilst avoiding excessive dependence on donor support.
 - Supporting the broader enabling environment for public interest media and information, including a human rights based legal and regulatory system, access to information for journalists, journalists' safety measures, media representative bodies, journalists' or editors' associations, media researchers, media monitors, advocacy organisations and coalitions as well as investing in media education in society and in media organisations in particular.
- Where relevant, connecting infrastructure investments in the information environment (telecommunications, broadband, etc.) with initiatives that safeguard information integrity.
 - Supporting engagement with national and global multi-stakeholder fora and engaging with social media and tech companies on policy debates, norm setting, experience exchanges, and information sharing.
 - Designing and supporting efforts to build resilience to mis- and disinformation for example through strengthening the skills and capacities of local media, increasing access to trustworthy information online and offline, and supporting fact checking, prebunking and improved digital and media literacy.
 - Supporting processes which enable media organisations to engage with large digital platforms to build the sustainability of public interest media, increase access to trustworthy information online and offline, and minimise the risks of stifling legitimate freedom of expression.

4. Strengthen local leadership and ownership, empowering media partners as well as other actors in the information environment such as civil society organisations and online content creators to meaningfully participate in policies and programmes.

This may include:

- Building on acquired good practices for the meaningful participation of local actors in diagnostics, priority-setting, design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes.
- Contextualising risks and opportunities for public interest media and information integrity, tailoring assistance to each individual context and with particular attention to underrepresented and marginalised groups.
- Ensuring that assistance responses remain grounded in local realities, bottom-up, evidence-based, and demand-driven, with audiences and the public interest always at the centre.
- Accounting for diversity, equality, inclusion, and accessibility principles and standards based on international and regional human rights instruments.
- Providing incentives for international implementers to work through local and regional partners and ensuring a more significant share of ODA for media development reaches local and regional actors directly, fostering their longevity, resilience and viability.
- Increasing the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible, and reliable support, including core funding and longer-term, multi-year funding, where appropriate and feasible.

5. Improve co-ordination of support to the media and information environment, both among donor agencies and between development and diplomatic efforts to support media freedom, especially in contexts of crisis.

This may include:

- Building on good practices to improve donor co-ordination at the national and global level, including opportunities for joint, locally led diagnostics and data sharing.
- Ensuring co-ordination efforts in individual countries meaningfully involve local partners and foster accountability towards them.
- Ensuring multistakeholder co-ordination with tech companies, tech developers, content creators and young people, as appropriate.
- Consider including funding for co-ordination and collaboration between actors in public interest media and the information environment.
- Streamlining administrative requirements for support to lower transaction costs for actors and providers and incorporating adaptive and flexible processes into results management of funding.
- Ensuring that diplomatic efforts to protect media freedom also recognise the importance of supporting the media and information environment through ODA.
- Broadening co-ordination efforts to initiate dialogue with non-DAC development co-operation providers, philanthropic organisations and other development co-operation providers to the media sector.

6. Invest in knowledge, research, and learning.

This may include:

- Drawing on the experience and research of media development institutions with technical expertise, local and global networks, and a history of success.
- Taking account of the growing body of research and analysis in diagnosis and programme design and incentivise new research.
- Exploring new pathways to media viability, including digital media trends, audience analysis, national laws and regulations, self-regulatory bodies and professional associations, advertising markets, government subsidies, and business models.
- Remaining up-to-date with rapid advancements in technology, including algorithms, bots, surveillance, and artificial intelligence and their potential threats or benefits to media sustainability, journalism safety, and information integrity.
- Sharing of findings on context specific approaches that work, including approaches that are effective in building resilience to mis- and disinformation, and in strengthening democracy, human rights and gender equality.
- Supporting innovation and experimentation; incorporating adaptation into policy, planning, and implementation, and ensuring ODA projects and programmes adapt quickly considering lessons learned.
- Facilitating the inclusion of new knowledge and learning in school curricula (particularly in journalism schools).
- Supporting the development and use of metrics and indicators to understand and analyse national information ecosystems.

List of abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations	IMS	International Media Support
ACOS Alliance	A Culture Of Safety Alliance	IPSI	Institut de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information
AMIC	Asian Media Information and Communication Centre	IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
ARIJ	Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism	JX Fund	European Fund for Journalism in Exile
ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra	LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and others
CAMECO	Catholic Media Council	M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
Centre ESD	Centre d'Education pour une Société Durable	MDIF	Media Development Investment Fund
CIMA	Center for International Media Assistance	MENA	Middle East and Northern Africa
CITEZW	Centre for Innovation and Technology Zimbabwe	MFC	Media Freedom Coalition
COVID 19	Coronavirus disease 2019	MVM	Media Viability Manifesto
CSO	Civil society organization	NGO	Non-governmental organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
GovNet	DAC Network on Governance	ODA	Official development assistance
EU	European Union	PR	Public relations
FMAS	Forum des Alternatives Maroc	PRIMED	Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments	REDES A.C.	Redes por la Diversidad, Equidad y Sustentabilidad A.C.
FPU	Free Press Unlimited	SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
GMF	Global Media Forum	UN	United Nations
GFMD	Global Forum for Media Development	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ICFJ	International Center for Journalists		
IFPIM	International Fund for Public Interest Media		

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy
VIBE	Vibrant Information Barometer
WHO	World Health Organization

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