**Supporting journalism and media development
through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and advocacy**

Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)

2018 – 2020 Strategic Plan

1.0. Summary

This document sets out the strategic objectives for the Global Forum for Media Development until the end of 2020, drawing on input from members of the Executive Committee and experts from the wider network. It recognises the fundamental requirement to assess the needs and interests of GFMD members on a rolling basis and to develop programmes which respond directly and promptly to these needs. At the current time, the key priorities have been defined as:

- **Capacity-building** with a focus on the skills necessary to write successful funding proposals, evaluate the impact of projects and manage not-for-profit organisations;
- **Knowledge management**, strengthening GFMD's ability to develop and disseminate best practice models and effective research tools across the media development community;
- **Advocacy initiatives**, which seek to impact on donor strategies and which capitalise, in particular, on GFMD's newly conferred Special Consultative Status at the United Nations.

The 2018-2020 Strategic Plan will help to define and focus GFMD's core activities over the coming two years. It will also shape and inform discussions with international donors and key strategic partners, underscoring GFMD's potential to act as a convening body and a thought-leader within the media development sector. The indicators for success presented in this document will enable the GFMD secretariat to monitor and evaluate the resonance of related activities, thereby ensuring that they can be recalibrated, where necessary, to reflect changing circumstances.

2.0. Problem statement

2.1. The media landscape

The business model for journalism and independent media is showing clear signs of decline. Globally, newspapers are on course to lose around $23.8 billion in annual advertising revenue between 2017 and 2021[1]. It is estimated that more than 10% of these losses, around $3 billion, will be sustained by local newspapers which were once the main providers of public service information for communities worldwide.

At the same time, state subsidies are rapidly becoming a major source of revenue for local news outlets, thereby giving governments new cudgels for keeping outspoken media to heel. According to an Open Society Foundations report on the future of digital journalism[2], governments used financial pressure to control news organisations in more than half of the 56 markets examined. This proportion is widely thought to have increased over the past four years.

In addition, public trust in national media has plummeted. According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, media has become the least-trusted global institution for the first time in history. Media is distrusted in 82% of countries and in only six —Singapore, the Netherlands, UAE, India, Indonesia, and China — were trust levels reported to be above 50%.[3]

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[1] PwC Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2017-2021
https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/tmt/media/outlook/segment-insights/newspapers.html
[2] Digital Journalism: Making News, Breaking News, 2014, Mapping Digital Media, Open Society Foundations
https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/mapping-digital-media-overviews-20140828.pdf
[3] Edelman Trust Barometer, 2018, https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer

The decline of local public affairs reporting is, perhaps, one of the greatest areas of concern. In his analysis *The Big Picture: Misinformation Society*,[4] US academic Robert Picard writes, "Today, symptoms of extreme – and largely unregulated – commercialism in our media system include the ubiquity of clickbait, sponsored content, behavioural advertising, and corporate and state surveillance in our digital news media, along with the tendency toward media monopolies, a lack of public access to high-quality information, a loss of diverse voices and viewpoints, and the evisceration of public service journalism."

The diminishing number of trustworthy news media has been compounded by a widespread inability to monetise online content. With falling revenues and fewer journalists, this erosion is creating "news deserts," with entire regions bereft of any meaningful coverage. In Colombia, for example, 37% of the population lacks access to locally produced news in their municipality.[5]

These trends have severely affected the role of journalist and are leading to unforeseen consequences for the future of both developed and emerging democracies. Without public service journalism, democracy itself is under threat, increasingly exposed to a culture of misinformation, proliferated by social media platforms. There is, therefore, a continuing and pressing need for multi-stakeholder actions which address the core problems and not just the symptoms of decline.

2.2. The media development community

Support for journalism and independent media has been a fixture in the international development agenda since the fall of the Soviet Union. As research by CIMA and others has shown, access to impartial media plays an essential role in supporting good governance, promoting human rights and eliminating poverty. More recently, donors and implementing agencies have shifted their focus to combating disinformation and propaganda in an effort to stymie state-sponsored efforts to undermine the credibility of democratic processes and institutions.

At the current time, funding for media development totals between $350 and $500 million per year – which constitutes around 2% of total support for good governance by OECD member countries and less than 0.5% of overall development assistance budgets.[6] However, against the backdrop of falling revenues and political pressures, this support acts as a lifeline for beleaguered media outlets worldwide. A combination of commercial income and donor funding is rapidly becoming the new business model for the independent sector.

Despite the pledges made by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the donor landscape is increasingly complex and fragmented. Donors, philanthropists and intermediaries often lack the mechanisms to identify and commit to projects or organisations which have the potential to deliver long-term impact. Meaningful coordination and effective collaboration – particularly across borders – remain the exception rather than the rule.

The current crisis of sustainability and trust in media has thrown these issues into sharp relief, renewing calls for objectives to be better articulated and streamlined. There is an urgent need to drive systems change[7], in particular by eliminating the obstacles which stand in the way of effective collaboration and knowledge-sharing. The imbalance of skills between the Global

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[4] The Big Picture: Misinformation Society, 2018, Robert Picard, http://www.publicbooks.org/the-big-picture-misinformation-society/
[5] War in Colombia is silencing local journalism, Cartografias de la informacion, FLIP, FOS and Open Society Foundations, 2017.
[6] https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/slowly-shifting-field/
[7] https://ssir.org/articles/entry/a_new_model_of_collaborative_philanthropy

North and South – particularly in terms of securing and managing grants – is also a cause for concern.

3.0. The GFMD approach

GFMD is uniquely positioned to tackle these imperatives. With a membership of more 190 implementing agencies, it represents a broad cross-section of the international media development community and includes a significant proportion of actors from the Global South. Furthermore, GFMD has a strongly independent profile, underpinned by a democratically elected governance structure which draws on multiple skills and diverse backgrounds. This means that it can represent the interests of its members fairly and equitably in all discussions aimed at shaping development strategies.

At the current time, GFMD's core activities can be summarised as follows:

Networking: GFMD has an excellent track record in connecting media development agencies through a combination of networking activities and online engagement. The organisation's flagship event – the quadrennial World Forum – remains the sector's leading arena for policy and strategy debates. As well as enabling an exchange of experience and ideas, networking activities are effective in building partnerships between individual agencies as well as exploring opportunities for collaboration or pooling resources in the context of ongoing initiatives.

Peer-to-peer learning: A key achievement of the past year has been the launch of a capacity-building programme for GFMD members which enables an exchange of knowhow and skills between organisations operating in very different environments. Webinars are the main learning platform, offering beneficiaries the chance to learn from their peers through moderated sessions and follow-up engagement. Informal surveys of GFMD members point towards a growing interest in this service, particularly in areas such as proposal development and impact evaluation.

Communications: The newly revamped website and social media platforms offer GFMD members a broad range of services and resources. They also ensure that the secretariat can share information on upcoming events and opportunities. GFMD will continue to invest time and resources in enhancing these platforms to the benefit of members worldwide. There is also room for using social media discussion forums as conduits for professional debate and constructive interaction.

Knowledge management: GFMD has accrued a wide experience of disseminating research and analysis, including insights into access to information cases and media consumption patterns. The organisation has considerable potential to showcase best practice in the sector and capture lessons learned, then to stimulate a discussion of new techniques and approaches. Knowledge management efforts are underpinned by the website which offers an increasing range of downloadable resources.

Advocacy: GFMD tackles the political and structural constraints to media sustainability and media freedoms by engaging in peer-led advocacy. Through research and networking activities, it documents how high-quality journalism and media can impact on governance, civic participation, poverty alleviation, conflict resolution and economic prosperity worldwide. Using a combination of bespoke events and third-party forums, GFMD works to mainstream these issues, thereby shaping the international discourse and reaching a wide range of decision-makers and duty-bearers.

These activities contribute to GFMD's core mission to enhance the impact, efficiency, and professionalism of a sector that supports the creation and strengthening of independent, sustainable journalism and pluralistic media which meet the information needs of communities across the globe.

4.0. Target groups

The Strategic Plan acknowledges that GFMD reaches out to a range of target groups and has significant potential to bring concrete benefits to institutions and stakeholders beyond its immediate membership. The paragraphs below describe this widening sphere of influence.

4.1. Primary target groups

- Members and associated members: GFMD remains centrally focused on serving its members, both in terms of building their capacity and representing them on the international stage. GFMD also seeks to increase its membership by demonstrating the value of the services on offer and by giving media development actors, particularly in the Global South, the chance to lend their voice to lobbying initiatives.

- Independent media outlets and journalism organisations: Whilst sub-granting programmes aimed at supporting content production in the independent sector have become commonplace, potential beneficiaries often lack the skills and capacity to apply for these grants, manage them and evaluate their impact. This is an area in which GFMD can provide essential support and make a major contribution to the sustainability of independent operators.

4.2. Secondary target groups

- Donors supporting the development of media and civil society: Increasingly, donors are seeking professional advice and insight into ways of building resilience to the challenges faced by media and civil society in the digital age. These challenges include developing news ecosystems, countering state-sponsored disinformation campaigns, and developing new business models. GFMD has access to the experience and expertise needed to inform donor strategies whilst its independent profile ensures that this advice is perceived as strictly impartial.

- Policy-makers engaged in media-related fields: By the same yardstick, policy-makers in government, media and civil society share a commitment to devising regulatory or ethical frameworks aimed at improving public access to credible information. GFMD has already gained a strong reputation for enriching these debates and ensuring that the viewpoints of diverse media actors are heard.

- Think-tanks and research institutions: GFMD has an exceptional ability to access and collate research findings produced by media development organisations which demonstrate the value of diverse approaches and test assumptions around effective methodologies. Research agencies share an interest in data generated through field work and recognise the value of working through a single interlocutor which can draw evidence from multiple sources.

4.3. End beneficiaries

- Media audiences: GFMD's work to improve the effectiveness and impact of international aid has a direct benefit for the general public who gain better access to media programming that reflects their needs and concerns. Furthermore, by promoting audience-centric research methodologies, GFMD can help ensure that audiences have a say in the development of new content and platforms.

- Democratic institutions: Media's role as a key pillar of democracy is recognised across the development community and, therefore, improvements in coordination and collaboration ultimately benefit those institutions which have a responsibility for promoting and conducting transparent democratic processes.

- Civil society: CSOs continue to make an important contribution to media programming, providing journalists with access to diverse stakeholder groups and acting as a sounding board for specific initiatives. GFMD actively involves CSOs in its advocacy work as well as encouraging members to forge stronger links between media and civil society.

5.0. GFMD Approach for 2018-2020

In order to ensure that GFMD remains relevant and that its services are properly targeted, the organisation's core activities must be closely aligned to "zeitgeist" issues which affect media practitioners and the wider media industry. Consequently, GFMD adopts a participatory, consultative approach in its dealings with both internal and external stakeholders. These consultations have helped to identify and expound the following priorities:

- GFMD needs to continue demonstrating its value as a network which can offer concrete benefits to its members. This is essential in maintaining and broadening the community of best practice which it has established. It also boosts GFMD's credibility and role as a catalyst for innovation within this community. Part of the process involves an emphasis on responding to perceived needs and researching findings.

- GFMD has prioritised amplifying the voices of Southern actors in policy debates, thereby addressing concerns that the agenda is dominated by large international agencies based in the North. GFMD recognises that local organisations often have a better insight into the immediate needs of media communities as well as a clearer idea of the possible barriers to success. GFMD is also committed to improving their business-winning skills, thereby shifting what has been described as "the balance of power" in this sector.[8]

- GFMD will seek to embody the diversity and variety of media worldwide, both by ensuring a broad geographical spread within its membership and by gaining a better understanding of the challenges faced by development actors in multiple environments. This will serve to inform and enrich best practice models on a global level.

- There is a perceived need to converge towards common standards and approaches, particularly when it comes to measuring impact and sharing results across the community. GFMD is working closely with international partners to develop an online Resource Centre which will capture the work of various stakeholders seeking to improve the quantity and quality of rigorous, independent research on the impact of media assistance. Established under the umbrella of the GFMD website, the Centre will include a searchable database of

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[8] Comment by a participant at a conference organised by the EU-funded MedMedia project in April 2017.

reports, studies, statistics and external evaluations as well as tools developed by different agencies for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

- GFMD will source funding to expand the size, reach and capabilities of its secretariat. Staffed by an Executive Director, a Policy and Programmes Manager and a Membership and Communications Officer, the secretariat plays an essential role in ensuring high levels of engagement amongst members as well as between members and external stakeholders.

6.0. Strategic objectives for 2018-2020

Overarching goal

GFMD recognises that collective efforts are the most effective way of driving system-level change and overcoming key challenges within this sector. It has an exceptional experience of bringing the needs and priorities of journalism and news media to the attention of range of stakeholders including policy makers, donors, and funders. GFMD has also played a vital role in identifying the key drivers for success and failure in journalism support and media development worldwide.

Objective 1: *To address political, economic, social, and structural constraints to journalism sustainability and media freedom through targeted, peer-led advocacy and to ensure that the voices, needs, and priorities of journalism organisations, news media, and journalism support and media development organisations are properly reflected in relevant policy processes.*

GFMD has shown its ability to work effectively to bring grassroots voices and concerns to the regional and international level and provide essential input to development policies during the formation period of the Sustainable Development Goals. Advocacy initiatives will mainstream the voices of journalism and media actors – small and big ones, NGOs and private sector, in the Global South and Global North, ensuring that they carry as much weight as many of their corporate counterparts in the North.

GFMD provides a structure that allows local, regional and global journalism support and media development NGOs to participate in global policy and decision-making processes on an even playing field. This makes for a more coherent journalism support and media development sector in which GFMD relays the structured policy arguments of civil society in policy discussions with government and private sector actors.

GFMD shares the belief that collaboration is critical to solving the biggest crisis for journalism and democracy, as we know it. Our response to new challenges requires innovative and improved mechanisms of connecting different stakeholders to efficiently match the information needs of local communities with committed donors, philanthropists, and their peers. We aim to help facilitate policies and processes that reduce monopoly power, remove commercial pressures, install public interest protections, and build efficient and sustainable funding alternatives for future journalism and media. GFMD will, on behalf of its members and the wider community, engage with decision-makers and funders to better formulate the needs within the sector and to have a two-way conversation with policy makers and funders.

GFMD will continue to advocate for increased understanding and recognition of journalism support and media development within the international donor community. This will also entail regular engagement with the representatives of key donor and philanthropy organisations to better articulate existing needs and priorities within the sector. GFMD will actively encourage increased cooperation and exchange in order to strengthen industry impact, efficiency and professionalism and will provide platforms to facilitate this objective.

In addition, GFMD will continue to support core themes identified by its members (e.g. Internet Governance, SDGs, women in media, journalists safety), channelling their views into international policy debates. GFMD's newly conferred Special Consultative Status at the UN will assist and galvanise these efforts, particularly in terms of developing policy and practice around SDG 16.10.

Objective 2: *To build skills and knowhow in journalism support and media development community through peer-to-peer learning, networking, and knowledge-sharing*

We champion the idea that journalists, media and media development organisations have a great deal of expertise to share with one another, and as such will facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchanges. GFMD will continue to leverage the expertise that exists within the media development sector to provide up-to-date, relevant knowledge and experience to its members and the wider community. We will actively contribute to building capacities of local organisations and professionals in their interaction with international implementers and donors.

This objective will be pursued through sharing and showcasing best practices and research that demonstrates impact and ensuring the dissemination of industry relevant knowledge among its members. Workshops, consultancy clinics, training sessions and webinars will be aimed at equipping media, journalists and media development staff with the ability to successfully apply for grants from international donors, foundations and philanthropists. Through the learning programmes, local organizations will gain a better understanding of the basic building blocks of non-profit management. GFMD experts will also provide more general strategic advice enabling beneficiaries to better navigate the international donor landscape and negotiate effective partnerships contributing to the overall professional level of the sector. Members – particularly those in the Global South – are eager to gain the skills necessary to successfully apply for grants in their own right and to manage donor funding in an effective way. As part of this cycle, they also need to be able to monitor and evaluate impact, thereby demonstrating the value of their work and ensuring that media development remains high on the donor agenda.

A key achievement over the past two years has been the launch of working groups for GFMD members that enable an exchange of knowhow and skills between organisations operating in very different environments. We have, so far, established the following working groups: Impact and Learning, Internet Governance, Women in Media, SDG 16.10 – Access to Information, and Local and Community Media Sustainability.

Organisational Objective: *To enhance and expand the resources offered to members, including knowledge management and communications platforms*

Over recent years, GFMD's online presence has been enhanced by a revamped website with the resource centre, a biweekly newsletter and dynamic Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn channels. These platforms have served to increase the organisation's outreach and energise its communications activities. The Strategic Plan, therefore, proposes placing increased emphasis on providing members with access to the latest research, studies and analysis which can help shape their own implementation strategies. Enhanced communications will also ensure that GFMD is more reactive to upcoming challenges and can facilitate a constructive exchange of views across its global community. This drive will continue throughout the period covered by the Strategic Plan, thereby improving GFMD's visibility and building its reputation for driving knowledge management processes.