

GFMD Statement on Donor Assistance to Journalism Support and Media Development

In light of the “Confronting the Crisis in Independent Media: Strategic Approaches for International Donors” meeting in Paris, France, on 31 January 2019, the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)¹ and its members call on the international donor/aid community to demonstrate high-level political will and engage in concerted action to respond to the global crisis in news media and journalism.

From state censorship and the imprisonment of critics, to masked political control and market capture, the combination of new and old strategies to curb press freedom have contributed to an upsurge in killings, jailing, and threats to journalists and media workers around the world. At least 53 journalists were killed in 2018, at least 34 of whom were murdered,² while more than 250 journalists are currently incarcerated worldwide.³ In addition to physical threats, the transition of our information and communication spaces to digital and mobile platforms is undermining the sustainability and quality of news, increasing distrust in institutions, and exacerbating the “post-truth” environment. Those who actively seek to destroy public trust in journalism and media have the political will, strategy, tools, and capabilities to capture information spaces, and they are often stronger than those who defend this space – particularly in countries where news organisations are operating in challenging environments or under threat.

Difficult conditions for journalistic work and professional news production often lead to the creation of “news deserts,” with entire regions remaining uncovered. In Colombia, for instance, 37% of the population does not have access to locally produced news in their municipality.⁴ Without public interest journalism, democracy itself becomes dangerously vulnerable and exposed to a culture of misinformation. Numerous studies clearly indicate that the health of news media is linked to the health of democracy, with each reinforcing the other.⁵ Healthy news ecosystems also have a vital role to play in the progress towards all other development goals, and should be held up as a primary solution to the weaponisation of media, disinformation, and misinformation.⁶

Even though journalism support and media assistance represent a small proportion of donor portfolios,⁷ this funding contributes significantly to and is increasingly crucial for sustaining journalism organisations and independent media around the world. Donor assistance to journalism support and media development is critical for the community to function strategically through measures such as improving regulatory environments, cultivating resistance to media capture,⁸ and helping professional journalism and media organisations build critical capacities. This is also in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, specifically Sustainable Development Goal 16.10, and respect for human rights.

Against the backdrop of long-standing debates about the status of journalism support and media development within the overall structure of official development assistance (ODA), there is a sense among the GFMD community that donors sometimes underestimate the importance of media as a sector in and of itself – akin to other sectors, such as health or education – which requires its own dedicated strategies and commensurate budgets.

¹ <https://gfmd.info>

² <https://cpj.org/reports/2018/12/journalists-killed-murdered-afghan-saudi-us.php>

³ https://cpj.org/data/imprisoned/2018/?status=Imprisoned&start_year=2018&end_year=2018&group_by=location

⁴ <https://flip.org.co/cartografias-informacion/>

⁵ http://www.cima.ned.org/publication/by_the_numbers___tracing_the_statistical_correlation_between_press_freedom_and_democracy/

⁶ <https://en.unesco.org/programme/ipdc/initiatives/mdis>

⁷ <https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CIMA-Official-Development-Assistance.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.cima.ned.org/resource/service-power-media-capture-threat-democracy/>

In a January 2019 study commissioned by GFMD,⁹ our members emphasised that although donor understanding of the sector has improved in recent years – including a shift away from the instrumentalisation of media to achieve other development goals – there is still a concern that funding for the field remains constrained by limited human capacity and low levels of media-specific expertise within donor agencies. The study also highlighted that most journalism support and media development organisations (79%) operate on short funding cycles of up to two years. Short-term funding cycles and increasing administrative burdens often make these organisations less effective, trapping them in a cycle of perpetual fundraising for and reporting on small, short-term grants. Thus, longer-term funding is not only important for the sustainability of organisations, but also for achieving strategic and project goals as well as demonstrating impact.

Based on the results of this study, GFMD and its members are advising greater institutional/core support, capacity building, and flexible, longer-term funding for the sector. We are also committed to working together with international development assistance actors to inform donor strategies. In line with the recommendations of the study, we seek to provide more policy input to foster greater alignment between the sector’s needs and donor priorities, specifically by:

- Facilitating greater consultation with media and journalism stakeholders internationally, regionally, and nationally;
- Supporting stronger coordination between donors and the journalism support and media development community;
- Facilitating ongoing needs assessments and quicker responsiveness to changing needs; and
- Working together to develop a common monitoring and evaluation framework across donors and/or programs, as well as more effectively tell the story of the results and impact over time of donor support.

GFMD calls on the international community to reinforce its recognition of the importance of media and journalism for good governance and democratic institutions by firmly positioning support for the sector within the overall international development assistance and governance agenda. GFMD and its members also call for regular annual meetings of donors, implementers, and beneficiaries in order to ensure the prioritisation of journalism support and media development, especially in the face of rapid changes in market dynamics, technological advances, and political uncertainties.



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About GFMD

Established in 2005, the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) is an international network of more than 190 journalism support and media development organisations. As a not-for-profit, Belgian-registered ASBL, GFMD’s main focus is to foster collaboration as well as an exchange of information and experience among its members with the aim to foster viable and independent journalism, greater transparency, and more pluralistic and sustainable media environments.

⁹ <https://gfmd.info/gfmd-content/uploads/2019/02/GFMD-Recipient-Perceptions-of-Media-Development-Assistance-2019.pdf>