GFMD
GLOBAL FORUM FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

Global Forum for Media Development

Mapping of media assistance and journalism support programmes in the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region

With special focus on the top five recipient countries

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

*by **Owais Aslam Ali**, GFMD Steering Committee Member*

The Global Forum for Media Development's (GFMD) Mapping of media assistance and journalism support programmes in Asia, Pacific and Oceania region is a timely data-based analysis of media assistance in the Asia region between 2020-2024. It will be an important resource for stakeholders — donors, international NGOs, local civil society organisations, media, and journalists — to assess donor-based funding in the region.

Built on publicly available data, in which a lack of transparency was noted, this mapping report identifies key features, distribution, and gaps in 257 programmes and grants. It provides the basis for discussions on how funding in the region can be adapted to ensure improved compliance with the OECD Development Co-operation Principles and how the media development community can be better equipped to deal with sudden setbacks and the systemic challenges it faces.

In a region where challenges to the media are numerous and diverse, the need for donor-based funding to provide transparent and sustainable programming in response to shifting ground realities is essential. In a sector where at least **80% of funding comes from international governments**, reassessing the funding landscape has become crucial to grappling with a global backsliding of democratic commitment.

Main findings

- The report focuses on five countries — Afghanistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka— highlighting the extremities and extraordinary circumstances that impact the **US$308 million funding in the region**. The emergency situations in **Afghanistan and Myanmar**, resulting in support for exile media, highlight countries with volatile and uncertain political situations in the region that pose unique challenges for donors.
- There is a geographical concentration of funding with **South Asia and South East Asia collectively receiving at least 60% of all funding, with South Asia receiving the largest share.**

- There appears to be **a clear lack of transparency in the disbursement and implementation of donor-based media assistance programs**.
- The report's findings indicate **a glaring lack of local leadership in media assistance programmes**, with **only 4%** of the total funded volume comprising programmes managed by organisations located in the country of implementation.
- One out of five projects analysed focussed on supporting professional capacity building or thematic reporting, while nearly half of the funding was under the theme of democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression.

An unpleasant push to rethink donor-based funding

The urgency for a reassessment of donor-based funding came to the fore in January 2025 with the U.S. funding freeze, on which media assistance in the Asia region was highly dependent. Almost one-third of the funding came from the U.S., with most of it issued by USAID alone.

While the suspension of US funding may be the most drastic blow to the donor community, the lack of local ownership of funding programmes, limited funding for thematic reporting, and core support to local organisations point to systemic challenges that require rethinking. The dramatic disruption in US funding should be a call for fundamental changes that would have been put off otherwise.

In the GFMD Asia Members Meeting in May 2025, Waqas Naeem, the report's eminently qualified author with many years of experience in media development, rightly noted that the report provides significant inputs to the donor community, particularly at a time when they may be re-strategising.

A call to engage locally with transparency

An International Media Support report, *Where is the money?, A global perspective on forms of funding, financing and investment for public interest media*, found that media in Asia sought transparency, reliability, and inclusivity in grant funding.

The reality this GFMD mapping report presents is that donors are not adequately engaging local partners.

If we want to adapt funding to address the challenges faced by the donor community head-on, donors must engage with local stakeholders and develop the capacity of local organisations to implement projects while striving to increase transparency across the funding landscape, from disbursement to implementation and reporting.

Owais Aslam Ali, the Director of the Pakistan Press Foundation, has served on the GFMD Steering Committee since 2016. After completing two consecutive terms, he will be stepping down this year.

Mapping of media assistance and journalism support programmes in the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region

PURPOSE

This mapping of media development and journalism support projects in the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region was conducted between October and December 2024. It was done in connection with the ongoing work of Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) to provide information for a sector-wide discussion of the funding situation and journalism support environment in the Asia region. The mapping was updated in May 2025 to incorporate feedback and inputs from GFMD members as well as to take stock of the media development funding situation in Asia after the U.S. administration suspended its foreign aid in January 2025 and began to dismantle the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The mapping seeks to provide an overview of media development programmes as a basis for discussion among donors, media support organisations, media outlets and journalists about the experience and lessons learned from implementing media assistance initiatives in the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region as well as for initiating conversations on strategies for future interventions.

Note: The data collection and preliminary draft of the mapping report was completed in 2024, before the U.S. funding freeze was enacted. The research was supported by the Media Viability Accelerator (MVA), an initiative that was funded by the USAID. The MVA closed down on 31 March, two months after the events of January 2025 that also led to the dismantling of the USAID by the current U.S. administration. One of the reasons for commissioning the report was to inform the work of the MVA by identifying Asian countries and sub-regions where media viability support was needed and could be provided through MVA activities and grants. This is not possible now due to the MVA closure.

However, this mapping report is being shared nonetheless in the hope that it will assist donors, implementers and media communities in the region in their efforts to effectively coordinate media support, avoid overlap and duplication, and identify gaps in funding at a time when support for independent journalism and public interest media is most needed.

METHODOLOGY

What did the mapping examine: The mapping focussed on media development and journalism support programmes announced, launched, implemented or concluded between January 2020 and December 2024 in individual countries of the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region as well as at the regional level involving multiple Asian countries. The data provides a snapshot limited in time to current and recently ended programmes.

How did we collect the data: The mapping was a collective and collaborative effort; information was gathered by a GFMD consultant, the GFMD Secretariat, partners and members and donor organisations working in Asia.

Information sources used: Sources used for data collection included online databases on humanitarian and development aid (e.g., d-portal etc.), open data sources related to multilateral institutions and government aid agencies (e.g., OpenAid.se, Grants.gov etc.), the websites of philanthropic foundations, media funds and tech donors (e.g., NED, Ford Foundation, MDIF, Google News Initiative etc.), the websites of international, regional and national organisations implementing media assistance programmes (e.g., Internews etc.) and websites publishing media development grant funding opportunities (e.g., GFMD, IJNet etc.).

In many instances, the data on identified programmes was checked and validated using keyword search. For Official Development Assistance (ODA) data for media development collected from d-portal, the OECD Creditor Reporting System's sectoral classification and purpose code of "Media and Free Flow of Information (15153)" was used to search for relevant grants.

Regional classification: The selection of the regional boundaries was done in line with the designated regions of GFMD's global operations. The "Asia, Pacific and Oceania" regional boundaries used for the mapping, therefore, include 56 countries, territories and Small Island Developing States across the subregions of Eastern Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia & New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia[1]. The Central Asian and Western Asian (Caucasus) subregions were not included in the mapping because they fall within the "Eastern Europe, Caucasus & Central Asia" regional classification used by GFMD. Similarly, countries of the Middle East and Asia Minor were not included because they fall within the "MENA" region, as classified by GFMD.

Focus countries: In addition to the regional analysis, the mapping also focused on the five countries that received the highest volumes of media development funding. These five countries included three from South Asia and two from Southeast Asia. Two of the focus countries, Afghanistan and Myanmar, are also significant because they both faced emergency situations during the time period under review due to the overthrow of democratically elected governments, which led to circumstances forcing media in these countries into exile.

Limitations: The information collected as part of this mapping exercise provides a broad overview and general analysis of available funding but it is not an exhaustive list, as the data collection depended on publicly available details. It is plausible that more instances of funding were made available by a variety of donors for media development activities in the region during the time period for this study and their exclusion from the data is inadvertent. Moreover, if information about any identified and relevant programme is found to be inaccurate or missing from the data, it is an un-intentional error and may be due to incomplete or unavailable details about programme funding volumes or descriptions in the public domain. Attempts were made to clean the data to remove overlaps between calls for smaller subgrants and the large media development programmes they might be part of, but some overlap in the data might be possible and any such instance is regretted.

In some cases, for example in relation to philanthropic funders and foundations that support development interventions in Asia, the mapping exercise observed scarcity of funding information disaggregated by individual grants, themes, and country of focus, which made it impossible to reflect the information in the data. For National Endowment for Democracy (NED) grants, the report acknowledges that NED provided annual grants related to media development for countries in the region throughout the reporting period, but the financial information in the report only reflects the NED grants for 2024 whose list was made available on the NED website in 2025. The lack of transparency also extended to governmental grants. Some d-portal records, such as those for U.S. media development funding for Afghanistan, were redacted under U.S. law and therefore made analysis difficult due to the lack of details about programme themes, descriptions, and implementing partners etc.

The research also noted that d-portal data – based on the International Aid Transparency Initiative and the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System – often inflates the share of the "Media and free flow of information" sub-sectoral funding to match the overall budget and disbursement of a grant which may have a significant funding from other sectors. In such cases, the mapping attempted to accurately reflect only the share of media-related funding volumes in the data set, wherever possible. On the other hand, for regional or global initiatives that specifically focussed on or generally included Asian countries or sub-regions, the overall budget of the initiatives was used as it was not possible to ascertain their specific disbursements for Asia. It is therefore likely that some figures might be conservative and others might be inflated. In conclusion, the funding estimates and analysis should be viewed as indicative rather than definitive.

[1] See Appendix for full list of countries used for the mapping.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- **Overall funding volume:** The mapping identified around **U.S. $308 million (€292m)** in funding for announced, ongoing and concluded media development programmes in the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region between 2020 and 2024.[2]

- **Geographical distribution of the funding:** The South Asian subregion received the highest total of media-related funding in the region with around **$98m (or 32% of the total)**, based on the available data. Afghanistan topped the list of recipients of country-specific media support funding in the region with **nearly $37m**.

- **Thematic focus of programmes: Nearly 33%** of the 257 identified programmes and grants had a broad focus on "Democracy, Human Rights and Freedom of Expression", amounting to a **51% share in the overall funding volume**. Initiatives that supported media viability had the second-largest share in funding, with **nearly $51m available.** However, only a third of the media viability funds could be confidently marked as core support, while the rest were project-based assistance or related to capacity building activities.

- **Type of funding:** Only 11% of the identified funding was to fully or partially provide core support that recipient organisations could use in an unrestricted or

- flexible manner for their operations and institutional strengthening. The remaining programmes were largely project-based or activity-based initiatives with set objectives and the expectation to be implemented within a certain thematic area.

- **Scope of funding**: Less than a quarter of the funding (**23% or $70m**) was for regional initiatives whereas the majority of the funds (**59% or $182m**) were for country-based activities.

- **Sources of funding:** The USAID, SIDA and UK FCDO were the top three donors for media development work in the region, with the USAID programmes accounting for around one-third of all available funding. Overall, **82% of the funding** was provided by international governments.

- **Implementing organisations:** Programmes implemented by organisations based in the country of implementation accounted for **only 4% of the total funding volume**. Around **38% of the funding** was implemented by organisations based in the country of the donor entity.

Overall funding volume and geographical distribution

The mapping identified 257 programmes, activities, grants or subgrants related to media assistance and journalism support in the region that were announced, launched, implemented or concluded between 2020 and 2024. The total available funding for these identified interventions was $308,097,236.

The majority of the funding ($182.5m or 59% of the total) went to 207 country-specific programmes. Nearly a quarter of the funds ($70m) were contributed by 32 regional programmes, while 18 global programmes with a specific focus on Asian countries or sub-regions made up around 18% (or $55.5m) of the total identified funds. Chart 1 shows the share of geographical distribution for the overall budget amount.
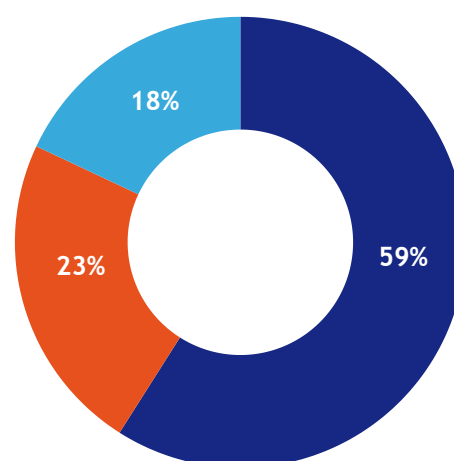
- Country: $182,471,135
- Regional: $70,137,475
- Global: $55,488,626

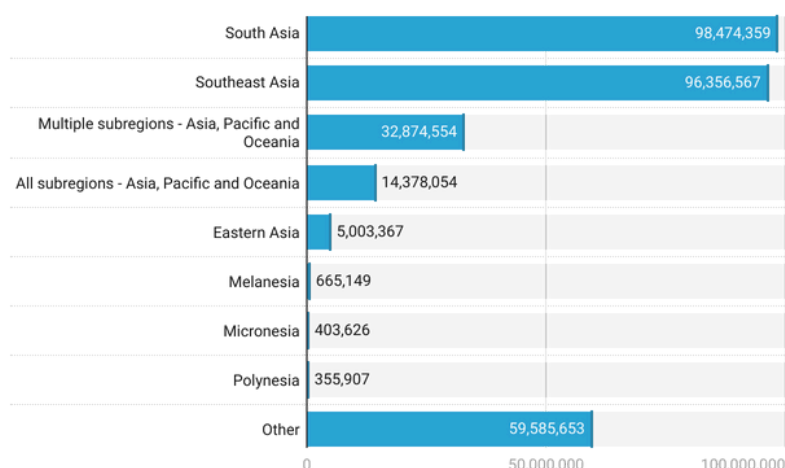Chart 1: Geographical distribution of overall funding, 2020-2024*

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[2] *This figure includes global and multi-regional programmes that clearly express the inclusion of an Asia-regional focus or representation of Asian countries.*

In terms of subregions, South Asia ranked highest with its eight countries receiving nearly $98m in media support. It was followed by Southeast Asia (11 countries) receiving media assistance worth around $96m. Chart 2 shows the subregional breakdown of the overall budget.

For the $182.5m made available as country-specific funds, Afghanistan topped the list of countries with the most media assistance received during the period under study (20% or $37m). It was followed by Myanmar (19% or $35m) and Bangladesh (13% or $24m). Chart 3 shows the list of the top 10 recipient countries for country-specific media development support programmes. These 10 countries accounted for nearly 94% of all the country-specific funds identified during the reporting period.

For most of the top 10 recipient countries, the media development funding was a tiny share of the overall Official Development Assistance (ODA) received by the countries between 2020 and 2023.[3]

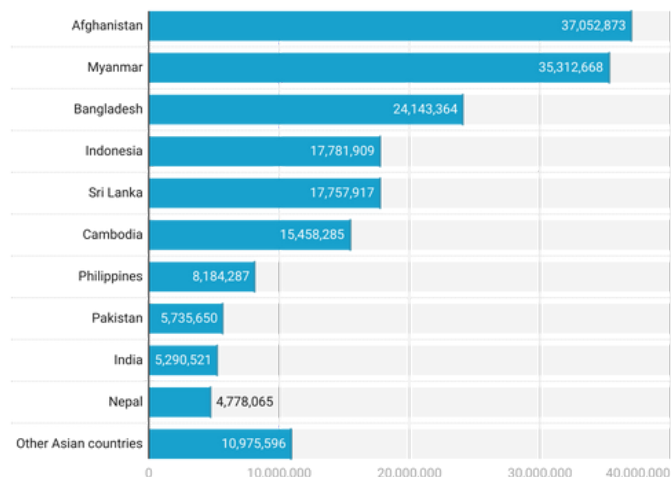| Funding volume (USD)	
South Asia	98,474,359
Southeast Asia	96,356,567
Multiple subregions - Asia, Pacific and Oceania	32,874,554
All subregions - Asia, Pacific and Oceania	14,378,054
Eastern Asia	5,003,367
Melanesia	665,149
Micronesia	403,626
Polynesia	355,907
Other	59,585,653

Note: Total funding volume = $308m. No funding was identified for the Australia & New Zealand subregion. The 'Other' category includes global funding also available for Asia along with other world regions.

Chart 2: Overall funding volume by Asian subregion, 2020-2024

After excluding outliers, Chart 4 shows that the media funding as a share of total ODA ranged between 0.03% to 0.89%, with an average value of 0.3%. This is slightly more than the global estimate of 0.19% media development share of ODA, which itself is abysmally low.[4]
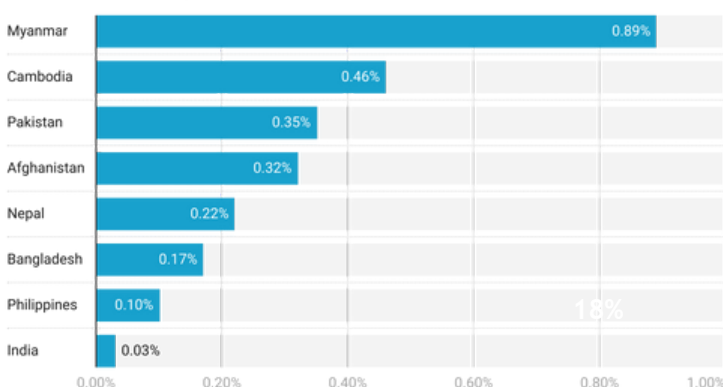
Funding volume (USD)	
Afghanistan	37,052,873
Myanmar	35,312,668
Bangladesh	24,143,364
Indonesia	17,781,909
Sri Lanka	17,757,917
Cambodia	15,458,285
Philippines	8,184,287
Pakistan	5,735,650
India	5,290,521
Nepal	4,778,065
Other Asian countries	10,975,596

Note: Total country-specific funds = $182,471,135. These figures are for announced, ongoing and concluded programmes between 2020 and 2024. The figures do not include funds for regional and global programmes.

Chart 3: Funding allocation by country (excluding regional or global programmes), 2020-2024

Media development funding as share of total of ODA (%)	
Myanmar	0.89%
Cambodia	0.46%
Pakistan	0.35%
Afghanistan	0.32%
Nepal	0.22%
Bangladesh	0.17%
Philippines	0.10%
India	0.03%

Note: The chart shows media development funding (2020-2024) as percentage share of total ODA received by the country (2020-2023). Two countries, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, showed outlier behaviour with larger shares of media development funding in total ODA. Sri Lanka had 2.8% media development share of ODA without any discernible cause. Indonesia, an upper middle income country, had a 107% media development share of ODA due to negative ODA flow of $2.6b in 2022 because of potential repayments.

Chart 4: Media development funding by country (excluding regional or global funds) as share of total ODA received by country

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[3] *The ODA statistics were taken from the OECD Data Explorer, with latest figures available for 2023: https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_DAC2%40DF_OFFICIAL&df[ag]=OECD.DCD.FSD&df[vs]=1.3&dq=DAC..967.USD.Q&lom=LASTNPERIODS&lo=5&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false&vw=tb*

[4] *The mean value may be higher than the global average because funding for five years was compared with total ODA calculated over four years only because 2024 ODA statistics are not available yet. The 0.19% global figure is from the IPFIM post about an OECD assessment: https://ifpim.org/resources/donor-funding-to-international-media-is-even-lower-than-we-thought-we-need-to-increase-it-rapidly-to-protect-and-sustain-independent-journalism/*

The main themes of the programmes

The titles and descriptions of the identified programmes were examined to determine their thematic focus against a list of predetermined themes borrowed from literature.[5]

Over half of the funding (51% or around $156m) was for the theme of "Democracy, Human Rights and Freedom of Expression", indicating that the media development programmes broadly addressed the journalism environment in relation or as part of efforts to strengthen civil society, governance and democratic values. This theme also had the largest number of programmes (33% of 257 instances). These programmes were characterised by a focus on the enabling environment of freedom of expression as a means to support independent journalism and also involved strengthening collaboration between civil society and media for the protection and promotion of human rights and democratic norms.

The second-largest share of funding was for programmes related to the financial sustainability of media (17% or nearly $51m in available funds). The initiatives related to financial sustainability included capacity building, mentorship and subgrants for news organisations and journalists to develop a better understanding of business viability and implement projects related to product testing or audience research to help them diversify their revenue streams. However, only a third of the funds directed towards

media viability could be confidently labelled as core funding. The remaining two-thirds of the funding appeared locked in project-based assistance and capacity-building support for media organisations, without offering them the flexibility to use the assistance to cover their operational costs.

Even though one in every 10 programmes had a focus on supporting thematic reporting, the funding available for these initiatives was only 6% of the total $284m, according to the data. These funds were usually in the form of fellowships, subgrants or training opportunities for individual journalists or teams of journalists on specific issues.

The most prominent coverage areas for thematic reporting support included reporting on climate, environmental issues, health, gender and human rights. Investigative journalism (5%) was one of the least funded thematic focus areas for the identified programmes; these funds were specifically for supporting investigative reporting or investigative news organisations and were therefore classified separately from other thematic news reporting grants. Content production (3%) was different from thematic reporting or investigative journalism because content production grants typically allowed news organisations to fund their overall news broadcasts and journalism output. Chart 5 shows all the themes mapped in the data set by share of available funding.
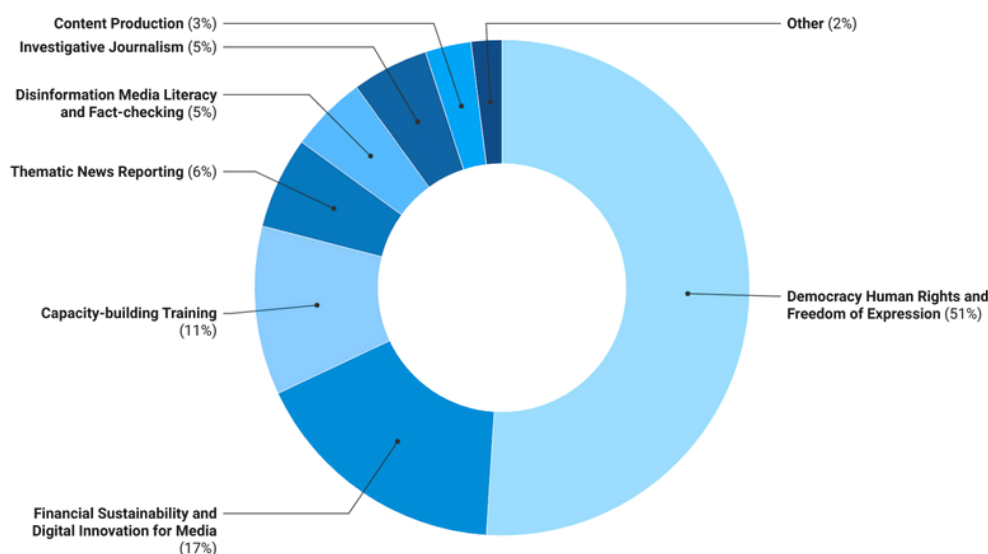
Note: Total funding volume = $308,097,236

Chart 5: Themes of the identified programmes, as percentage of total funding

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[5] List of themes was inspired by GFMD mapping of media assistance for Western Balkans, available here: https://gfmd.info/h-content/uploads/2024/06/Mapping-of-media-assistance-and-journalism-support-programmes-in-the-Western-Balkans-region-gfmd.pdf

Type of funding

The mapping also investigated the type of funding to determine the share of programmatic (or project-based) funding and core support (unrestricted funds for operations or organisational strengthening) as well as other types of assistance.

Only 44 programmes (or 17% of the total 257 initiatives) were either fully or partially providing core support to the recipient organisations whereas the rest were largely project- or activity-based funds, including for content production.

The core support funding interventions included assistance provided to media and civil society organisations related to Afghanistan and Myanmar, initiatives announced by the International Fund for Public Interest Media, and NED grants for news organisations, among others. The funding for the core support initiatives was around $34m, or around 11% of the total.

Size and duration of funding

Excluding global funding, the mapping had identified around 239 media assistance opportunities within the broader Asia region with a total of around $253m in funding.[6] This means an average funding size of $1.1m per programme for country or region-specific initiatives. It also amounts to around $51m on average in identified funding per year for the region, according to the data.

The maximum budget found in the data was $10m for the "Empowering the truth-tellers: Asia Investigative Reporting Network (AIR Network)" initiative, implemented by Pact and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ). It was one of 13 projects awarded under the USAID's Civil Society and Media – Strengthening Together and Advancing in New Directions (CSM-STAND) project. The five-year initiative was expected to continue until 2028, but with the likely demise of USAID, it is also expected to be shelved. On the other end of the spectrum, the minimum budget was around $5,000 for a capacity building training project in Vietnam, supported by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency.

Subgrants: The mapping was able to identify some instances where programmes offered subgrants to journalists or media organisations for reporting or projects. The subgrants ranged from $250 for freelance news reporting opportunities to $20,000 for media organisations for strengthening their content output on a specific theme, such as the environmental impact of infrastructure projects.

The average subgrant amount was around $7,000, based on the available information.

The total amount of funding delivered through subgrants is difficult to ascertain because many subgranting calls did not specify the total number of awards. However, a conservative estimate shows around $1.4m allocated as subgrants, based on the available data. It should be noted that some international media development organisations have now started indicating the share of their annual programmatic expenses that go to subgranting.

According to the DW Akademie's recent The State of Media Development report, 14 international media development organisations reported that, on average, about 40% of their funding reaches their local and regional partners directly.[7] One example of this can be seen in the Free Press Unlimited annual report where the organisation noted that a majority of its €15m activity expenses are provided to media organisations via subgrants.[8] It is recommended that not only media development funders but also implementing organisations should transparently publish disaggregated data about subgrants and flows to local partners.

Duration: Nearly half of the programmes (47% of the 257) were for a duration of one year or less. Around one in every three programmes had an implementation duration between one to three years. Only around 10% of the programmes ran for five years. The average duration of the 257 programmes analysed for the study was 26 months.

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[6] This dimension of analysis excludes the multi-regional or global funds.

[7] See Page 36 of The State of Media Development report by DW Akademie: https://akademie.dw.com/en/the-state-of-media-development-vis-%C3%A0-vis-the-oecd-principles/a-71897327

[8] Free Press Unlimited annual report 2023: https://freepressunlimited.org/sites/default/files/documents/Annual%20and%20financial%20Report%202023_0.pdf

Sources of funding

Altogether, the mapping identified at least around 51 donors and funders. Chart 6 shows the contributions of the top donors with funding volumes above $1m, excluding those institutions whose only funding for Asia was part of global or multi-region programmes.
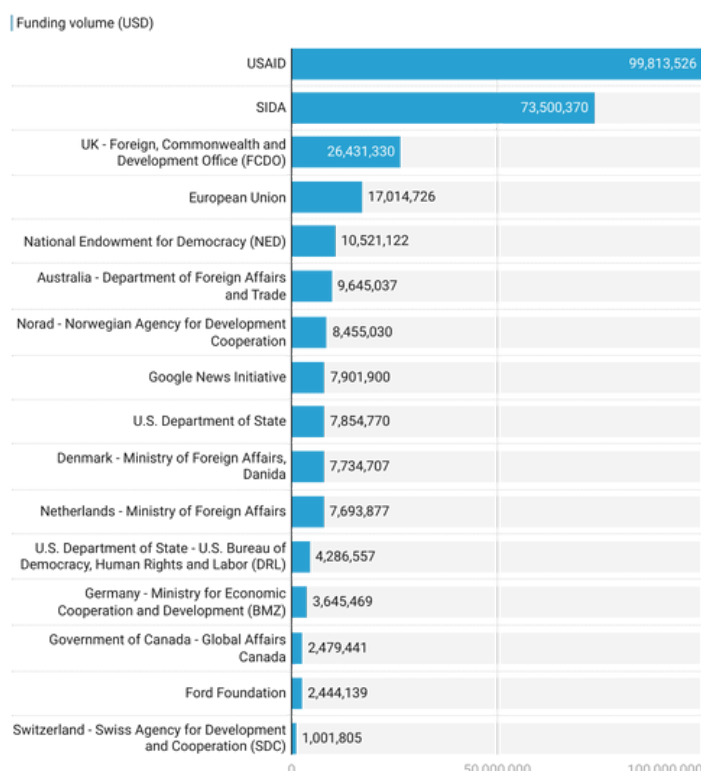
Funding volume (USD)	
USAID	99,813,526
SIDA	73,500,370
UK - Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)	26,431,330
European Union	17,014,726
National Endowment for Democracy (NED)	10,521,122
Australia - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	9,645,037
Norad - Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation	8,455,030
Google News Initiative	7,901,900
U.S. Department of State	7,854,770
Denmark - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Danida	7,734,707
Netherlands - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	7,693,877
U.S. Department of State - U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL)	4,286,557
Germany - Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)	3,645,469
Government of Canada - Global Affairs Canada	2,479,441
Ford Foundation	2,444,139
Switzerland - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)	1,001,805

Chart 6: List of top donors for the region[9]

Based on the mapped information, the U.S. was the largest media development donor for the region with $112m made available in funding for media-related programmes (36% of the total identified funding). This included funding by USAID, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) as well as U.S. Embassies in various countries of the region. USAID-funded projects alone accounted for 32% of the total identified funding for the region between 2020 and 2024.

SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, occupied second place on the list of top donors, accounting for just over a quarter of the total funding (24%, or $73.5m). The UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) was the third-largest donor in the region for media assistance, with around 9% or $26m in funding.

OECD DAC dominance: The donor list is dominated by governments and entities from Europe and North America not only because of their significant role in supporting media development but also because the funding data was based on contributions from OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries and prominent philanthropic foundations located in the Global North. The data and analysis, therefore, do not feature possible contributions for media development from within the Asian region and by non-DAC countries, such as China.

NED grants: The mapping included data from the recently released list of grants issued by NED for fiscal year 2024. A total of 82 media-related grants were awarded by NED for countries in Asia in that one year, with a total funding volume of $10.5m. The data can be extrapolated to estimate that the NED may have provided around $50m in media development funding to the Asian region between 2020 and 2024. However, for the period 2020 to 2023, no disaggregated data was available about the NED grants for Asia.

Since the non-profit foundation issues a variety of thematic grants each year, the lack of data made it difficult to determine the exact number of grants and funding for its media development support in Asia for the four years prior to 2024. Therefore, the $50m estimate based on an assumption was not reflected in the data and only the 2024 funding volume of $10.5m backed by evidence was included for analysis.

Impact of US funding freeze and impending cuts: As is clear from the above information, the dismantling of USAID is likely to wipe out at least one-third of the media development funding available for the Asia region. The funding deficit for the Asian media sector from the elimination of USAID grants alone could be around $20m per year on average, by extrapolating based on historical funding trends.

If future funding cuts by the current U.S. administration extend to journalism support awards issued through the U.S. Department of State, then roughly another $2 to $3 million on average per year will be lost. Furthermore, the uncertainty around the future of NED grants related to media development could lead to the loss of an additional approximately $10 million per year for Asia.
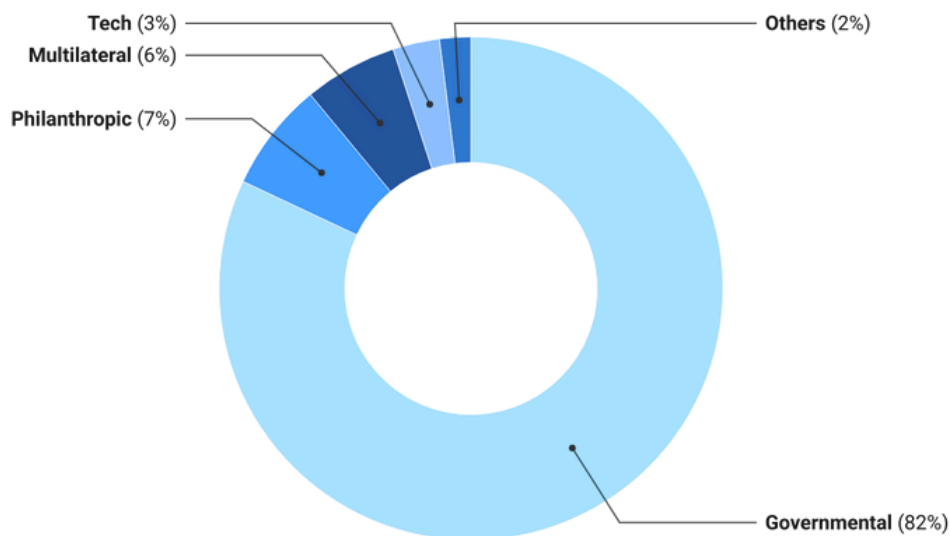
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[9] The NED figure shown in the chart is only for 2024.

According to the data, there were 29 media support programmes funded by USAID in the Asia region. Half of these initiatives were ongoing as of December 2024 and their planned end dates were between 2025 and 2029. These ongoing USAID funded programmes had an overall budget of around $47m, with around $13m funds disbursed by December 2024. This means that the USAID cuts may have potentially affected $34m in media development currently and for the short-term future. The countries most affected by the funding freeze include Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Nepal and Afghanistan where ongoing USAID programmes are disrupted.

The analysis is supported by a new assessment published by three consortia of international media development organisations.[10]

The negative impact of the USAID funding suspension on Myanmar appears to be severe, with local organisations indicating that nearly $39m in civil society funding is affected, including at least $1m in media support funds.[11] Another estimate shows that several local media organisations in Myanmar, Afghanistan and Cambodia may have lost up to 50% of their existing funding due to the U.S. funding cuts.[12]

The mapping also labelled the type of donors, for example governmental, philanthropic etc. Just over 80% of the funding was provided by international governments, including through their development aid agencies.

Tech (3%)
Multilateral (6%)
Philanthropic (7%)
Others (2%)
Governmental (82%)

Note: Total funding volume = $308,097,236

Chart 7: The share of total funding by type of donor organisation

Implementing organisations

In terms of organisations implementing the media support programmes, around 38% of the funding was handled by implementers that were based in the country of the donor entity while the programmes managed by organisations located in the country of implementation had a funding share of only 4% of the total available volume.

Altogether, half of the 257 identified programmes were implemented by organisations based in either the country or the region of implementation, but this amounted for only 19% of the total funding (including the 4% mentioned above), demonstrating that a majority of the funding was managed by international

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[10] *Crisis in Journalism:* https://www.freepressunlimited.org/sites/default/files/documents/Crisis%20in%20Journalism.pdf

[11] *Financial estimate based on February 2025 statement by Human Rights Myanmar:* https://eng.mizzima.com/2025/02/11/19086

[12] *Based on self-reported situation analysis by local news organisations:* https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/IMS_Impact_Report_2025.pdf

organisations with links to donor countries and entities. This indicates that most donors are not providing funds directly to local media or civil society organisations for work within the Asia region.

For the purpose of this analysis, only organisations originating from the country or region of implementation were considered as local.

Local country offices of international media development organisations were considered as belonging to the countries where the international organisations are headquartered.
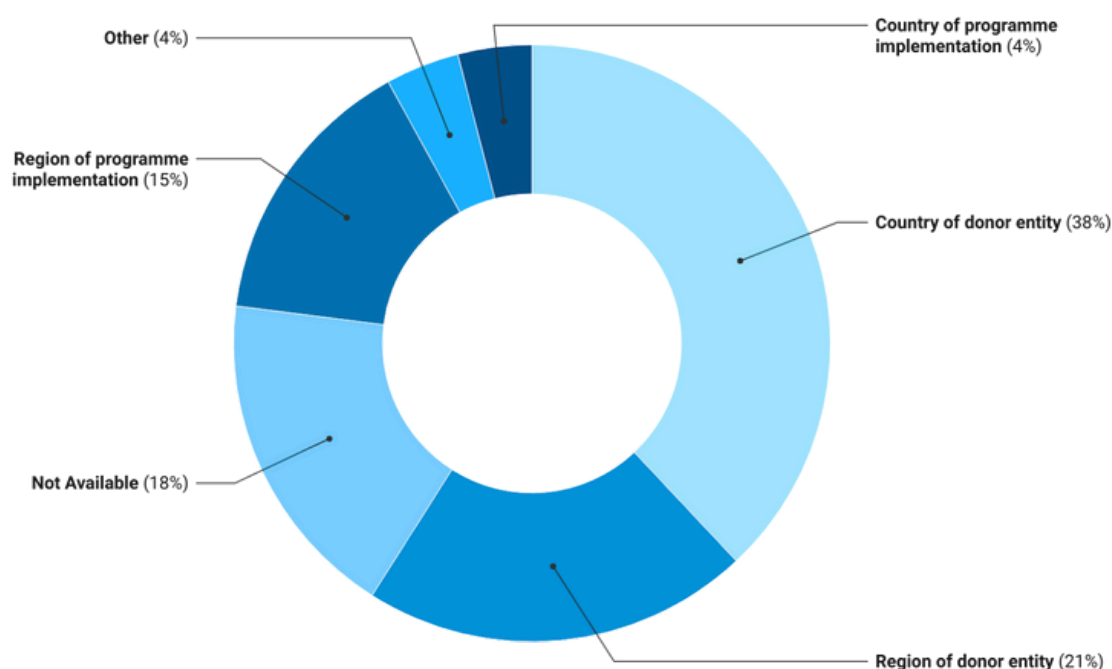
Note: Chart labels indicate location of the implementing organisation. Values show the percentage share of total funding volume available to the implementing organisations. Total funding volume = $308,097,236.

Chart 8: Percentage share of funding volume, by location of the implementing organisation

Focus Countries

For country-specific funds, the analysis examined the top five recipient countries in terms of the highest funding volumes. These countries are Afghanistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. These five countries accounted for just over 70% of the total country-specific funding

(excluding global and regional funds) for the Asia region. The analysis also looks at how these countries will be affected going forward due to the decline in overall media development spending by donor governments and organisations.

Country	Number of programmes	Ended programmes	Ongoing programmes	Total funding (USD)	Share of funding out of total for focus countries (%)	Major donors and their contribution share in total funding
Afghanistan	25	17	8	37,052,873	28%	SIDA (35%), USAID (18%), FCDO (16%), EU (15%)
Myanmar	32	23	9	35,312,668	27%	USAID (69%), Norad (16%), Canada (7%)
Bangladesh	10	7	3	24,143,364	18%	SIDA (40%), USAID (31%), FCDO (19%)
Indonesia	11	5	6	17,781,909	14%	USAID (79%), EU (8%), Germany (6%)
Sri Lanka	11	7	4	17,757,917	13%	USAID (82%), EU (11%)
Total	89	59	30	132,048,731	100%	

Table 1: Details about the programmes, overall funding volume (excluding regional or global funds) and donors for focus countries

Afghanistan: The reporting period was marked by extreme turmoil for Afghanistan's media sector after the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021, with many journalists and news organisations either forced to stop working or go into exile abroad to continue their work. The mapping identified 25 programmes in Afghanistan from 2020 to 2024. Among the ongoing initiatives, a $5.8m multi-year SIDA-funded programme is providing support for the safety of Afghan journalists and the operations of exile media while a $3m EU-funded project is leveraging the support of local Afghan media for the distribution of life-saving information to citizens.

NED grants in 2024 supported Afghan exile media outlets with core support worth around $1.2m. Most of the ongoing funding is expected to run out in 2025. The USAID dismantling may have disrupted up to $2m in ongoing media funding for the country that was planned for disbursements up until fall 2025. According to one assessment, nine radio stations in the country are at risk of closure due to USAID cuts.[13]

Myanmar: Myanmar's news media also continued to face emergency and exile conditions during the reporting period, after the military coup there in February 2021. The mapping documented 32 programmes for Myanmar between 2020 and 2024. Among the ongoing programmes, a $1.4m programme funded by NORAD is supporting Burmese media inside the country and operating from exile to continue their public interest journalism and strengthen their financial and operational capacities. Another ongoing programme, funded by the Canadian government, to strengthen civil society includes a 12% ($2.3m) commitment to train Myanmar media partners in conflict-sensitive reporting.

NED grants for Burmese news organisations during 2024 provided content production support worth $1.3m to exile media as well as news organisations with a focus on local language journalism for specific states and regions inside Myanmar. The USAID was a major funder of media development work for Myanmar, with nearly $18m in programmes that ended by the end of 2024. The USAID suspension would disrupt at least $1m in media assistance to Myanmar in 2025.

[13] *Crisis in journalism:* https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/crisis-in-journalism-report-june-2025.pdf

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All except one of the ongoing funding programmes (excluding USAID) are expected to end by March 2026, which will likely exacerbate the funding crisis for Myanmar's news organisations and create existential risks for exile media.

Bangladesh: The mapping identified 10 programmes for Bangladesh, including multi-year, multi-million dollar media support initiatives funded by SIDA, USAID and FCDO. Only three of these programmes are ongoing. These include a $0.95m EU funded project to foster collaboration between Bangladeshi media and civil society, a $5.2m SIDA-funded programme to improve quality journalism, and an FCDO programme to promote civic spaces that includes a $4.6m commitment for media support. The latter two initiatives will continue through 2026-27. In 2024, NED provided grants to Bangladeshi organisations for strengthening journalism and freedom of expression worth $0.8m. Unlike other Asian countries, Bangladesh appears to be least affected by the U.S. funding freeze as the mapping did not identify any US funding for media development for the country beyond January 2025.

Indonesia: The mapping identified 11 media development programmes for Indonesia, out of which six were ongoing. Indonesia was largely tipped up in the list of Asian countries with high funding volumes due to USAID support.

One five-year USAID programme titled Media Empowerment for Democratic Integrity and Accountability, which was meant to run until October 2025, accounted for over half of the $18m funding identified for Indonesia during the period under review. Implemented by Internews with seven local partners including the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), this programme claimed to have trained 1200 local journalists in data journalism and assisted 120 news organisations on media viability, before the USAID funding was terminated. Other notable ongoing initiatives included core support by Germany for a media outlet in West Papua and the Netherlands-supported Safe Journalism Consortium that worked on the safety of Indonesian journalists. All ongoing media support funding for Indonesia identified by the mapping was scheduled to end by March 2026.

Sri Lanka: The U.S. funding freeze also spells bad news for media development work in Sri Lanka. USAID accounted for 82% of the total funding identified for Sri Lanka between 2020 and 2024. Out of the 11 programmes documented for Sri Lanka, all four ongoing programmes that were expected to continue beyond December 2024 had U.S. funding sources (two through USAID and two through DRL). The termination of these programmes could lead to a loss of up to $3m in assistance for the country's media sector.

Lowest recipient countries: While the analysis about the focus countries shows the donor priority destinations and the potential funding shortfall they might face in the next few years, there were some countries in the Asian region that received very little media development assistance during the period under review. Some of these are unsurprisingly small Island nations in the South and Central Pacific, such as Fiji. The island nations of Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands and Tonga received media sector support from Australia under bilateral agreements, with an average award of $300,000. Similarly, NED grants helped three exiled Tibetan media organisations for their local news coverage with separate grants in 2024, for a total of $297,200.

However, one notable entry at the bottom of the list was Vietnam, the Southeast Asian country with 100 million citizens that ranks 173 out of 180 on the World Press Freedom Index. Vietnam received less than $200,000 in media support between 2020 and 2024, including one NED grant for a local news organisation and a Germany-supported project to empower local media to report on public sector accountability.

[6]

Adherence to the OECD Development Cooperation Principles

In 2024, the OECD adopted the [Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment](). These principles were adopted with the realisation that the crisis in the media sector requires a strong international response to support independent media in a fragile information ecosystem. The six principles encourage donors to:

1. **Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media.**
2. **Increase financial and other forms of support.**
3. **Take a whole-of-system perspective.**
4. **Strengthen local leadership and ownership.**
5. **Improve coordination of support.**
6. **Invest in knowledge, research, and learning.**

The mapping also examined the identified programmes to determine adherence to some of the OECD principles which are relevant given the nature of the information available.

The first "do no harm to public interest media" principle requires an in-depth review of the assistance programmes and modalities, which was beyond the scope of this mapping study. However, a surface-level analysis of programme titles and descriptions indicates that the media development assistance largely reinforced democratic norms, media freedom, media sustainability and journalist safety.

For Principle 2, the historical trend based on available data shows that new funding made available for Asia between 2020 and 2024 did not consistently increase with each passing year (Chart 9). In fact, the funding volume dipped by 70% in 2021 compared to 2020 before showing year-on-year increases of 86% and 93% for two consecutive years 2022 and 2023. However, new funding dipped again by 27% in 2024 compared to 2023. This erratic trend cannot be seen as a clear signal of improvement and more data might be needed to pass judgement on donors' adherence to the principle of increasing financial support to the media sector in Asia.

A further decline is now anticipated in journalism support funding for 2025 and the immediate future, due to the U.S. funding cuts. During the period under review, however, high levels of funding for Afghanistan and Myanmar indicate that support was prioritised for countries where crises risked creating information deserts, in accordance with Principle 2.

In both these high-risk environments, there was evidence of programmes offering security assistance to journalists and media professionals in keeping with Principle 2.

With regards to the whole-of-system perspective advised in **Principle 3,** the duration of programmes and grants indicated the lack of a long-term approach to media assistance. Most interventions (47% out of 257 identified programmes) were designed as short-term projects of one year duration or less. However, it should be noted that the short-term projects only accounted for less than 10% of the funding. Around 60% of the large, multi-year programmes were funded by USAID, SIDA and the EU contributing $89m, $73m and $15m respectively. With the termination of USAID funds and the agency's uncertain future, a holistic and long-term approach is at risk. The situation will be further affected as SIDA is expected to phase out its Asia regional support strategy by mid-2026. It has already phased out its development aid to Cambodia.

For other aspects of this principle, the descriptions of the identified programmes indicated varying levels of support for a broader enabling environment for public interest media (51% of total funding), support for innovation in business models (17% of total funding), and support to build resilience to mis- and dis-information through capacity building of media (5% of total funding). Support for a diverse range of media and information stakeholders was also evident through funds for content production, thematic news coverage and investigative journalism (altogether 14% of funding).

For **Principle 4**, as previously discussed in this mapping study, the available data shows a lack of attention to strengthening local leadership and ownership of media development in the region as the levels of core support funding and providing funds to local organisations for implementation are low. A vast majority of the funds were for activity-based projects or programmes that do not allow funding flexibility to local partners to strengthen their operational capacities, leaving only 11% of the total $308m funds identified for the Asia region for core support. Similarly, only 19% of the funds were administered by organisations based in the region or country of implementation, out of which only 4% was received and handled directly by country-based local news outlets and media development civil society organisations. Even after accounting for exiled media, these findings indicate that donors and

international NGOs need to take more steps to walk their talk of localisation with regards to media assistance.

For **Principle 5**, the existence of multi-donor programmes is taken as an indicator for improvement in coordination of media support. However, the data did not demonstrate sufficient examples of jointly funded initiatives and there was a high degree of uncertainty about some programmes having institutional back donors that were not clearly identified in the publicly available information. Therefore, the mapping does not lead to any general conclusion on the funding behaviour vis-a-vis improved coordination.
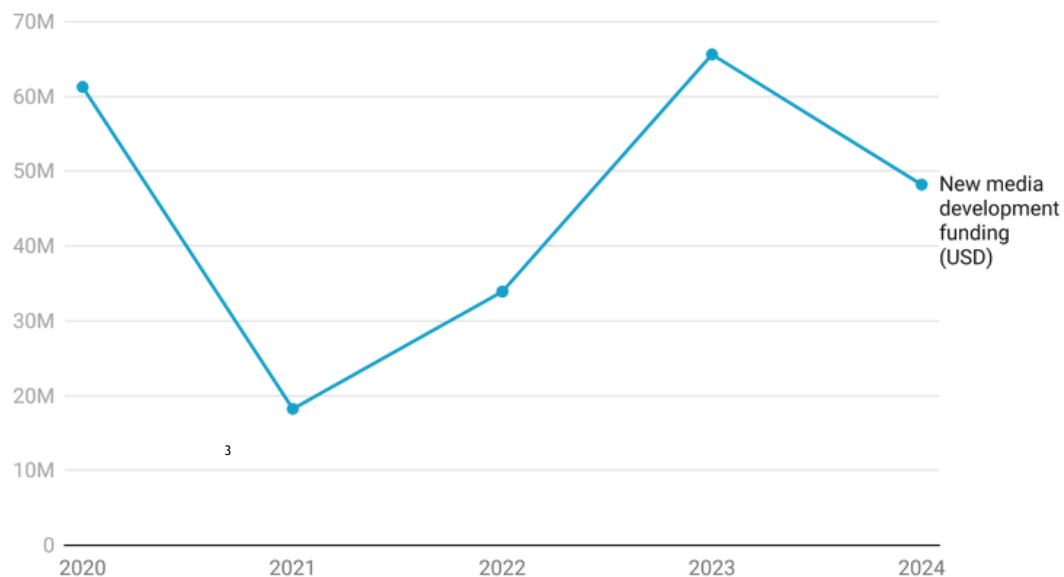
Note: The chart only shows around $227m in funding that originated each year from 2020 to 2024. The remaining $81m was carried into the 2020-2024 time period by programmes announced or started in the years prior to 2020.

Chart 9: Historical trend of new funding for media assistance in the region (2020-2024)

For **Principle 6**, the available programme descriptions provided few details about a direct focus on knowledge, research and learning. However, a basic analysis showed that nearly 48% of the identified programmes had at least some level of attention to knowledge production and research to support media development. This was mostly

evident in multi-year programmes whose objectives were well-defined and leaned towards the strengthening of democracy and civil society through knowledge-sharing, coalition-building and advocacy efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

The mapping shows that the funding opportunities for media development and journalism support in the Asia region are concentrated in six countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and four countries of Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines), with large grants predominantly packaged as broader civil society-focused development interventions on democracy and human rights that also include provisions for media support.

The funding situation was disrupted by the U.S. funding freeze on foreign aid initiated in January 2025 and will continue to affect the media development landscape in Asia for the foreseeable future. Core institutional assistance to independent news media organisations and local media development organisations remains limited, even though new mechanisms during 2020-24 such as the

Google News Initiative's Innovation Challenge and the Media Development Investment Fund's Amplify Asia programme have provided significant but highly competitive opportunities for local independent news media in the region. Media development aid transparency is still limited and many notable funders do not provide disaggregated data on funding awards, thereby limiting the potential data and impact of such mapping exercises.

The limited information also prevents confident assessments of the performance of media development funders against the OECD Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Waqas Naeem is a media development professional and former journalist, with around 15 years of experience working on training, education, research and advocacy for the media sector. His research interests include media viability, countering disinformation, and the impact of journalism support initiatives. He holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri. Waqas currently works as a programme officer and Asia M&E advisor at International Media Support (IMS).

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Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) is the largest global community for media development, media freedom, and journalism support. Through collaboration, coordination, and collective action the GFMD network of member organisations — as well as our dozens of partners — creates, promotes, and delivers policies and programmes to sustain journalism as a public good.

GFMD's International Media Policy and Advisory Centre (GFMD IMPACT) is a learning and knowledge-sharing destination for the international journalism support and media development community that brings together media development and journalism support groups, donors and funding organisations, academic and research institutions, as well as technology, media, and governance experts.

Read previous mapping reports:
- *Mapping of media assistance and journalism support programmes in the Levant region (March 2025)*
- *Mapping of media assistance and journalism support programmes in the Western Balkans region (May 2024)*

APPENDIX

Countries of the Asia, Pacific and Oceania region, based on GFMD regional operations and UN statistics division guidance.

Eastern Asia
1. China
2. China, Hong Kong
3. China, Macao
4. Democratic People's Republic of Korea
5. Japan
6. Mongolia
7. Republic of Korea
8. Taiwan (Chinese Taipei)

Southeast Asia
1. Brunei Darussalam
2. Cambodia
3. Indonesia
4. Lao People's Democratic Republic
5. Malaysia
6. Myanmar
7. Philippines
8. Singapore
9. Thailand
10. Timor-Leste
11. Viet Nam

South Asia
1. Afghanistan
2. Bangladesh
3. Bhutan
4. India
5. Maldives
6. Nepal
7. Pakistan
8. Sri Lanka

Australia & New Zealand
1. Australia
2. Christmas Island
3. Cocos (Keeling) Islands
4. Heard Island and McDonald Islands
5. New Zealand
6. Norfolk Island

Melanesia
1. Fiji
2. New Caledonia
3. Papua New Guinea
4. Solomon Islands
5. Vanuatu

Micronesia
1. Guam
2. Kiribati
3. Marshall Islands
4. Micronesia (Federated States of)
5. Nauru
6. North Mariana Islands
7. Palau
8. United States Minor Outlying Islands

Polynesia
1. American Samoa
2. Cook Islands
3. French Polynesia
4. Niue
5. Pitcairn
6. Samoa
7. Tokelau
8. Tonga
9. Tuvalu
10. Wallis and Futuna Islands