fome_

Mind the Gap!

18th fome Symposium 2024

A critical review of common practices and strategies in International Media Assistance

Editorial

Critically examining the sector's performance is a routine practice of the *Forum Media and Development* (fome), a network of 32 German and Swiss organisations, all active in the field of International Media Assistance (IMA). A fome working group identified four areas in which the gap between aspiration and reality of media development co-operation appeared to be greatest:

- Dominance of Western values: IMA has been criticised for lacking awareness of its Western bias. The criticism is that Western concepts, while applied in the Global South, are unsuccessful in non-Western contexts.
- Local Ownership: Local ownership and participation are guiding principles in IMA; however, funders often dictate topics and objectives. This paternalistic approach has caused local partners to adopt a more constrained and less autonomous stance.
- International Coordination: Poor coordination of activities and strategies between IMA organisations active in the same country or context is a notorious source of inefficiency and subsequent problems in IMA.
- Measuring Impact: Due to a lack of resources or methodological challenges, the effects and long-term impact of projects often remain unknown; effects are claimed, but claims are not supported by evidence.

To broaden our understanding of these issues and find ways to improve practices and strategies within the IMA community, these topics were the subject of discussion at the 18th fome Symposium in Dortmund from Sep 30 – Oct 1, 2024. In advance, a survey was developed and shared across the network to test some common assumptions. The fome Symposium was hosted by the Erich-Brost Institute (EBI) at the University of Dortmund, with nine other fome members responsible for organising various sessions. To kickstart the event, Dani Madrid-Morales from the University of Sheffield presented a broad perspective, comparing the principles, beneficiaries, and approaches of China and Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries in a keynote speech. Morales put forward several recommendations for reforming media assistance by DAC countries to contribute to the *information sovereignty* of the partners.

The four articles in this publication introduce the abovementioned subjects and summarise the speakers' contributions at the Symposium.

The survey results for each topic are tabulated, and the recommendations of all symposium participants on how the weaknesses discussed could be improved in the future are also listed. These are some key takeaways from the summary:

Participation and locally driven development, as stipulated in the *OECD Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment* adopted in 2024, appeared to be an overarching requirement for successful media development. Participation is one of the prerequisites for developing ownership and setting priorities that meet the local needs and interests of both the media and the public. This is key to successful communication, as it avoids imposing values and priorities on partners and compromising their independence. International coordination has also proven particularly effective when local partners take the lead from the very beginning of activities, including conceptualisation.

Repeated requests were made for more research. Before setting intervention targets, greater investment in media and audience research and impact studies is needed to determine the effects of media-supported involvement.

Some of the analyses and recommendations may resemble a déjà-vu of previous events. Whether the sector has sufficient evidence of its impact, for example, has already been questioned at the fome symposia *Measuring Change* I and II in *2007* and *2009*. Seventeen years later, some of the recommendations sound familiar. However, it must be acknowledged that in recent years there has at least been an increased awareness of the sector's weaknesses, both in practice and in terms of academic knowledge. This is reflected, for example, in a greater recognition of the local partners' funding priorities or improved international coordination in crisis situations where a rapid response is required. Under real-world conditions, it will probably be impossible to achieve any desired ideal. This does not mean, however, that ideals should not be pursued and that a critical review of practices is pointless; on the contrary, given an increasingly uncertain funding environment, we should uphold ideals even more resolutely, including the ideal of a controversial, critical and open debate.

Michel Leroy, EBI
Anja Wollenberg, MiCT
Sofie Jannusch (fome Coordinator)
December 2024

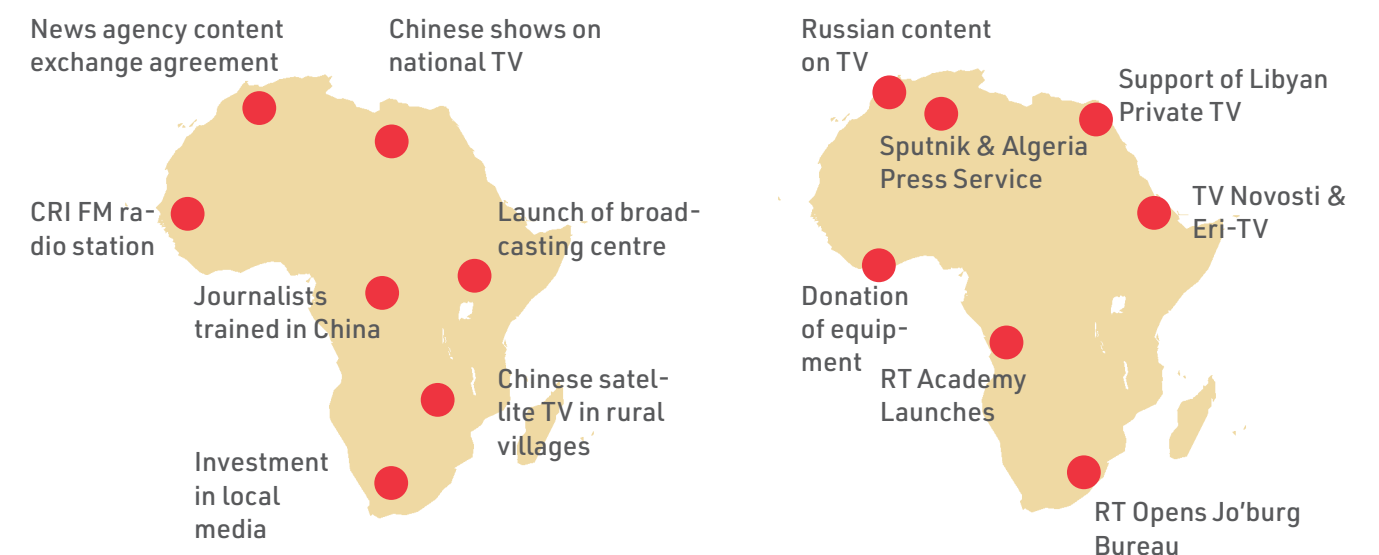# The New Order of Media Assistance and the Urgent Need for Reform

In his keynote speech, Dr Dani Madrid-Morales, a researcher at the University of Sheffield, explores how both established and emerging forces are reshaping practices and priorities within the field of media development. He emphasises the significant impact of China and Russia and calls for democratic responses to their influence. The keynote provides valuable insights into current challenges in media assistance and encourages us to re-evaluate its foundations to address 21st-century issues effectively.

The re-emergence of traditional players such as Russia and China has disrupted several areas of media development. For instance, the RT Academy (formerly Russia Today) was launched in Africa, critiquing Western approaches to media development through masterclasses held by RT's correspondents and producers. In addition, media partnerships were established during the Africa-Russia summits in Sochi in 2019 and St. Petersburg in 2023. China organised various multilateral media forums and summits, including a World Media Summit in Beijing and a Chinese-Arab Media Cooperation Forum. This engagement is closely tied to China's substantial investments in the media and telecommunications sectors.

It is worth examining the training programmes offered by China to "developing countries". These programmes vary in duration, from 14 days for a Seminar on Radio and Television for Senior Technical Management to 56 days for a Seminar on Telecommunication, New Technology and Equipment Maintenance. Various institutions, such as the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television Training Institute, the Wuhan Post and Telecommunications Research Institute, and the Hunan Foreign Trade Vocational College, conduct them. These training initiatives focus on new and legacy media, with goals such as "promoting common media development", fostering "international media exchanges and cooperation" and ultimately presenting a positive image of China within the African media landscape. Key concepts featured may include China's "Smart National Radio and Television Administration" and "Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Socialism".

Context | Types of "media assistance" projects by "new" actors

News agency content exchange agreement

Chinese shows on national TV

CRI FM radio station

Launch of broadcasting centre

Journalists trained in China

Chinese satellite TV in rural villages

Investment in local media

Source: Madrid-Morales 2021

Russian content on TV

Support of Libyan Private TV

Sputnik & Algeria Press Service

TV Novosti & Eri-TV

Donation of equipment

RT Academy Launches

RT Opens Jo'burg Bureau

Source: Birkovich 2021

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY **DANI MADRID MORALES**,
SUMMARY BY **MICHEL LEROY, ERICH BROST INSTITUTE**

Some local media makers see this offer as an opportunity: "We should stop seeing the things through the eyes of others – through the eyes of Reuters or Associated Press" as the director of the Moroccan press agency, *Maghreb Arabe Presse*, puts it. A Kenyan artist argues, "China uses media trips in a soft power play to boost its image."

In contrast, there are discrepancies and overlaps between discourses and interventions from DAC and non-DAC assistance systems.

China's approach to development aid and cooperation is governed by a series of principles that have been immutable for some decades and expressed by the Chinese government in a 2011 white paper as follows:

- A "non-conditionality of aid" (no interest loans, for example)
- China sees itself as "the world's largest developing nation"
- Cooperation is described as "mutually beneficial" and "win-win"
- Chinese authorities talk of "media cooperation" rather than "media assistance"

- Cooper (2017) identified four key differences between China and OECD's DAC donors:
- Support for "independent media" versus support for governmental institutions
- Involvement versus non-involvement
- Training versus infrastructure
- Diverse versus unified support

Skjerdal (2024) identified eight characteristics of media systems assistance from the West:

- The idea that media bring about democratisation (despite limited evidence)
- Citizen participation at the centre
- Promotion of free and independent media
- Journalism should be monitorial
- Assumption of a universal media ethic
- News should be balanced and unbiased
- Benchmarking progress

It is thus possible to differentiate between two different approaches:

Contrast | Shared characteristics of key (most) DAC countries

| Media might bring about democratization | Importance of transparency & good governance | Citizen participation at the centre | Promote free & independent media |
| News should be balanced and unbiased | Benchmarking progress against global standard | Journalism should be monitorial | Universal media ethics are assumed |

All graphics are based on the presentation by Dani Madrid Morales.

Contrast | Shared characteristics of key non-DAC countries

| Top-down non-participatory approaches | Activities are ideologized but pragmatic | Activities are (mostly) oriented at elites | Donor countries directly benefit from activities |
| Information is seen as foreign policy tool | Oriented to preserve status quo | Blurred lines with private sector | Anchored in modernization paradigm |

Building media assistance programmes based on the concept of information sovereignty is crucial in this new information environment. Strengthening Information sovereignty is needed because it is eroded by non-DAC countries, and the respect for information sovereignty in developing (aid-receiving) countries could be promoted as an efficient counterbalance to Russia and China's efforts.

Change | How to focus on information sovereignty

INFORMATION SOVEREIGNTY

Citizens need to be sovereign in their media choices

States need to be able to exercise their sovereignity in the information space

Journalists need to be sovereign in determining the topics they deem important to cover

Legislation needs to protect both individual and national sovereignity
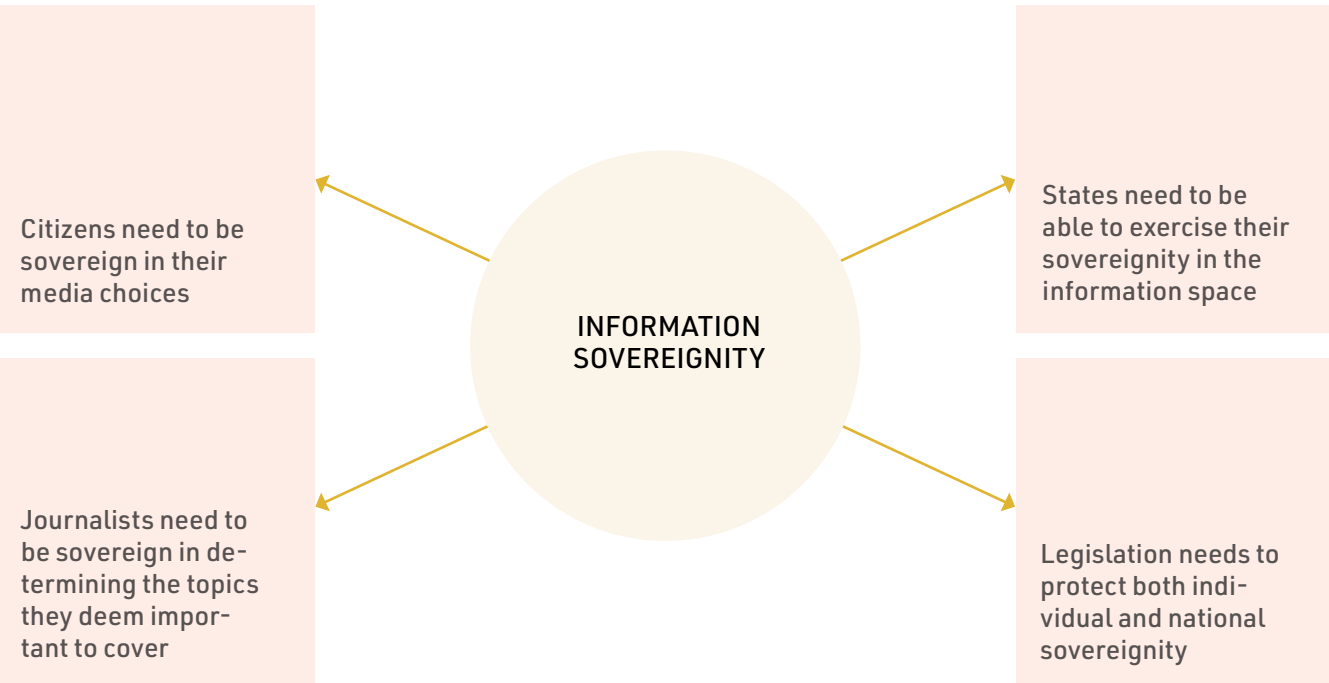
During the Q&A session, many participants of the fome Symposium insisted that "even in Europe, media assistance is not void of interests; political values are at play." Madrid Morales warns: "If our approach is to counter actors like China on a value level, the fight will never be won." Oppressive regimes often limit other voices. "In some countries, those actors are seen as a a welcome breath of fresh air. What are the dangers of leaving the information space unregulated and unprotected? In Europe, it is protected by legislation and infrastructure, which make it more resilient towards illiberal voices. In many countries, this is not the case." Technologies are also key: "If we open the door to new actors to come into our home and let them have a say, it may create dependencies that counter the sovereignty that states have – e.g. cables, technologies are no longer in the hand of states, but Chinese, Turkish … companies.

Michel Leroy, Erich Brost Institute (EBI)

Further Reading

Center for International Media Assistance (2024), Are Donors Taking the Journalism Crisis Seriously? An Analysis of Official Aid to Media 2010–2019, Myers, M. & Gilberds, H. *https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/are-donors-taking-the-journalism-crisis-seriously/*

Cooper, V. A. (2017). Media development, DAC, and China: different approaches, same public diplomacy. Journal of Media Business Studies, 14(1), 25–37. *https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2017.1292714*

Elgas (2023), Les bons ressentiments. Essai sur le malaise post-colonial. Paris: Riveneuve.

Escobar, A., Demaria, F., Kothari, A., Salleh, A. and Acosta, A. (eds) (2024), Post-development: From the Critique of Development to a Pluriverse of Alternatives, in The Barcelona School of Ecological Economics and Political Ecology, Cham. *https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-22566-6_6*

fome/MEDAS 21 (2021-2022), Research Reviews for Media Development Practitioners. *https://www.medas21.net/resources*

Global Forum for Media Development (2024), GFMD Impact Resource centre. *https://impact.gfmd.info/*

Gudynas, E. (2022). Postdevelopment and Other Critiques of Development. In: The Essential Guide to Critical Development Studies. London: Routledge. *https://gudynas.com/wp-content/uploads/Gudynas PostdevelopmentCritiqueDevelopment2ndEdt2021.pdf*

Madrid-Morales, Dani, Borekci, Deniz, Loffler, Dieter, Birkevich, Anna (2021). It is about their story, How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa, Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, Johannesburg. *https://www.kas.de/documents/285576/0/How+China,+Turkey+and+Russia+influence+media+in+Africa.pdf/6594fc3e-f240-6aea-342d-92c8f90dbf43?version=1.2&t=1611814964948*

Madrid-Morales, Dani, Rodriguez-Amat, Joan Ramon, Lindner, Peggy (2023). A ComputationalMapping of Online News Deserts on African News Websites, Media and Communication, Vol 11, No 3(2023): News Deserts: Places and Spaces Without News. *https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i3.6857*

MEDAS 21 (2022), Position paper "Development Assistance in the 21st Century, Lessons Learnt from A Media Development Research Program. *https://www.medas21.net/resources*

Medium (2020), Aid re-imagined. *https://medium.com/aidreimagined*

OECD (2024), Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment. *https://doi.org/10.1787/76d82856-en*

Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (2024), Workshops and learning briefs. *https://impact.gfmd.info/meetings/2024/primed-feb.-mar.-2024*

Piron, Laure-Helene (2024), Mapping and analysis of ODA to media and the information environment, OECD DAC Network on Governance. *https://thepolicypractice.com/analysis-oda-media-and-information-environment*

Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller , G. and Drumm, E. (2023). Implementing the SDG Stimulus. Sustainable Development Report 2023. Paris: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Dublin: Dublin University Press. *https://www.unsdsn.org/world-at-risk-of-losing-a-decade-of-progress-on-the-un-sustainable-development-goals*

Skjerdal, Terje, Mellado, Claudia, Hallin, Daniel, Blanchett, Nicole, Marquez Ramirez, Mireya, Jackson, Daniel, Stępińska, Agnieszka, Himma-Kadakas, Marju, McIntyre, Karen, Hagen, Lutz, Amiel, Pauline, Abuali, Yasser, Fahmy, Nagwa, Boudana, Sandrine, Chen, Yi-Ning, Davidov, Sergey, De Maio, Mariana, Vazquez, Maximiliano, Garces-Prettel, Miguel, Wyss, Vinzenz. (2024). The societal context of professional practice: Examining the impact of politics and economics on journalistic role performance across 37 countries. Journalism. 25. *https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849241229951*

"The re-emergence of traditional players such as Russia and China has disrupted several areas of media development."

What do we talk about when we talk about independent media?

REFLECTIONS ON A LEADING VALUE IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ASSISTANCE

One chapter of the fome working group, *Media Development Reform*, was dedicated to normativity in media development, specifically addressing the question of whether key values that the sector adheres to are universal or reflective of specific political circumstances. Put differently, are key values such as the watchdog role of journalism, media independence, media pluralism, and freedom of expression universal or context-dependent? Based on the survey findings and preparation meetings with experts from Latvia and Georgia, the normative concept of media independence was put into focus of the first session. It turned out that independence, as applied in International Media Assistance, is both a leading and highly ambivalent concept.

Fostering media independence is a key principle in international media assistance and the overarching goal of many leading agencies in the field. UNESCO, for example, says it "works across the community, national, and international levels to foster media independence and trust in media institutions",[1] the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) is "dedicated to improving efforts to promote independent media in emerging democracies and developing economies around the world";[2] and in the fome network, the 32 member organisations are striving to "strengthening independent media in developing and transitioning countries", according to the mission statement on the fome website. In the same spirit, the Media Viability Manifesto,[3] jointly developed by 13 media assistance organisations and published in

2024 by the Deutsche Welle Akademie, frames media independence as an overarching goal. In the theory of change, all activities ultimately aim to strengthen the economic sustainability of financially and editorially independent and diverse media, which are seen as key drivers of peaceful and democratic societies.

These are just a few examples and quotes that illustrate the high relevance of the concept for the sector; there are many more.

Historically, independent media emerged during industrialisation in Europe and the United States in the mid-to-late 19th century, primarily due to the commercialization of newspapers during that period. Political parties, churches and special interest groups that used to serve as primary sources of financing were replaced by advertisement clients that did not want their consumer goods to be associated with political positions:

"The shift towards politically neutral newspapers was a product of the shift from a reader-supported to an advertising-supported press and of the related trend toward concentration of media markets."[4]

46% of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement: the concept of independent media does no longer work for the selection of local partners.

46%

Source: fome survey, May–June 2024, N=69

78%
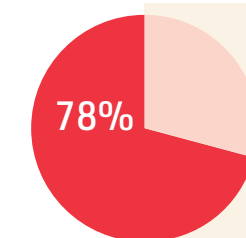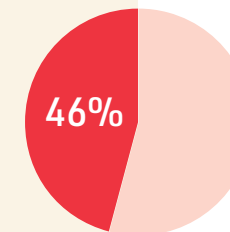
78% of our respondents say they conduct needs assessments, and they also align programs with the findings from these assessments.

48%
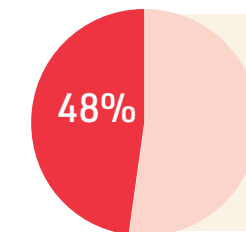
48% of respondents in our survey say that often local partners invent artificial activities that fit into funding.

SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION BY **ANJA WOLLENBERG, MICT**
HOSTS OF THE FORMATS: **MICT, N-OST** AND THE **FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION**

[1] UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development 2021/2022
[2] Website CIMA *https://www.cima.ned.org/about/*
[3] Media Viability Manifest. A common framework for joint action (2024)
[4] Hallin & Mancini (2004). Comparing Media Systems: three models of media and politics. Cambridge University Press, p. 219

Karpinnen & Moe (2016) define media independence as the absence of political or market pressure, allowing newsroom editors and journalists to make decisions free from external influence. According to this definition, an independent newsroom is editorially autonomous and makes decisions solely based on journalistic criteria and journalism ethics. However, there is no such thing as total or absolute independence in the realm of media. Instead, any media outlet will always have to deal with a multitude of different types of constraints and external influences.[5] Which of these constraints are regarded as the most pertinent or politically relevant inevitably depends on the context?

In light of multiple dependencies and contextual constraints, editorial autonomy plays a crucial role as a defining element of independent media. But to what extent do independent media manage to defend their editorial autonomy against external influences?

Media support should strengthen the capacity of independent media to protect and defend their editorial independence. However, conditional funding, i.e., funding linked to specific editorial or journalistic outputs, is a common practice that does exactly the opposite. Independent media are increasingly addressed as agents of change that promote a particular cause or a purpose. To the extent that it implies editorial interference, such funding contradicts the overarching goal of supporting media independence. Put differently, funding linked to the expectation that the media pursue a specific cause or purpose cannot simultaneously be framed as support for independent media. But it often is. In light of this contradiction, support strategies that provide funding for topics such as reporting on climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, and women's rights were critically reviewed on the expert panel.

Against the backdrop of these observations, we asked during the first session: What are we talking about when we talk about independence and independent media in the field of International Media Assistance (IMA)? How is international media support for media independence perceived and assessed by experts from Latvia and Georgia?

Donors show little willingness to follow priorities of local partners re objectives – 30% say that happens often.

30%
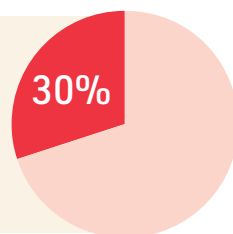
Trending topics in support programs: women's rights, LGBTQ+, GBV (13%), climate change and environment protection (7%), civic participation, freedom of speech and accountability (7%), Human Rights (4%)

13%
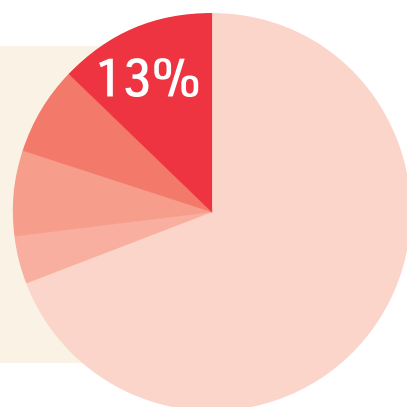
Source: fome survey, May-June 2024, N=69

[5] Karpinnen, K., & Moe, H. (2016). What We Talk About When Talk About "Media Independence". Javnost - The Public, 23(2), 105–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2016.1162986, p. 112

SPEAKERS INPUT

RITA RUDUŠA is a media consultant, a former head of the Latvian Journalists' Association and the founder and first executive director of the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence. She started the discussion by highlighting the contradiction between support for independent media on one side and donor-driven agenda-setting on the other. In her view, one cannot do both. Yet, on many occasions, Rita encountered donors who claimed to support independent media but then attempted to impose their own agenda on local partners. This is particularly true for service contracts and less so for grants.

Service contracts have the advantage that the recipients (as service providers) are enabled to make a profit; on the other hand, the donors (as clients) feel entitled to interfere in the editorial workflow. She also noted that donors vary in their ambition to influence editorial decisions: some are reluctant in this regard, while others are unaware of the contradiction and attempt to control content production as much as possible, including pre-screening content. Yes, we want to support free media, but please share your draft with us and include our logo. In Rita's view, what is needed is more flexible, tailor-made training for specific newsrooms based on their needs over a more extended period. If donors want to have a say in editorial content, they could suggest that recipients of funds should focus more on under-reported topics and then leave it to the media to choose which topics are under-reported.

Needs assessments have become standard practice, but donors often consult only a few like-minded partners who share their interests. Opening the process and incorporating a greater variety of sources in their analysis is essential.

NATA DZVELISHVILI is the CEO of Indigo Magazine and an invited lecturer at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA). Like Rita, Nata shared experiences with donors who provided funds only under the condition that the recipient would address a specific topic. When the protests about the so-called "Russian law" erupted in Georgia,[6] it was impossible to use existing funding to cover this historic moment. Instead, the team had to report about ethnic minorities in Georgia because the funding was earmarked for this purpose and could not be redirected. Nata said she would like to see more trust in local media makers' understanding of audience priorities and flexibility in redirecting funding if circumstances require it.

Like Rita, Nata experienced situations where donors wanted to check content before publication, which she refused. However, confronting the donor was difficult since Indigo heavily relies on international funding. Asked about her current priorities, Nata said that Indigo needs to develop its marketing department, website, and equipment, but donors are reluctant to support such requirements. Calls typically focus on other categories, such as topics, skills and/or quality of content. Sometimes, she finds it quite frustrating if experts from Brussels (or elsewhere) tell media makers in Georgia what their needs are. Nata also emphasised the need for long-term projects and a less bureaucratic approach to funding.

[6] The "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" requires non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media outlets receiving over 20% of their funding from foreign sources to register as "organisations carrying the interests of a foreign power"

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Conducting needs assessments is considered a solution to overcome donor-driven agenda setting, thereby safeguarding the editorial autonomy of the media. Ideally needs assessment enable independent media to take the lead in project design. Accordingly, 78% of our respondents to the working group survey report regularly conducting needs assessments and aligning programs with the findings from these assessments.

However, in environments such as Afghanistan, where media have adapted their priorities to donors' expectations, needs assessment can quickly become an echo chamber: media makers will present needs and priorities in line with assumed donor priorities. Accordingly, 48% of respondents in the fome survey say that local partners often invent artificial activities that fit into funding. In this environment, needs assessments will not provide insight into actual solutions that work in the field.

Against the background of these observations, the participants at the fome symposium were asked: What kind of listening would enable us to overcome the limitations of traditional needs assessments? How should the art of listening differ from what we have now?

▶ Systematic and continuous listening through local actors and with a focus on audiences and their priorities

▶ Translate local needs into donors' language and let needs assessment guide donor priorities

▶ Needs assessments must be based on patience, deep interest and empathy, and they should be free from prejudice and common assumptions

▶ Adding frameworks of listening that involve the understanding of the political context and the power balance in that context and include a variety of different stakeholders/participants (not only like-minded partners)

▶ Facilitated self-reflection sessions conducted as a South-South exchange; share findings from these sessions with donors

The recommendations were noted on memory cards during an interactive wrap-up session with the participants.

" Funding linked to the expectation that the media pursue a specific cause or purpose cannot simultaneously be framed as support for independent media.
But it often is. "

Local ownership – an ongoing dilemma

SUMMARY BY **TIEMO EHMKE, ICEBAUHAUS**
HOSTS OF THE FORMATS: **DEUTSCHE WELLE AKADEMIE, FONDATION HIRONDELLE** AND **R0G_AGENCY**

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES IN THE FIELD OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

Local ownership and participation are fundamental principles in media development. However, the topics and objectives are often shaped by funders and strategic partnerships. Even when donor priorities are well-researched and justified, their paternalistic approach tends to foster a passive mindset among local partners and European media assistance organisations. This often results in a lack of engagement in shaping strategies and concepts, leading to reliance on pre-established frameworks.

In conducting the 2024 fome survey within our member community, we identified several significant weaknesses in media assistance cooperation that impact ownership and collaboration. Respondents highlighted a) the short-term focus of projects, b) the dominance of donor agendas, and c) the frequent neglect of local perspectives. While this may not be new information, it is essential to remind ourselves to address these issues openly.

The survey revealed that 30% of our colleagues frequently observe that donors show little willingness to align with the priorities of local partners. This sentiment is more commonly expressed by local staff and advisors than by personnel in German organisations. Conversely, 70% of respondents agreed that local partners ultimately decide which issues should be prioritised.

Moreover, we found that local partners often adapt to the "market logic" of ever-changing funding trends, leading them to propose projects that are disconnected from the realities on the ground. This is underscored by the fact that 48% of respondents indicate that partners frequently create artificial activities designed to fit funding requirements.

Interestingly, 79% of media assistance organisations in Germany report that they often engage in critical discussions about cooperation with their local partners. However, a disparity exists in perceptions, as German management tends to be more optimistic than local staff regarding this dialogue. This raises the question of whether media assistance organisations can truly advocate for local partners and their interests in discussions with donors.

Assuming that ownership is essential for the success and sustainability of media assistance projects, the topic-focused track "Local Ownership" at the 2024 fome Symposium addressed how to establish genuine participation and ownership, while acknowledging that development cooperation is inherently asymmetric and normative.

Key insights and observations from parallel workshops are shared in this article, initiated by the fome member organisations Deutsche Welle Akademie, Fondation Hirondelle, and r0g_agency, and coordinated by icebauhaus.

CAN MEDIA DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS ADVOCATE FOR LOCAL PARTNERS?
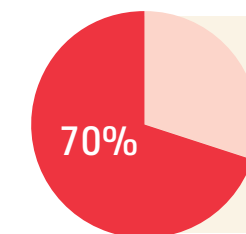
70% Local partners essentially determine which problems should be addressed – 70% of respondents agree.
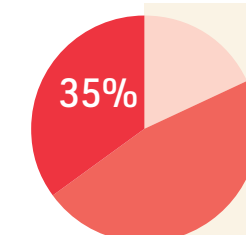
35% However, 35% indicate that the priorities of donors and local partners often differ. An additional 47% state that this occurs sometimes.

Source: fome survey, May-June 2024, N=69

ROLE CONFLICTS AND POWER INEQUALITIES IN PARTNERS RELATIONS

A reflection workshop by Deutsche Welle Akademie
Facilitation: Folke Kayser and Fahmim Ferdous, DWA

Successful cooperation with project partners is crucial for effectively implementing media development projects and achieving sustainable development results. At the same time, every cooperation between organisations involves a tension that arises from different interests, working methods and expectations. This needs to be understood and dealt with.

At the 2024 symposium, participants were offered a condensed version of a DWA reflection workshop. Using interactive methods meant that it was suitable for everyone interested in partner dynamics within media assistance, irrespective of the kind of organisation they represent. The workshop focused on two key topics related to DWA's principles for understanding cooperation: roles and power.

Roles in cooperation relationships

To gain a deeper understanding of individual position and self-determination within work and project contexts, participants were guided by the question: What roles do international media development organisations have towards their project partners? As different roles follow different logics and require different attitudes, how can we achieve role clarity and avoid conflicts and confusion in our cooperation?

Power in partner relations:

Power is often perceived as obstructive and negative. In development cooperation, we encounter structural inequalities, but how do we address them? During the workshop, participants engaged playfully with questions such as: Is power good or bad? What is the impact of money and privileges? Is it possible to achieve a partnership on an equal footing?

CROSSING THE DONOR AND PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES ON LOCALISATION

A round-table discussion by Fondation Hirondelle
Guests: Dastan Kamanzi Raphael, Tanzania Media Foundation; Caroline Vuillemin, Fondation Hirondelle; Hanspeter Wyss, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Facilitation: Sacha Meuter, Fondation Hirondelle

Locally led development has long been a priority for many financial partners and media development actors. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) updated its media assistance guidelines four years ago and recently played an important role in helping the OECD adopt principles designed to strengthen international support for the information environment, with locally led development as a key pillar. But what does genuine local participation and ownership really mean? What are the realistic expectations, and how do donor perspectives align – or sometimes clash – with those of local and international practitioners?

The main takeaways from the roundtable were the following:

- Localisation is about local actors being in the driving seat or at least being heard in defining the situation and challenges to be addressed.
- There are different local perspectives on this, we need to accept and embrace this diversity.
- Therefore, we need to invest in research and audience surveys before setting the objectives. we also need to embrace failure as an opportunity to learn.
- Ideally, donors should provide long-term and flexible funding, because it takes time to strengthen the necessary capacities for local actors to be able to raise their own funding so that they can be more viable, more assertive and stronger to push back and not accept everything that donors request.
- We need to move away from project-based support and develop more flexible and long-term programmatic support.
- All actors also need to be more transparent about their respective capacities, avoiding overpromising. We need more transparency on where the money goes and on the respective limits and goals.

UNDOING GAME OF THRONES

A rapid game co-creation by r0g_agency and icebauhaus
Facilitators: Marina Modi, #defyhatenow, South Sudan and Stephen Kovats, r0g_agency, Germany

Developing simple board games as hands-on activities helps connect often abstract online structures with actual offline realities. By linking these two dimensions, games and other types of mobile participatory tools not only increase participation but also facilitate various forms of dialogue and community interaction. This approach helps raise and identify questions related to conflict mitigation, explores strategies while imparting knowledge, and creates effective means of local ownership.

In the workshop, we highlighted obstacles to overcoming cultural, conflict, and skills training issues, using methodologies and experiences from the field of hate speech mitigation to create a playful experience.

Participants were invited to follow an established practice where games are employed to transform classic struggles, channelling the energy of competitiveness into active participatory dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

▶ Ensure that partners are involved in project design, monitoring, and evaluation as a standard practice.

▶ Trust in the partners and have a realistic exit strategy as part of the project approach.

▶ Be aware about your power as donor and intermediary!

▶ Advocate to donors for local ownership and serve as a platform or interpreter rather than an educator or idea generator.

▶ Facilitate dialogue between local partners …to develop common understanding and orientation within the funding processes.

48% report that partners frequently create artificial activities to align with funding.

48%

33%
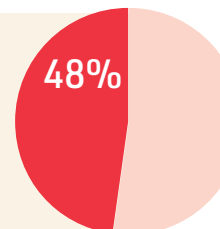
Donors show little willingness to follow priorities of local partners regarding objectives – 30% say that happens often.

30%
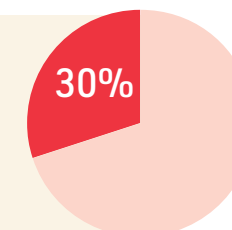
Digital and innovative projects concentrate on technology rather than user benefits. 33% report that this occurs always or often.

Source: fome survey, May–June 2024, N=69
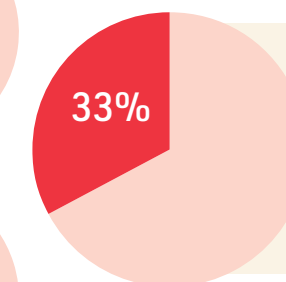
Lessons Learned for Effective International Coordination

SUMMARY BY **INES DREFS, DWA**,
HOST OF THE FORMAT: **DEUTSCHE WELLE AKADEMIE**

TACKLING SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES AND GAINING INSIGHTS FROM INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

When various actors support media in the same context or country, media assistance is often subject to redundancies, duplications, or overlaps. Enhanced coordination is considered key to preventing this and improving the efficiency of media assistance. But what does it actually take for different organisations – which often compete for funding – to collaborate effectively?

Following a lively fishbowl discussion at the fome Symposium 2024 with Manizja Aziz, Senior Project Officer for the Safety of Journalists at Free Press Unlimited, Raghdan Orsud, Co-Founder of Beam Reports, and Andreas Lamm, Managing Director of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, we asked these experts for a recap.

MANIZJA AZIZ: "Personal communication and in-person meetings are very important".

Do you think international media development occurs in a coordinated manner?

Manizja Aziz: On paper, a lot of coordination is happening in international media development, but we should be mindful of whether this coordination is also happening in practice and is being done efficiently. Sometimes, maybe inevitably, coordination is being clouded by competition.
In my experience, the more practical the coordination needs to be (for example, in emergency support), the more effective it is because roles and objectives are more clearly defined. This is because the support provided is very practical and hands-on, making it clear what the purpose is: to bring adequate emergency support as quickly as possible to the beneficiary.

At fome2024, the following strategies to enhance international coordination were highlighted: clarity on roles, expectations, costs, and benefits; local leadership; dedicated resources; and regular reviews of coordination efforts along the way. Where do you see the most room for improvement?
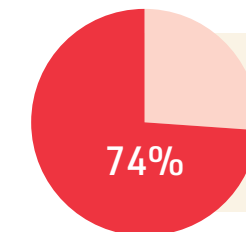
74% of respondents confirm ("strongly agree" or "agree") that coordination is lacking.

Source: fome survey, May-June 2024, N=69

Manizja Aziz: Coordination is essential, but we should not coordinate merely for the sake of coordinating or only on paper to please a donor, as this would simply create more work for ourselves. We must clearly define the incentives for coordination and the added value for each party involved.

At the core of effective coordination is trust, making personal communication and in-person meetings essential. This approach allows for frequent evaluation of the coordination and its alignment with incentives. We must empower local and regional organisations to take a leading role, particularly in emergency support.

Could you share any lessons learned from concrete coordination attempts in a specific country or region with which you are familiar?

Manizja Aziz: The Journalists in Distress (JiD Network) exists to share information about journalists in peril and collaborate on urgent efforts. The Network facilitates coordination among its members - international organisations tasked with protecting freedom of expression - enabling them to address specific cases, streamline their efforts, and avoid duplication. The JiD Network is also active during times of crisis. One of the lessons learned is to involve local and regional organisations in emergency support efforts. They have the best insight into what is happening on the ground and what the current needs are, as well as practical matters such as methods for transferring funds. Another lesson learned is to leverage the complementarity between JiD member organisations. For example, some organisations can provide a rapid response whenever a crisis occurs and quickly verify cases, offering immediate support. In contrast, others can provide more mid-term support or supplemental assistance after the initial aid has been delivered.

RAGHDAN ORSUD: "Lack of local ownership impedes effective coordination"

Do you think that international media development occurs in a coordinated way?

Raghdan Orsud: International media development often struggles with coordination due to overlapping agendas, competing priorities, and insufficient alignment among stakeholders. While there are instances of collaboration, such as donor consortia or partnerships between local and international organisations, these efforts are not always systematic or sustainable. Challenges such as resource fragmentation, cultural differences, and a lack of local ownership often impede effective coordination. Additionally, many donor consortia tend to shift the majority of risks – financial, operational, and reputational – onto both international implementing partners and local partners. This imbalance not only undermines genuine collaboration but also discourages open coordination, as implementing partners often compete for funds and operate in silos instead of openly. Although this may mitigate risks, it hinders working collectively toward shared goals.

At fome2024, the following strategies to enhance international coordination were emphasised: clarity regarding roles, expectations, costs, and benefits; local leadership; dedicated resources; and a regular review of coordination efforts throughout the process. Where do you see the greatest opportunity for improvement?

Raghdan Orsud: The most significant areas for improvement in international media development coordination include:

1. Clearly define the responsibilities, expertise, and expectations of each stakeholder, including local partners, international donors, and implementing agencies, to minimise duplication of efforts.
2. Empower local actors to spearhead development efforts, as local ownership is essential for effective coordination. This enhances sustainability.
3. Allocate sufficient funding and technical support specifically for coordination mechanisms, such as joint planning sessions or shared monitoring tools, to enhance efficiency and minimise redundancies.
4. Regular Reviews: Establishing ongoing evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of coordination efforts and adjust strategies as necessary.

Can you share any lessons from concrete coordination attempts made in a particular country or region with which you are familiar?

Raghdan Orsud: An example of coordination in international media development is Sudan's efforts to address misinformation during its political transition. Several international donors collaborated with local media organisations to provide training in fact-checking, content verification, and digital safety. Key lessons from this initiative include:

1. The Importance of Local Ownership: Success was highest in programmes where local organisations took on leadership roles, as they possessed deeper insights into the cultural and political landscape.
2. Coordination was more effective when international partners adapted their approaches to align with the rapidly changing environment in Sudan, particularly during periods of heightened conflict. For instance, during the coup in Sudan, it became necessary to shift the original project's monitoring focus from the online space (which was not feasible due to the internet shutdown) to monitoring TV channels instead and checking for misinformation.
3. Challenges in Sustainability: Without long-term funding commitments and capacity-building efforts, many of the initial gains could not be sustained once international partners shifted their focus elsewhere.

31%

Only 31% think that coordination should be strictly focused on information exchange.
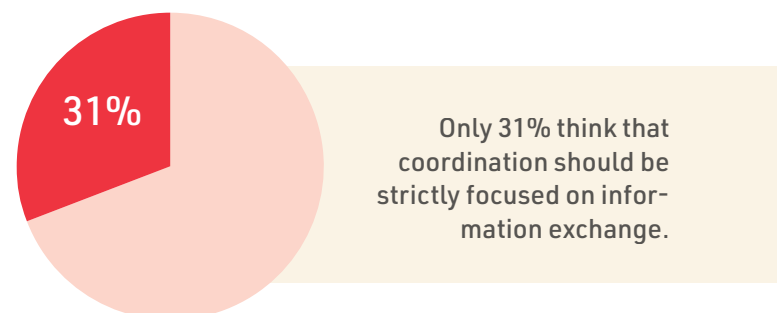
Source: fome survey, May-June 2024, N=69

ANDREAS LAMM: "The involvement of local stakeholders can and should be improved"

Do you think international media development occurs in a coordinated manner?

Andreas Lamm: Since the ECPMF does not operate in the realm of media development, this question can only be addressed from the perspective of emergency support.
The increasing number of crises in recent years, combined with shrinking budgets, has underscored the necessity for effective coordination. This suggests that work can start early to ensure a comprehensive range of support is provided without risking duplication of individual assistance programmes. The early involvement of various local stakeholders encourages the development of tailored support. Coordinating the available assistance also shows donors that the funds can be utilised effectively.

At fome2024, the following strategies to enhance international coordination were highlighted: clarity on roles, expectations, costs, and benefits; (local) leadership; dedicated resources; and regular review of coordination efforts along the way. Where do you see the most room for improvement?

Andreas Lamm: The involvement of local stakeholders can and should be improved. In conflict situations, in particular, it is essential to allow a multitude of voices to be heard, rather than relying solely on individual strong local players. This is because there is a risk that they will quickly act as gatekeepers, and not all needs will be heard.

Can you share lessons learned from concrete coordination efforts in a specific country or region with which you are familiar?

Andreas Lamm: With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a support group was formed, coordinated by GFMD, which worked from day one to harmonise the various offers of help with the needs. Local stakeholders were engaged from the outset, and joint activities were conducted to actively involve funding organisations in the process. The group still exists today and has been able to respond to changing needs throughout the collaboration.
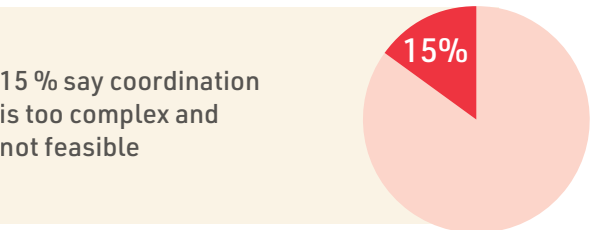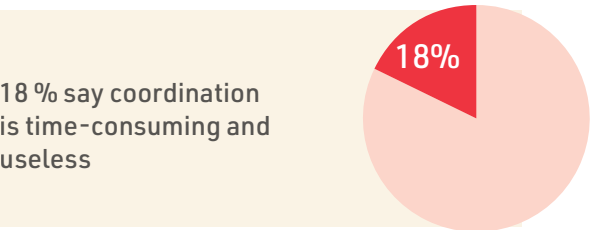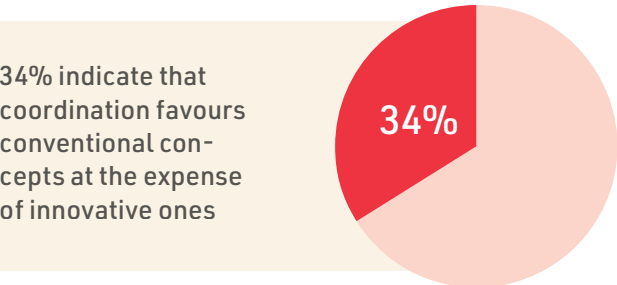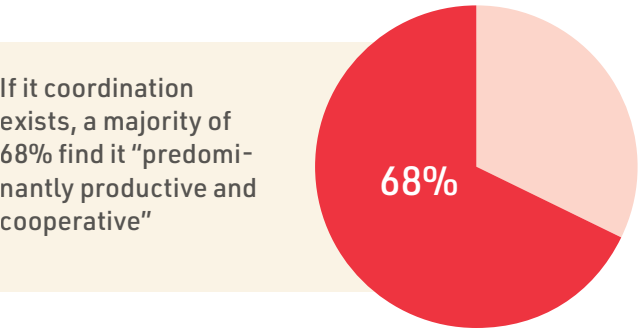
"COORDINATION WAS MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS ADAPTED THEIR APPROACHES TO ALIGN WITH THE RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT IN SUDAN, PARTICULARLY DURING PERIODS OF HEIGHTENED CONFLICT."

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Clarity on roles, expectations, costs and benefits

▶ Define roles clearly for all parties involved.

▶ Establish clear frameworks and mandates.

▶ Address the need for coordination at all levels with specific actors: a) among donors, b) among international actors, c) among local actors.

▶ Ensure effective communication between all parties.

▶ Discuss openly the costs, benefits, and expectations of coordination for everyone involved.

▶ Be honest about the trade-offs: Coordination versus funding.

▶ Request in funding applications an indication of how, when, with whom, and why coordination will take place.

▶ Request in funding applications an indication of how, when, with whom, and why coordination will take place.

(Local) leadership

▶ Local coordination should be encouraged.

▶ International organisations and intermediaries should initiate coordination among local organisations, as they possess greater knowledge of these organisations and their specialisations. However, they should transfer the coordination to the local organisation once it is established.

▶ Establish a coordination fund and start anew, allowing local implementing partners to apply and take the lead if they so choose.

▶ Encourage the development of regional and pan-regional networks of journalists (e.g., MENA, Africa, etc.).

Dedicated resources

▶ Efficient professional structures with dedicated coordination resources.

▶ Investment in coordination: EU umbrella projects and discussions with the respective embassies.

▶ Ensure a mutually beneficial outcome for everyone.

▶ Establish and invest in networks, including vital personal communication, to foster trust and transparency despite the likely increase in competition.

Consistent evaluation of coordination efforts throughout the process

▶ Periodic evaluations of set structures

▶ Frequent evaluation of progress and inclusion of findings into the next phases

▶ Flexibility and knowledge exchange

▶ Create a space for critical reflection: What can be improved? What is simply adding more work? What is already beneficial? Can we achieve our goals?

How can we avoid discussing this again in 20 years?

▶ Do not discard the recommendations; take action instead

▶ Joint forces and dialogue at conferences and networks (OECD, EU, GFMD, fome, CoE)

▶ Adopt or adapt successful models from the UNESCO-led media working group.

▶ Joint studies and open discussions on learning

▶ Platform with good practices and contact points for details

▶ Networks of journalists and media support actors facilitate North-South exchange and foster trust.

PROS AND CONS OF COORDINATION

If it coordination exists, a majority of 68% find it "predominantly productive and cooperative"

68%

34% indicate that coordination favours conventional concepts at the expense of innovative ones

34%

18 % say coordination is time-consuming and useless

18%

15 % say coordination is too complex and not feasible

15%

OTHER ROLES OF COORDINATION AND THEIR NUMBER OF MENTIONS

Learning and Sharing; Joint Research	18
Establish clear frameworks and mandates.	13
Address the need for coordination at all levels with specific actors: a) among donors, b) among international actors, c) among local actors.	12
Ensure effective communication between all parties.	2
Discuss openly the costs, benefits, and expectations of coordination for everyone involved.	2
Be honest about the trade-offs: Coordination versus funding.	1

Source: fome survey, May-June 2024, N=69

"We must clearly define the incentives for coordination and the added value for each party involved."

Evidence of impact is still scarce at best

SUMMARY BY **MICHEL LEROY AND CHRISTOPH SPURK**
HOST OF THE FORMAT: **ERICH BROST INSTITUTE** AND
FONDATION HIRONDELLE

THE CHALLENGES IN MEASURING IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES OF MEDIA ASSISTANCE AND HOW THEY CAN BE ADDRESSED

Media assistance programmes are largely evaluated as relevant, and activities are implemented according to plan. However, the effects of programmes on outcome and impact level remain in the shadows. Those effects are often taken for granted, but this claim is not backed up by evidence. It is sometimes argued that current funding programmes are not conducive to this kind of measurement; however, methodological weaknesses also prevent the sector from learning from what it implements. And yet, trends are emerging to help document the ability of media assistance actors to transform (for good or ill) the information ecosystem.

Challenges in measuring the impact of media assistance

For more than a decade, it has been known that there is hardly any evidence of the impact of media assistance programmes, defined as "the higher-level effects of an intervention's outcomes" or "the ultimate effects or longer-term changes resulting from the intervention" (OECD 2024), focusing on changes in the beliefs or activities of media users, administration, government, and civil society, depending on the project's focus. Consequently, the media assistance community knows very little about whether media assistance works and how it works (if at all).

Schoemaker and Stremlau (2014), in their review of the literature, including grey literature on media and conflict, demonstrated that "the evidence of impact of media interventions or ICTs is scarce at best." They noted that many studies employed unclear methods, were merely descriptions of projects, and provided only proclamations without empirical evidence regarding impacts. Often, media exposure was the sole factor considered in these studies, overlooking the interplay of media with other factors and the actual use of media and ICTs within the local context. A similar conclusion was drawn by Gagliardone et al. (2015) regarding Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Africa, indicating that studies presented limited evidence of the actual impacts of ICTs, relying instead on assumptions and assertions.

Myers et al. (2017) argue that the media assistance sector struggles to identify appropriate indicators for the success of media projects, and that the "attribution challenge" remains unresolved. The success of media projects at the outcome or impact level depends on various factors, including the political environment, the strength of civil society, press freedom, and economic sustainability. However, evaluation studies often fail to determine the extent to which the media intervention contributed to these outcomes. Some studies merely report positive correlations between the project and outcome or impact indicators, but correlations cannot clarify whether, for instance, a high-quality radio station increased the political interest of its listeners or if those already interested in politics simply used the high-quality radio station more frequently.

The basic methodological challenge in evaluation studies is that (a) randomised control trials (RCTs) are considered difficult and costly to implement, and (b) regression analyses have the disadvantage of not being able to include all potential influencing factors. In addition, unlike other fields, alternatives such as the theories of change approach or qualitative comparative analysis (QCAs) are still in their infancy within the media assistance industry. Current attempts to develop theories of change (e.g., Internews 2024, Media Viability Core Group 2024) often lack the reasons, causes, and motivations that explain why actors should take action, which is a crucial aspect of a theory of change (Weiss 1995). Nevertheless, theories of change can help identify at least how media assistance projects may operate. Such insights would assist the sector in improving its interventions and would also help RCT studies formulate the right questions.

Existing RCTs (see studies by Moehler 2013, Conroy-Krutz and Moehler 2015, Conroy-Krutz 2018, FoME 2016) demonstrate that some media interventions positively affected users' political knowledge, increased political interest, and enhanced discussion and participation; however, others showed negative or no effects. Radio talk shows and soap operas also

varied in their influence on civil society engagement, revealing greater tolerance in some instances but also less tolerance toward opposing groups. A recent RCT study by Groves (2022) in rural Tanzania highlights the positive effect of media stories on addressing local issues, such as broken water pipes or damaged roads. The study's most significant finding was identifying why this effect occurred: the middle level of administration in local communities risked losing respect from central authorities if local problems – exposed by local radio – were not resolved by these middle-level leaders. Additional case studies (Lublinski, Spurk et al. 2015; Molenveld and Pattyn 2015) illustrated other ways in which media stories impacted the real world.

Other recent studies (Media Impact Funders 2020) concentrate on digital metrics such as "reach" or quantitative figures related to media usage. However, these studies neglect the fact that reach does not provide much insight into impact, and they completely disregard the challenge of the "attribution gap."

Some authors request that future studies include more in-depth case analyses to better understand how projects achieve an impact (Molenveld and Pattyn 2015). This pertains to "theories of change", which were developed in the 1990s by evaluators in community development. The idea behind theories of change (Weiss 1995) is that complex programmes must explain their hidden assumptions (black boxes) and outline all steps as a hypothetical result chain. These chains not only encompass the usual steps from activities to outputs, outcomes, and impacts but also elucidate the causal mechanisms that lead from one step to the next. These causal mechanisms (for example, motivations, rational choices, following role models, etc.) are the main difference from the logical frameworks used in media assistance, as they clarify why the project is hypothetically functioning. Those result chains need to be developed during planning and can subsequently be tested through process tracing when the project is active.

Session 4 was dedicated to the reasons for the deficit in impact measurement and possible solutions.

Remarks on Terminology

In preparing for this session and during the symposium, one or two additional terminology issues were identified. Some participants assumed that impact studies differ from evaluation studies or theories of change testing. The understanding (OECD 2023) is that evaluation studies typically involve examining the relevance of programmes, the organisational context, the implementation of activities, and efficiency, as well as measuring effectiveness at the outcome and impact levels.

Thus, impact studies are a subset of evaluation studies. Regarding theories of change, some confusion exists within the practice of media assistance. Many actors have deviated from the original meaning (outlined above, which describes the causal mechanisms that connect each step) to an understanding that focuses merely on presenting the standard log frame in a broader narrative or through a graph. In contrast, genuine theories of change hypothesise the causal links between outputs, outcomes, and impacts, thereby allowing for testing these theories using social science methods. These tests also qualify as impact studies. It may be necessary to clarify terminology within the media assistance community.

SPEAKER'S INPUT

MICHEL LEROY from the Erich Brost Institute in Dortmund reported on his study set to be published in early 2025, which reviewed and analysed twenty years of media assistance evaluations. This ground-breaking corpus includes 289 studies of projects primarily funded by OECD member countries and examines how evaluators assess the impacts and sustainability of these projects:

1. Real impact studies are scarce. For instance, there has not been a single real ex-post study conducted five or ten years after an operation, and the lasting impact remains largely unknown.

2. Forty-five percent of evaluation studies cannot offer any opinion on the lasting net benefits of the intervention.

3. Numerous scientific biases cast doubt on favourable results that are merely intended to reassure

the commissioner. In contrast, critical evaluations (Balkans, Ukraine, etc.) confirm that the sector must reassess its assumptions.

4. Few studies mention a reference to a robust theory of change, and almost none try and trace mechanisms that should lead to the expected outcomes (process tracing).

5. Even fewer consider the transformations – both positive and negative, expected or unexpected – that are occurring throughout the entire media ecosystem in the country of intervention and the role that the intervention may have played in either preventing or fostering change.

Leroy concluded that without better evaluation, we miss out on learning opportunities. Furthermore, growing populism creates fertile ground for narratives that question aid.

JEFF CONROY-KRUTZ from Michigan State University reported on a recent evaluation study conducted on the effects of Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL) in the Central African Republic. RNL is the most accessed radio station in the country and is supported by Fondation Hirondelle, Switzerland. As part of an effort to measure the impact of RNL programming on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, the study took advantage of RNL launching new transmitters in specific regions to assess factors such as trust, knowledge, and political engagement both before and three months after the launch. It was expected that radio listenership would increase significantly in these "new" regions.

The study also indicated that trust in RNL was very high, with around 84% of listeners expressing trust in RNL, compared to other radio stations in the area, which had trust levels ranging from 13% to 21%. Furthermore, many respondents in the post-launch survey indicated that they would verify stories before sharing them and felt more confident in their ability to distinguish fact from fiction after RNL's launch. However, other expected outcomes of interest, including political engagement and support for inclusive, peaceful, pluralistic politics, could not be identified between pre- and post-launch. Conroy-Krutz insisted that expectations regarding the outcomes and impacts of projects should be realistic. More studies are needed to learn how projects achieve their results. The sector also learns from negative evaluations.

EMMA CANTERA from the OECD Development Cooperation Directorate reported on the OECD "principles on relevant and effective support to media and the information environment". She began by stating that currently more people distrust the news media than trust it, and that levels of democracy are declining, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, which are the main recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA). She cited a study claiming that ODA to media represents only 0.5% of total ODA in 2022, but 0.19% when infrastructures are excluded, and only 0.05% is directly channelled to media organisations.

Against a challenging environment (existential threats to free media, increasing disinformation, growing threats to journalists' safety) these principles include increasing support to public media, strengthening local ownership, improving coordination and investing in research and learning. The validity of data from the OECD was questioned during the plenary. Cantera acknowledged that the databases are lacking. Attempting to assemble 22 DAC members to collect comparable data, especially when the data is often scattered, poses significant challenges. Additionally, while OECD principles were recognised, concerns were raised about why these new principles would have a tangible impact, given that many previous guidelines existed without substantial change. Cantera noted that these principles were developed collaboratively with media organisations and civil society (GFMD, CIMA), and that countries are expected to report back on their implementation in two years.

NICOLA HARFORD from "iMedia Associates", Harare, a consultant/evaluator, noted that impact measurements are often conducted superficially, relying solely on the opinions of beneficiaries or experts without appropriate baselines and research design. Some projects struggle to accurately identify outcomes and impacts, leaving it unclear what should be measured. To evaluate the effects of media assistance programmes, it is important to consider the broader context of media development. However, she emphasised that the media assistance sector should be cautious about projecting overly ambitious impacts, even if donors seek to see significant outcomes related to their funding. Nonetheless, it is crucial for the sector to enhance the assessment of its theories of change and to employ a diverse range of methods.

ANDRIS KESTERIS, DG NEAR European Commission, stressed that media assistance should focus on supporting independent media and its environment but nothing more. In his view, the sector should refrain from aspiring to achieve goals unrelated to media, such as promoting activism instead of journalism, and thus "pushing media to adopt an NGO-type of behaviour." Independent media is important for democracy, but the sector should focus more on the media themselves rather than supporting the media as a means for reaching other goals.

With regard to impact measurement, he stated that reports from beneficiaries of media assistance are sufficient in his view, as well as monitoring whether specific outcomes postulated for media organisations (for example, higher content delivery on social media channels or more multimedia content) are achieved.

SARA NAMUSOGA-KAALE from Makerere University in Kampala stated that the principle of 'do-not-harm' is sometimes taken for granted, while interventions in the media can have negative effects. Based on her research into the coverage of LGBT issues in Uganda, Namusoga shows that even when dressed up in a human rights framing, reporting often relies on sources that are opposed to LGBT issues, without giving LGBT people a voice or even, in the case of tabloids by exposing them and publishing their contact details. Bilateral relations with China and Russia, in particular, emphasise that these countries share the same "values", which are supposedly opposed to those of the West. This has fuelled public backlash against the idea of national sovereignty.

Media assistance providers must approach the issue with caution, as local activists themselves request that "our friends in the Western world, please refrain from participating in this debate", stating that their "involvement with sanctions and travel bans distorts the whole issue." (Andrew M. Mwaenda on X, Apr. 3, 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

In the panel discussion, the question was asked why donors are apparently fine with the lack of good impact studies. Kesteris, as an EU representative, explained that in his view, relying on collecting beneficiaries' opinions is sufficient. Cantera of the OECD instead referred to the principle of investing more in knowledge and learning.

Regarding the issue of highly ambitious goals in media assistance requested by donors, Kesteris responded that such goals are only mentioned by politicians. The EU administration hardly looks at those but focuses on programmes that, in their opinion, help the media directly.

In the plenary discussion, it was stated that

1. A significant amount of resources is spent on evaluations. Instead of conducting impact studies, we should establish robust baselines and develop appropriate theories of change.

2. Evaluation is just one of many tools, alongside capitalisation exercises and audience studies.

3. Media assistance organisations prefer studies from which they can learn. This symposium appears to suggest that we are not doing things properly – can we share some ideas and solutions? Otherwise, it seems as if we are not learning from evaluations.

Question in the wrap-up on session 4: How to avoid talking about the same questions on impact studies in 20 years?

Invest in more and better research

▶ More research, more resources for stronger, more manageable impact studies, fewer studies, but more profound ones

▶ Ensure clear baselines / design evaluation strategy before start of the programme / define clear and achievable goals.

▶ Conduct impact studies five or ten years later. Not commissioned by the donor or implementer, favour studies on a limited area with several donors

▶ Develop impact studies from the perspective of recipients

▶ Ensure funding of evaluation studies outside of project budget (and validate study design before access to funds is provided)

▶ Experiment with new methodological approaches

Improve coordination and collaboration in evaluation studies

▶ Coordination of evaluation design to achieve sound and strategic evidence, a pool of resources and expertise by building research teams

▶ Evaluation studies must be validated by peers or external experts regarding their objectives and methods. Building up a consortium with stakeholders for coordination of task force (Databases, accessible)

▶ Information exchange and frequent dialogue, giving voice to expertise from Global South

Develop clear formats for sharing of insights

▶ Support willingness to learn from failures

▶ Change the mentality from "what did not work equals failure"

▶ Share learnings from impact measurement

▶ **Prioritise the implementation of findings** in decision-making and planning

▶ **Develop a compendium of evaluation methods** with guidance for evaluation design, implementation, reporting, and use

▶ **Push back on donors' unrealistic expectations**

RESULTS FROM THE FOME SURVEY

87% of respondents indicated that they "always" or "often" planned outcomes and impacts according to a theory of change. However, some expressed doubt, stating, "The theory of change is rarely formalised (or else it is not really a theory of change as such). Without questioning the causal links and any potential interferences, this is often a formal exercise that bears little relation to the reality on the ground."

87%
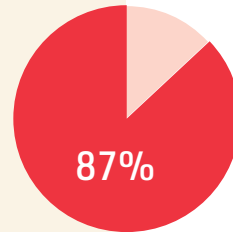
90% 90% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that they know little about whether their projects achieved the intended outcomes and impact
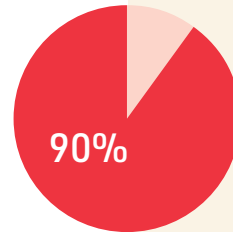
55% 55% agreed that data collection methods might not meet scientific standards, but they are considered sufficient to assess outcomes and impacts. Many are sceptical about ambitious goals
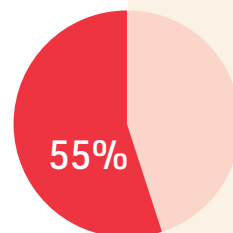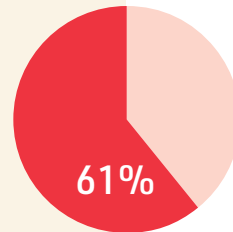
66% "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement that they would like to analyse outcomes and impacts scientifically, but costs are too high

66%
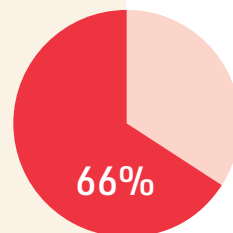
61% 61% agreed that they are aware of not being able to fulfil some of thea high expectations of donors.
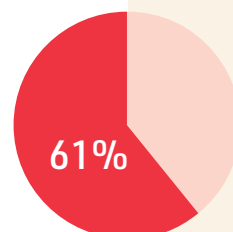
61% acknowledged that they are aware of their limitations in fulfilling some high expectations from donors.

61%

Source: fome survey, May-June 2024, N=69

References

Conroy-Krutz, J. and D. Moehler 2015. Moderation from Bias: A Field Experiment on Partisan Media in a New Democracy. Journal of Politics, 77(2): 575-587.

fome 2007. Measuring Change I. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in Media and Development Cooperation, in fome symposium documentation.
https://fome.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/FoME-Measuring-Change-2007.pdf

fome 2016. Measuring impact in media projects in conflict/fragile contexts, in fome symposium documentation, pp. 25-27.
https://fome.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FoME-Observer-Agitator-Target-2016.pdf

Gagliardone, I. et al. 2015. In Search of Local Knowledge on ICTs in Africa. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development. 4(1), 35, 1-15. DOI:
http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.fv

Internews 2024. Internews Theory of Change.
https://internews.org/about/our-impact/theory-change/

Leroy, M. 2025. The Sustainability Imperative in Media Development: A Critical Analysis of a Self-Serving Myth. Palgrave.

Lublinski, J., Spurk, C. et al. 2015. Triggering Change – How investigative journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa contribute to solving problems in society, in: Journalism, 17, 8: pp. 1074-1094.

Media Impact Funders 2020: Decoding Media Impact: Insights, Advice & Recommendations.
https://mediaimpactfunders.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MIF-Guide-Digital-FNL.pdf

Media Viability Core Group 2024. The Media Viability Manifesto's Theory of Change, jointly developed by 13 organizations.
https://mediaviabilitymanifesto.org/wp-content/uploads/MV_Manifesto_ToC-EN-20240904-1.pdf

Moehler, D. 2013. Democracy, governance and randomised media assistance, BBC MA Working paper, 4/2013.

Molenveld, A. and V. Pattyn 2015. An Evaluation of Media Support Programmes in Kenya and Tanzania, KU Leuven Public Governance Institute.
Myers, M., Harford, N. and K. Bartholomew 2017. Media Assistance: Review of the Recent Literature and Other Donors' Approaches, A Capitalisation Exercise (CapEx) for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

OECD (2023), Evaluation Systems in Development Co-operation 2023, OECD Publishing, Paris,
https://doi.org/10.1787/a255365e-en

OECD (2024), Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management for Sustainable Development (Second Edition), OECD Publishing, Paris,
https://doi.org/10.1787/cfda7a8c-de-en

Ragin, C. 2014. The comparative method: moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies: with a new introduction. Oakland, California.

Schoemaker, E. and Stremlau, N. 2014. The Media and Conflict: An Assessment of the Evidence, Progress in Development Studies 14, 2 (2014) pp. 181–195.

Snow, C. and Taylor, W. 2015. Media, Discussion and Attitudes in Fragile Contexts, BBC Media Action, Research Report, October 2015.

Weiss, C.H. 1995. Nothing as Practical as Good Theory: Exploring Theory-Based Evaluation for Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families. In: New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods, and Contexts, The Aspen Institute, 65-92.

Mind the Gap! Forum Medien und Entwicklung | fome 2025 | www.fome.info