

**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE**

DAC Network on Governance

Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment

11 December 2023

This proposed set of “Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment” was prepared by GovNet members who volunteered to establish a drafting committee and could count on generous contributions from CIMA and GFMD.

A first draft of the Principles was shared with GovNet members during the 33rd Plenary Meeting in June 2023 and with Media Freedom Coalition’s Working Group on Media Development in July 2023. Feedback received during these meetings has been integrated in the current draft.

This draft serves to consult stakeholders with the following objectives:

- Building consensus and foster a collaborative approach among stakeholders;
- Gathering feedback, inputs and insights from relevant stakeholders to further inform, shape and improve the draft Principles;
- Ensuring inclusivity and transparency in the formulation of the Principles;
- Identifying potential concerns and opportunities associated with the Principles;
- Gathering inputs on how respective stakeholders see their own role in the implementation of these Principles.

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Introduction

1. Democracy depends on a well-informed public. Freedom of expression, media independence, and access to information are the cornerstones of democracy. The ability of citizens to receive accurate and unbiased information is fundamental for making healthy political and economic decisions, building fair and just societies, and pursuing meaningful and sustainable development and peace. This ability, in turn, requires journalists who can safely produce quality content irrespective of their gender, media outlets that can operate with sufficient resources and without undue interference, and information ecosystems¹ predicated upon human rights-respecting frameworks, gender equality and the ethical use of technology.

2. A well-functioning independent media system is critical to sustainable social and economic development, and a bulwark of peaceful, economically prosperous societies. Greater citizen engagement,² stronger accountability,³ and lower corruption⁴ are all attributable to the presence of professional news media. A vibrant news sector is also fundamental as the first line of defence against democratic backsliding and autocratisation, whose first step is often to undermine media freedom and financial viability.⁵ Credible news media provide sunlight on critical social, economic and political issues to ensure a well-informed civil society and accountability of industry and private interests.

3. International norms have long recognised the importance of freedom of expression and of the media, including in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially Article 19; the [General Comment on Article 19: freedoms of opinion and expression](#); the 1991 Windhoek Declaration for the Development of a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press and [subsequent declarations](#); and various other instruments at the global and regional levels, including [target 16.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals](#).

4. In 2014, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued a series of guidelines on [Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development](#). Targeting the development assistance community, the guidelines aimed to inspire “new approaches to risk taking, analysis and programming around systems of accountability and ‘do no harm’ efforts in political engagement.” In addition to areas such as elections, political parties, and parliaments, the guidelines included a [dedicated chapter on media assistance](#) that acknowledged the central and powerful role of the media⁶ and advocated a

1 For a working definition, see, Internews, [Mapping Information Ecosystems to Support Resilience](#) (2015): “Information ecosystems are complex adaptive systems that include information infrastructure, tools, media, producers, consumers, curators, and sharers. They are complex organizations of dynamic social relationships through which information moves and transforms in flows.”

2 Larizza, M. (2017). World Bank World Development Report (Spotlight 12: The Media).

3 See, for example, Groves, D. W., Grossman, G., Humphreys, M., Jatich, S., Marshall, J., Riaz, Z., Slough, T., & Wilke, A. (2022). Media and Accountability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes Latest Version.; and Reinikka, R., and Svensson, J. 2005. Fighting corruption to improve schooling: Evidence from a newspaper campaign in Uganda. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 3, No. 2–3, pp. 259–6.

4 See, for instance, Freille, S., Haque, M.E., and Kneller, R. 2007. A contribution to the empirics of press freedom and corruption. *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 23, No. 23, pp. 838-62; and Brunetti, A., & Weder, B. (2003). A free press is bad news for corruption. *Journal of Public Economics*, 87(7–8).

5 <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/tipping-point-democratic-erosion-and-the-assault-on-press-freedom/>.

6 “The media provides news and information to the public, brings issues to the public agenda and facilitates public debate and discussion. It serves as a watchdog for the public interest and holds state and non-state actors accountable. The media is crucial for good governance: it creates the conditions for inclusive policy dialogue, as well as providing a platform for broad-based participation in actual policy processes.”

number of strategic principles for incorporating media assistance into the larger framework of development assistance.

5. Much has changed in the almost 10 years since the principles were first introduced. A confluence of financial, social, political, and technological forces now poses an unprecedented threat to media as a democratic institution, journalism as a profession, and information as a public good. In particular, the rise of new technologies, including social media, has had far reaching consequences on information ecosystems. The current global information ecosystem is increasingly dominated by non-traditional media, which has had positive consequences for vibrant public debate, but which has also facilitated a significant rise in mis- and disinformation and hate speech. The new information environment has also led to a collapse of the traditional business model for journalism. Taken together with state capture of media interests, threats to journalist safety, declining public trust in journalism, and growing authoritarianism, these trends pose an existential threat to free and independent media and information integrity and with them, to democracy itself.

6. The complex and interrelated nature of these challenges requires a fresh and sophisticated approach to development assistance. There is a need for more and better support to media and journalism, contextualised within a larger information ecosystem. The 2014 principles viewed media assistance as support for “editorial independence, financial sustainability, professional capacity, and a lively civil society.” Nearly 10 years later, the urgency of needs calls for a renewed and increased commitment to assistance that represents a more strategic response to current challenges, takes a more holistic, systemic approach to public interest media⁷, and balances growing tensions between addressing mis/disinformation and respecting freedom of expression and opinion-building – all within the context of ever-evolving information technologies, including artificial intelligence.

7. This document puts forward a first draft of some proposed principles which set out what relevant and effective support to media and the information environment might look like. The target audience for these principles is first and foremost development agencies within the DAC, whose 32 members include many of the world’s largest providers of ODA. In addition, it addresses media support practitioners and organizations, local media outlets, national governments, parliaments, political parties, international policy makers, private foundations and investors, and other stakeholders engaged in the future of media and media support. The principles derive from and respond to consultations conducted by the [Global Forum for Media Development](#) (GFMD) and the [Center for International Media Assistance](#) (CIMA), which between December 2021 and June 2022 gathered input from representatives from bilateral donor agencies, implementing organizations, civil society groups, and media development experts via nearly 200 in-person and online discussions.⁸

8. In November 2022, the DAC Network on Governance agreed to develop new principles, recognizing a need to ensure that the international response to the crisis in the media sector fits better in a rapidly changing information environment. That same month, the intergovernmental panel of UNESCO’s International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) also voted to endorse the process for developing such principles.⁹ This document captures that intent.

7 For a working definition, see [Enabling Media Markets to Work for Democracy: An International Fund for Public Interest Media](#) (2021), which defines public interest media as “media that is free and independent, that exists to inform people on the issues that shape their lives, in ways which serve the public’s rather than any political, commercial or factional interest, to enable public debate and dialogue across society, and to hold those in power to account on behalf of the public interest.”

8 For further details on the consultation process, see [Renewing the principles for effective media development and support to journalism](#).

9 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383161>.

Why is official development assistance (ODA) to public interest media and information integrity important for development actors?

9. The DAC defines official development assistance (ODA) as “government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries.” Understanding of this definition has changed over time, recognising, for example, the emergence of “non-DAC providers or philanthropic foundations, the diversification of financial instruments for development, or the increasing overlap of development co-operation policy objectives with those of other sectors such as migration and security.”¹⁰ In 2021, on the occasion of its 60th anniversary, the OECD released its vision for the next decade, in which OECD members reaffirmed not only their commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, but also acknowledged a dramatically changing world, including global financial crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges of climate change, and rising inequality and vulnerability.¹¹

10. This renewed commitment also recognised the key role of information ecosystems, with OECD members pledging to “support open societies in the digital and data driven age.” This includes the intention to “advance responses to the challenges of digitalisation, including the necessity to develop new skills, the evolution of the traditional model of work and modes of business, the need to update competition policy, the need to guard against threats to democracy, digital security and privacy and to combat disinformation online.”

11. In 2022, at the Global Forum and Ministerial Meeting on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy, the OECD launched the [Reinforcing Democracy Initiative](#), which aims to provide evidence-based guidance and good international practices to help countries reinforce democratic values and institutions.¹² Among the initiative’s five pillars are combating mis- and disinformation and transforming public governance for digital democracy. In addition, the OECD adopted the [Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy](#), which, among other statements, includes:

- the recognition that “free, pluralistic and resilient media and information ecosystems are critical for democracies”
- an acknowledgement of the risks posed by destabilised information ecosystems on the values of democracy, the defence of human rights, and the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups
- a commitment to addressing mis/disinformation while protecting freedom of speech.

12. Indeed, the erosion of trust has emerged as one of the leading concerns facing the information ecosystem, notably through the increased weaponization of fake news or false information. The [2023 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) shows that two out of every five respondents (42%) views journalists as a divisive force in society. While no major source is universally trusted for general news and information, trust in traditional media remains significantly higher (at 59%) than trust in social media (at only 41%).¹³

13. Public interest media and information integrity, however, are increasingly at risk. [UNESCO’s 2022 World Trends Report on journalism as a public good](#) found that over the past five years, approximately 85 percent of the world’s population experienced a decline

10 <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm>.

11 https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1110_1110970-giiac5g3aj&title=MCM-oct-2021-Trust-in-global-co-operation-Mathias-Cormann.

12 See also the [OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in OECD countries](#).

13 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, Global Report, p. 52. <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer>

in press freedom in their country. From 2016 to the end of 2021, UNESCO recorded the killings of 455 journalists, who either died for their work or while on the job. At the same time, imprisonment of journalists has reached record highs. Similarly, in 2022 the [Varieties of Democracy \(V-Dem\) Institute](#) observed a record 35 countries suffering significant deteriorations in freedom of expression at the hands of governments – up from only five countries 10 years ago. V-Dem also found that harassment and censorship of the media worsened in 21 of the 33 countries considered “autocratizing”. According to RSF’s [World Press Freedom Index 2023](#), the situation is “good” or “satisfactory” in only 52 out of 180 countries. In other words, the environment for journalism is “bad” in seven out of ten countries.

14. Moreover, a big part of the problem is that traditional business models and the financial viability of the media sector face serious challenges.¹⁴ Advertising revenues have shifted massively from traditional media to social media platforms, and circulation and sales of print media are in sharp decline. With readership and advertising markets moving online, advertising revenue for newspapers plummeted by nearly half in the ten-year period ending in 2019.¹⁵ In low- and middle-income countries in particular, media outlets operate in an unstable business and political environment and with limited access to investment capital, philanthropy, and government support. Even in countries with long traditions of safeguarding free and independent journalism, financial and technological transformations have forced news outlets, especially those serving local communities, to close.¹⁶ In some cases low or no-fee news wire services are provided by state-controlled media out competing public interest news providers. The COVID-19 pandemic and its global economic impact exacerbated these trends, which now threaten to create an “extinction level” event for independent journalism outlets.¹⁷

15. Gender-based violence (GBV), both digital and physical, constitutes an attack on democracy itself as it leads to self-censorship (women retreating from the public sphere because of harassment). More than a third of female journalists avoided reporting certain stories because of the threats, intimidation or attacks they endure. Almost half of female journalists experience online abuse, according to International Media Support (IMS)¹⁸.

16. In recent years, numerous initiatives have emerged in an effort to respond to this grave crisis. These include:

- The [International Initiative on Information and Democracy](#), driven by member states along with Reporters without Borders, which has led to: 1) the endorsement by 43 countries of the [International Partnership on Information and Democracy](#), defining principles of the global communication and information space and 2) the creation of the [Forum on Information and Democracy](#) to expand these principles and issue concrete recommendations for regulation and self-regulation.
- The [Media Freedom Coalition](#) (MFC), established in 2019 as a partnership of now more than 50 countries, which advocates for media freedom, including the safety of journalists and media workers, through a combination of advocacy efforts, diplomatic interventions, support for legal reforms, international events, and

¹⁴ See for example the Economist Impact report “[Breaking news: the economic impact of Covid-19 on the global news media industry](#)”, March 2022

¹⁵ UNESCO, [World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022](#), Paris 2022.

¹⁶ Economist Impact report “[Breaking news: the economic impact of Covid-19 on the global news media industry](#).”

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/apr/09/coronavirus-us-newspapers-impact>

¹⁸ [Virtual but real: Online violence against women journalists | IMS \(mediasupport.org\)](#)

funding for media freedom initiatives. The MFC has a Working Group dedicated to Media Development.

- The [Media Freedom Cohort](#), launched in 2021 as part of the first Summit for Democracy and co-chaired by the Netherlands and Canada and Internews, which aimed to protect journalist safety and security, advance freedom of expression, and bolster independent and diverse media. (Following the 2023 Summit, the Cohort now continues as part of the MFC.)
- The [International Fund for Public Interest Media](#) (IFPIM), established in 2021 as a multi-stakeholder initiative designed to diagnose and address the challenges facing public interest media in low- and middle-income countries and help to identify pathways toward long-term sustainability.
- The [International Media Policy and Advisory Centre](#) (IMPACT), established by GFMD, which aims to provide donors, funders, policy-makers, and practitioners with the necessary groundwork needed to make informed, evidence-based decisions about media development and journalism support strategies, programming, funding, and advocacy.
- The [Journalism Trust Initiative](#) (JTI) launched in 2018 by RSF (Reporters without borders), is an international standard, a label for showcasing and promoting trustworthy journalism. The JTI aims at a healthier information space by developing and implementing indicators for trustworthiness of journalism and thus, promotes and rewards compliance with professional norms and ethics. To date, more than 850 media organisations from 80 countries are engaged in the JTI process.

17. As part of the Summit for Democracy's Media Freedom Cohort, several organisations and states committed to work with the DAC Network on Governance to update the existing media assistance principles so they better respond to the current context, and include a more operational focus. Organisations and states which made this commitment included the Media Freedom Coalition's Media Development Working Group, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, GFMD, and CIMA. This is in line with a GovNet commitment in its programme of work 2023-2024.

18. Harnessing growing opportunities for coordinated action afforded by the abovementioned initiatives, the below draft principles draw from the original 2014 principles (accessible in [Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development](#)) as well as international policy documents, such as the [Windhoek+30 Declaration](#), the [Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development](#), the [Paris Agreement](#), the [2021 DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance](#); and a growing body of evidence and research emerging from practice-based learning and evaluation and scholarly enquiry into media development.

What have we learned from ODA efforts to improve the information environment?¹⁹

19. DAC members have supported the development of independent media since World War II. That assistance became more systematic and structured in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, when such support was critical to the transitions of previously one-party state-controlled media systems. In subsequent years, media development programs spread throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, responding to a diversity of contexts – from fragile and conflict-afflicted states, to transitional countries taking steps to reform, to more advanced middle-income economies where the media holds promise for growth and investment.

20. Despite decades of research on the vital role of public interest media and healthy information ecosystems for development, international support to the sector stagnated at a tiny fraction of ODA, just 0.3 percent.²⁰ This level of support is not sufficient to address the challenges reviewed above. In addition, only a small number of donors are supporting this sector. Between 2010 and 2019, 68% of the total ODA for media and information system development – excluding spending on international broadcasting such as Deutsche Welle and BBC World Service – was provided by six DAC members: United States (21%), Germany (17%), Sweden (10%), Japan (7%), France (7%) and the United Kingdom (6%).²¹ In short, only a few donors provide the bulk of media support, a relatively small part is country allocable, and an increasing segment goes to public corporations, leaving only a fraction of the 0.3% that reaches media outlets in partner countries.

21. Media sector support as a percentage of total governance support was 0.3% in 2021,²² a markedly modest ODA contribution for a sector that plays such a catalytic function in enabling accountability and democratic governance and fulfilling human rights. It also signals that support for public interest media and information integrity has not yet emerged as a clear priority for DAC members. Coupled with this comparatively low level of funding has been a scepticism towards media assistance and the challenges involved with demonstrating impact.²³

22. Another part of the problem has been that donor support to the media sector is not as effective as it could be. Donor support to the sector includes generic short courses on journalism, and use of the media to achieve broader development goals such as changing gender stereotypes, raising awareness of climate change and so on. While the latter are worthy goals in their own right, they do not help media to build the resilience they need to address the major challenges they face.²⁴ There is also a lack of donor coordination and overlapping or competing mandates between foreign policy and development institutions.

19 This part will be enriched and updated with findings and data from GovNet’s mapping and qualitative review of ODA to the information environment that is ongoing.

20 CIMA. 2022. Official Development Assistance to Media Development: Preliminary Analysis of OECD-DAC Data. Submitted to the DAC GovNet Nov. 7, 2022.

21 IBID

22 Based on reporting of ODA to “media and free flow of information” in the OECD CRS. .

23 See, for example, Arsenault, A. and Powers, S. (2010), *The Media Map Project: Review of Literature*, n.p.: Media Map Project; Nelson, M. and Susman-Peña, T. (2012), *Rethinking Media Development: A Report on the Media Map Project*, Washington, DC: Internews; and Odugbemi, S. and Norris, P. (2010), ‘Assessing the extent to which the news media act as watchdogs, agenda setters, and gatekeepers’, in P. Norris (ed.), *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, pp. 379–94.

24 See for example: GFMD, [Transforming Media Development. Recommendations for Effective Funding and Collaboration](#); or [IFPIM Feasibility study](#), pp31-32.

23. Despite these challenges, a community of media development and journalism support organizations has emerged, including the establishment of GFMD in 2005 and CIMA in 2006 – the organisations which have managed the consultations leading up to the development of the below principles. This community represents years of experience in a variety of challenging environments and has continued to hone its knowledge and expertise. An increasing focus on research and learning towards improving the relevance and effectiveness of aid has followed, along with innovations and improvements. Media development donors have helped to refine diagnostic tools, promote co-creation of country-level agendas, develop local multi-stakeholder networks, and incentivize coordination at the regional and country levels. Some have also experimented with aid modalities, such as loan guarantees to fund small and medium-sized independent media enterprises in emerging markets with riskier political contexts. Cross-border investigative journalism networks and media sustainability incubators are among the numerous new initiatives in the field.

24. More recent assessments on democracy aid find that targeted support to free media have been more likely to have a positive effect on democratization than other forms of development assistance.²⁵ This aligns with wider research findings on the critical role of media in democratic systems. Good quality media coverage has been proven to drive democratic engagement (for example in Sierra Leone²⁶ and Mozambique²⁷) and increase government responsiveness to citizen needs (for example in India²⁸). Media coverage of politics also has a positive impact by amplifying other information interventions such as televising election debates (in Sierra Leone²⁹ and Uganda³⁰), publicising citizens' scorecards (for example in India³¹), and disseminating findings from government audits (in Brazil³² and Mexico³³).

25. The work of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which led the Panama Papers, Paradise Papers, FinCEN Files, and Pandora Papers projects, is another critical example of the value of supporting media interventions. As the biggest cross-border investigations in journalism history, the results have helped trigger investigations and prompted government inquiries and legislative reform in more than 70 countries. In many cases, it has provided the basis for law-enforcement to identify and freeze stolen assets, showing both the importance of this work and the veracity of the

25 Gisselquist, R. M., Niño-Zarazúa, M., and Samarin, M. (2021). "Does aid support democracy? A systematic review of the literature" WIDER Working Paper (Issue 14). More detail available in Niño-Zarazúa, Gisselquist, Horigoshi, Samarin, and Sen (2020), 'Effects of Swedish and International Democracy Aid', EBA Report 2020:07, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden.

26 Casey (2015) '[Crossing Party Lines: The Effects of Information on Redistributive Politics](#),' American Economic Review 105(8), 2410-2448

27 Gracio & Vicente (2021) '[Information, Get-out-the-vote Messages, and Peer Influence: Causal Effects on Political Behaviour in Mozambique](#),' Journal of Development Economics 151, 102665.

28 Besley & Burgess (2002) '[The Political Economy of Government Responsiveness: Theory and Evidence from India](#),' The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 117(4), 1415-1451

29 Bidwell, Casey & Glennerster (2018) '[Debates: Voting and Expenditure Responses to Political Communication](#),' Journal of Political Economy 128(8), 2880-2924

30 Platas & Raffler (2019). '[Meet the Candidates: Field Experimental Evidence on Learning from Politician Debates in Uganda](#)' in Dunning, Grossman, Humphreys, Hyde, McIntosh, and Nellis (eds), Information, Accountability, and Cumulative Learning: Lessons from Metaketa. New York: Cambridge University Press.

31 Banerjee, Kumar, Pande & Su (2011) '[Do Informed Voters Make Better Choices? Experimental Evidence from Urban India](#),' Working Paper, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

32 Ferraz & Finan (2008) '[Exposing corrupt politicians: the effects of Brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes](#),' The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 123(2) 703–745

33 Larreguy, Marshall & Snyder (2020) '[Publicizing Malfeasance: When the Local Media Structure Facilitates Electoral Accountability in Mexico](#),' The Economic Journal, 130(631), 2291–2327

allegations it brings forward. These revelations have contributed to hold powerful individuals to account, spur criminal investigations, drive legislative reforms, and recover billions of dollars in taxes and penalties. Actions taken by governments recovered \$1.4 billion in taxes and penalties in the five years after the Panama Papers were first published.

26. Although support to the media constitutes a small proportion of total ODA, some donors are prioritising this area, and are considering how to make their support more effective. Major media development donors such as the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency—have revised their media support strategies. An [SDC guidance note on media assistance](#), for example, has reportedly helped the agency improve the quality of media funding.

27. The DAC/GovNet has taken numerous actions as well, including a 2019 policy dialogue on media development aiming to re-prioritise media in the governance agenda; an overview of governance ODA between 2010 and 2019, which demonstrated limited ODA investments supporting media and information; a specific component under the GovNet’s Programme of Work and Budget 2023-2024³⁴; and webinars and meetings on issues such as mis/disinformation and media viability. These events were met by calls for GovNet and the DAC to sharpen its focus on media and information integrity, to provide clearer guidance on how ODA could have a more meaningful impact.

28. The draft principles below unite these myriad factors: the vital role of media and journalism in development and democracy, the severity of the crises facing public interest media and information integrity, emerging initiatives to improve innovation and coordination, and growing understanding of aid and development effectiveness and the impact of assistance.

³⁴ “Effective ODA strategies to defend and promote the integrity of information ecosystems in a context of autocratisation”, which includes the following objectives: 1) Enhance understanding of effective ODA strategies to support the capability and impact of public interest media, 2) Better understand how ODA can support information integrity and respond to rise of mis- and disinformation, 3) Improve awareness of opportunities and constraints of digital technologies on information eco-systems, with a focus on the role of ODA.

Proposed Principles for Relevant and Effective ODA Support to Media and the Information Environment

The below principles seek to reinvigorate international support to Media and the Information Environment. They aspire to encourage current donors to increase levels of assistance and to improve the relevance and effectiveness of their existing support to preserve and promote media and information integrity. They also seek to inspire prospective donors to consider supporting this sector. Donors will need to use these principles to inform their support if ODA is to address the major changes currently facing the global information environment.

We suggest that donors follow the below principles as they work towards improving the levels, relevance, and effectiveness of their support to the media and information environment. One of the principles, that on ‘do no harm to public interest media’, is intended as a minimum standard which all donors are expected to respect. The other principles are more aspirational, seeking to act as a guide and an inspiration to donors to increase the effectiveness of their support.

1. **Increase support** to public interest media and healthy information environments, as a critical response to authoritarianism and democratic backsliding

This includes:

- Increasing the overall volume of support to the media and information environment.
- Incorporating assistance to media and the information environment as a vital element of OECD donors’ response to rising authoritarianism and mis- and disinformation (as well as a contribution towards democracy and development).
- Integrating support to the media and information sector within wider development co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding policies or strategies (e.g., in efforts supporting anti-corruption, elections, citizen engagement, gender equality, and other governance objectives).

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

This includes:

- Adopting a holistic and systemic approach towards the media and information environment, which takes into account its legal, political, economic, gender, technological and societal dimensions.
- Adopting a long-term approach to media assistance, acknowledging that empowering relevant stakeholders and systems needs time and long-term strategic programming.

- Developing solid and up-to-date diagnostics of the information environment in each country based on data and evidence including an assessment of the specific needs of public interest media organisations in a country.
 - Supporting a diverse range of media, journalism and information stakeholders, which may include print, broadcast, new and social media, long- and short-form video production, podcasting, start-up media, not-for-profit hybrids, minority-language media, gender sensitive and transformative media, and others.
 - Supporting media business models to improve organisations' financial resilience and sustainability, allowing organisations to survive whilst avoiding excessive dependence on donor support.
 - Supporting the broader enabling environment for media and information, including the legal and regulatory system, organisations representing the media such as journalists' or editors' associations, media researchers, media monitors, advocacy organisations and coalitions.
 - Where relevant connecting infrastructure investments in the information environment (telecommunications; broadband, etc) with initiatives that safeguard information integrity.
 - Assessing and navigating the political environment for media independence and information integrity, including through incentives for governments willing to address country-level systemic problems. This may include monitoring changes in country context, preparing for and reacting to signs of democratic backsliding.
 - Supporting engagement with national and global multistakeholder fora, including policy debates, norm setting, experience exchanges, and information sharing.
 - Designing and supporting efforts to counter mis- and disinformation through regulation, fact checking and improved media literacy.
- 3. Strengthen local leadership and ownership**, empowering media partners as well as other actors in the information environment to meaningfully participate in policies and programmes.
- This includes:
- Supporting locally led diagnostics of the media and information environment and sharing data and assessments publicly.
 - Contextualising risks and opportunities for public interest media and information integrity, tailoring assistance to each individual context.
 - Ensuring that assistance responses remain grounded in local realities, bottom-up, evidence-based, and demand-driven.
 - Accounting for diversity, equality, inclusion, and accessibility principles and standards based on international and regional human rights instruments.
 - Providing incentives for international implementers to work through local and regional partners.
 - Guaranteeing meaningful participation of local actors in diagnostics, priority-setting, design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes.

- Increasing the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible, and reliable support, including core funding and longer-term funding, where appropriate and feasible.
4. **Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment**, both among different donors and between development and diplomatic efforts to support media freedom.

This includes:

- Promoting donor coordination at the national and global level, including opportunities for joint, locally led diagnostics.
 - Ensuring coordination efforts in individual countries involve local partners.
 - Streamlining administrative requirements for support to lower transaction costs for actors and providers and incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into results management of funding.
 - Ensuring that diplomatic efforts to protect media freedom also recognise the importance of supporting the media and information environment through ODA.
5. Ensure that assistance **does no harm to public interest media**.

This includes:

- Ensuring that engagement reinforces democratic norms, human rights standards and principles, media sustainability, journalist ethics, and information integrity.
- Avoiding approaches that displace local actors, distort salaries, or create “brain drain” from the sector.
- Ensuring that assistance is gender sensitive and gender transformative to promote gender equality in media content, media coverage, reporting and editorial practices, self-regulatory equality policies, business strategies and public policy making.
- Endeavouring that any use of media to achieve other development goals (“media for development”) upholds journalistic standards of quality, professionalism, and independence, does not undermine media resilience, and is coordinated with development of media as a sector with its own needs.
- Requiring that implementers have record of upholding highest professional standards of journalism and program implementation in the media sector.

6. **Invest in knowledge, research, and learning.**

This may include:

- Drawing on the experience of media development institutions with technical expertise, local and global networks, and a history of success.
- Taking account of the growing body of research and analysis in diagnosis and programme design.
- Exploring new pathways to media sustainability, including digital media trends, national laws and regulations, self-regulatory bodies and professional associations, advertising markets, and business models.

- Remaining up to date with rapid advancements in technology, including algorithms, bots, surveillance, and artificial intelligence and their potential threats to media sustainability, journalism safety, and information integrity.
- Wide sharing of findings on what does and does not work, including which approaches are effective in countering mis- and disinformation, supporting democracy and human rights and gender equality.
- Remaining agile and open to innovation and experimentation; incorporating adaptation into policy, planning, and implementation, and ensuring ODA projects and programmes adapt quickly in the light on lessons learned.

The application of these principles is proposed to be discussed at regular intervals (for example every two years) by GovNet members based on voluntary member reporting.