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**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE****Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to
Media and the Information Environment**

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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 and democratic governance. Access to information and freedom of expression, fundamental in ensuring the ability of citizens to receive accurate and unbiased information, is indispensable for meaningful citizen participation in the conduct of public affairs, 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, nationality, ethnicity, race, language, religion, or any other status; 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 development, and a bulwark of peaceful, economically prosperous societies. Greater citizen engagement,² higher levels of transparency, stronger accountability,³ lower corruption⁴ and more social cohesion⁵ 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.⁶ Credible news media shed 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, [Windhoek+30 Declaration: Information as Public Good](#) 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

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., Jatieh, 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 See for example: Anita Breuer, [Information integrity and information pollution: vulnerabilities and impact on social cohesion and democracy in Mexico \(idos-research.de\)](#), Discussion Paper 2/2024.

⁶ CIMA (2021) Tipping Point: Democratic Erosion and the Assault on Press Freedom

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 media⁷ and advocated a 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. There is a global trend whereby increasing disinformation, toxic levels of polarisation and autocratisation mutually reinforce each other⁸ 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 rise of new technologies, including social media, has had far reaching consequences on information ecosystems. The current global information environment is increasingly characterised by a structural shift towards digital and mobile platforms dominated by user-generated content (including automated content generators)⁹, which has had positive consequences for vibrant public debate, but which has also facilitated a significant rise in mis- and disinformation and hate speech. This technological shift also resulted in a clear generational gap and other digital divides with young people predominantly using digital platforms to communicate and access information, including news. The new information environment has also led to a collapse of the traditional business model for media and journalism. This steep decline in economic viability of traditional journalism is accompanied by an even steeper increase in informational and user generated content which overshadows, undermines and contradicts verified reporting and content in the public interest.

7. 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.” Ten 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 media¹⁰, and balances growing tensions between addressing mis- and disinformation

⁷ “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.”

⁸ See for example V-Dem Institute (2023) Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization.

⁹ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023), [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023](#).

¹⁰ 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.”

and respecting freedom of expression and opinion-building – all within the context of evolving information technologies, including artificial intelligence.

8. This document puts forward 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 primarily development actors 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.¹¹

9. 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 Council of UNESCO’s International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) also welcomed the process for developing such principles.¹² This document captures that intent.

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

10. 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.”¹³ 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.¹⁴

11. 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,

¹¹ For further details on the consultation process, see [Renewing the principles for effective media development and support to journalism](#). For another recent civil society-led initiative calling for more effective ODA support to media, see [Uniting for Democracy – Supporting Free & Independent Media – Presseclub Concordia](#)

¹² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383161>.

¹³ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm>.

¹⁴ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1110_1110970-giiac5g3aj&title=MCM-oct-2021-Trust-in-global-co-operation-Mathias-Cormann.

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.”

12. 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.¹⁵ 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, social cohesion, the defence of human rights, and the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups.
- a commitment to addressing mis/disinformation while protecting freedom of speech.

13. Indeed, the erosion of trust in media has emerged as one of the leading concerns facing the information ecosystem, notably through the increased weaponization of mis- and disinformation, a perceived media contiguity with discredited elites, as well as a perceived lack of independence or professionalism. 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 media¹⁶ remains significantly higher (at 59%) than trust in social media (at only 41%).¹⁷

14. 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 in press freedom in their country. From 2019 to the end of 2023, UNESCO recorded the killings of 433 journalists, who died in circumstances related to their work.¹⁸ 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 “autocratising”. According to Reporters without borders (RSF) [World Press Freedom Index 2023](#), the situation is “good” or “satisfactory” in only 52 out of 180 countries.

15. Self-censorship is increasing because of more hostile media and information environments, particularly affecting women. Gender-based violence (GBV), both digital and physical, constitutes an attack on democracy itself as it leads to self-censorship (women

¹⁵ See also the [OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in OECD countries](#).

¹⁶ Under traditional media we understand print, radio and analogue TV.

¹⁷ 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, Global Report, p. 52, <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer>

¹⁸ See [UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists](#)

retreating from the public sphere because of harassment). In a global survey carried out by UNESCO and the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ), as part of a research project titled [The Chilling](#), more than a third of female journalists reported making themselves less visible as a result of the attacks and intimidation they endure – for example by asking to be taken off air, writing behind a pseudonym or self-censoring on social media. Nearly three quarters of women journalists surveyed reported facing online violence or harassment. Moreover, the potential impacts of Generative AI on GBV have been highlighted by UNESCO¹⁹. Women face additional challenges including discrimination in the newsrooms, a lack of women as sources, stereotyping of women and dismissal of women’s issues as soft stories.

16. Moreover, traditional business models and the financial viability of the media sector face serious challenges.²⁰ 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 2019.²¹ 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.²² In some cases low or no-fee information services are provided by state-controlled media, which may out compete other 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.²³

17. In recent years, various 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 RSF, 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 funding for media freedom initiatives. The MFC has a Working Group dedicated to Media Development. MFC members initiated and continue to support the [Global Media Defence Fund](#), administered by UNESCO; this fund complements existing

¹⁹ UNESCO, [Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in an era of generative AI](#).

²⁰ See for example the Economist Impact Report [“Breaking news: the economic impact of Covid-19 on the global news media industry”](#), March 2022

²¹ UNESCO, [World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022, Paris 2022](#).

²² Economist Impact Report [“Breaking news”: the economic impact of Covid-19 on the global news media industry.”](#), March 2022.

²³ Guardian (2020) [US newspapers face 'extinction-level' crisis as Covid-19 hits hard](#)

UNESCO funding mechanisms such as the International Programme for the Development of Communication and the [Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists](#).

- 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, 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 eighty countries are engaged in the JTI process.
- The 193 Member States of UNESCO in November 2021 endorsed the principles of the [Windhoek+30 Declaration: Information as a Public Good](#), which reaffirms the value of free, pluralistic, and independent media, and calls attention to the urgent importance of securing economic viability for news, transparency of internet companies, and increasing media and information competencies amongst the public.

18. 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 (FCDO), GFMD, and CIMA. This is in line with a GovNet commitment in its Programme of Work and Budget 2023-2024.

19. 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 2030 [Agenda 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?²⁴

20. 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-affected states, to transitional countries taking steps to reform, to more advanced middle-income economies where the media holds promise for growth and investment.

21. 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. GovNet’s mapping of ODA support to media and the broader information environment²⁵ shows that for the period 2016 to 2022 the total ODA (per year) allocated to media and the information environment (including funding for information and communication technology and broadband infrastructure) is on average only 0.5% of the total ODA. When ODA for infrastructure-related purposes is excluded, this number shrinks to 0.24%. Furthermore, the analysis shows that only up to 8% of ODA allocated for the media and information environment directly supports media organizations in partner countries (that is 8% of the 0.5%!).

22. In addition, only a small number of development co-operation providers are supporting this sector. Between 2010 and 2019, 68% of the total ODA for media and information system development – excluding spending on international public broadcast corporations – was provided by six DAC members: United States (21%), Germany (17%), Sweden (10%), Japan (7%), France (7%) and the United Kingdom (6%).²⁶ In short, only a few development co-operation providers provide the bulk of media support, a relatively small part is country allocable, and a significant proportion goes to public service broadcasters, leaving only a fraction of the total that reaches media outlets in partner countries.

23. Overall, this is a markedly modest ODA contribution for a sector that plays such a catalytic function in enabling democratic governance, economic development, and fulfilling human rights. The current level of support is insufficient to address the challenges above and 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 (lack of robust impact measurement).²⁷

²⁴ This part will be enriched and updated with findings and data from GovNet’s mapping and qualitative review of ODA to media and the information environment that is ongoing.

²⁵ GovNet’s mapping study of ODA for media and information environment excludes funding for international public broadcasters, such as Deutsche Welle or the BBC World Service.

²⁶ CIMA. 2022 Are Donors Taking the Journalism Crisis Seriously? An Analysis of Official Aid to Media 2010–2019, February, 2024.

²⁷ See, for example, Arsenaault, 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.

24. Development co-operation provider support to the media sector can be more effective. Short-term goals and donor-driven interventions, along with the instrumentalization of media are frequently observed. While use of the media to achieve wider development goals can have value, these initiatives do not necessarily help media to build the resilience they need to address the major challenges they face.²⁸ Also, development co-operation provider coordination could be improved, including greater coherence among overlapping or competing mandates between foreign policy and development institutions.

25. Despite these challenges, there has been a clear growth of engagement on media development issues through intergovernmental platforms (e.g., MFC and UNESCO’s IPDC) and multistakeholder platforms (e.g., IIID). 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, learning, innovation and harnessing of data to improve 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.

26. More recent assessments on democracy support find that targeted support to free media has been more likely to have a positive effect on democratization than other forms of development assistance.²⁹ 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 Leone³⁰ and Mozambique³¹) and increase government responsiveness to citizen needs (for example in India³²). Media coverage of politics also has a positive impact by amplifying other information interventions such as

Norris (ed.), *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, pp. 379–94.

²⁸ See for example: GFMD, [Transforming Media Development. Recommendations for Effective Funding and Collaboration](#); or [IFPIM Feasibility study, pp31-32](#).

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ Casey (2015) [‘Crossing Party Lines: The Effects of Information on Redistributive Politics,’](#) American Economic Review 105(8), 2410-2448

³¹ 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.

³² Besley & Burgess (2002) [‘The Political Economy of Government Responsiveness: Theory and Evidence from India.’](#) The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 117(4), 1415-1451

televising election debates (in Sierra Leone³³ and Uganda³⁴), publicising citizens' scorecards (for example in India³⁵) and disseminating findings from government audits (in Brazil³⁶ and Mexico³⁷).

27. The work of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)³⁸, 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 multiple 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 allegations it brings forward. These revelations have contributed to hold powerful individuals to account, spur criminal investigations, drive legislative reforms, recover billions of dollars in taxes and penalties, and promote economic development. Actions taken by governments recovered \$1.4 billion in taxes and penalties in the five years after the Panama Papers were first published.

28. Although support to the media constitutes a small proportion of total ODA, some development co-operation providers are prioritising this area, and are considering how to make their support more effective. Media development co-operation providers such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 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.

29. 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 2023-2024³⁹; and webinars and meetings on issues such as mis/disinformation and media viability. These events were met by calls for GovNet and the

³³ Bidwell, Casey & Glennerster (2018) '[Debates: Voting and Expenditure Responses to Political Communication](#),' Journal of Political Economy 128(8), 2880-2924

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Banerjee, Kumar, Pande & Su (2011) '[Do Informed Voters Make Better Choices? Experimental Evidence from Urban India](#)', Working Paper, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

³⁶ 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

³⁷ Larreguy, Marshall & Snyder (2020) '[Publicizing Malfeasance: When the Local Media Structure Facilitates Electoral Accountability in Mexico](#),' The Economic Journal, 130(631), 2291-2327

³⁸ <https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/icij-publishes-final-batch-of-pandora-papers-data-on-more-than-9000-offshore-companies-trusts-and-foundations/>

³⁹ "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.

DAC to sharpen its focus on media and information integrity, to provide clearer guidance on how ODA could have a more meaningful impact.

30. The 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.

*Development Cooperation Principles for Relevant and Effective 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 development co-operation providers to increase levels of financial and other forms of assistance and to improve the relevance and effectiveness of their existing support to preserve, protect, and promote public interest media and information integrity. ODA can be essential to address the major challenges facing the global information environment. The principles presented here may guide development co-operation providers' endeavours to respond to the challenges laid out in the preamble. The principles are supported by a non-exhaustive, indicative list of practical, concrete ways to operationalise each principle.

The first principle on 'do no harm to public interest media', is intended as a minimum standard which all development co-operation providers are expected to respect. The other principles are more ambitious, seeking to function as a guide and an inspiration to development co-operation providers to increase the relevance and effectiveness of their support.

1. Ensure that assistance *does no harm to public interest media*.

This may include:

- Ensuring that engagement reinforces democratic norms, human rights standards and principles, media freedom, media sustainability, journalist ethics, journalist safety, information integrity and editorial independence.
- Avoiding approaches that displace local actors, distort salaries, risk editorial independence, confuse information with institutional communication, imply contradictory injunctions of stated interests and values.
- Ensuring that assistance is gender sensitive, gender transformative and intersectional to promote equality and equity in media content, media coverage, reporting and editorial practices, self-regulatory equality policies, business and management 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, and supports core media resilience.
- Taking all precautions to ensure the safety and security of project beneficiaries and implementers, for example by developing and implementing risk mitigation strategies.
- Requiring that implementers have record of upholding the highest professional standards of journalism and program implementation in the media sector.

2. Increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment, in order to strengthen democratic resilience.

This may include:

- Increasing the overall volume of financial and other support to the media and information environment.
- Acknowledging that public interest news and public interest media are public goods and thus worthy recipients of public funding.
- Incorporating assistance to media and the information environment as a vital element of development co-operation providers' response to democratic backsliding, rising authoritarianism and mis- and disinformation, as well as a contribution towards democracy and development.
- Prioritising support for countries where multiple concurrent crises (for example political, economic, climate- or conflict-related) risk creating information deserts.
- Integrating support to public interest media and the information environment within wider and coherent development co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding policies or strategies (e.g., in efforts to tackle climate change or conflict, supporting for anti-corruption efforts, and promoting free and fair elections, citizen engagement, and gender equality, etc.).
- Supporting initiatives that offer security assistance, such as health insurance, life risk funds, or relocation to journalists and media professionals working in high-risk environments.

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

This may include:

- Pursuing 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 and thorough analysis of the media and information environment in each country based on data and evidence, as well as an assessment of the potential and specific needs of the people, particular audiences and public interest media organisations in each context.
- 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, storytellers, individual content creators, minority-language media, gender sensitive and gender transformative media, investigative journalism, media associations and others.

- Supporting innovation in 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 public interest media and information, including a human rights based legal and regulatory system, access to information for journalists, journalists' safety measures, media representative bodies, journalists' or editors' associations, media researchers, media monitors, advocacy organisations and coalitions as well as investing in media education in society and in media organizations in particular.
 - Where relevant, connecting infrastructure investments in the information environment (telecommunications, broadband, etc.) with initiatives that safeguard information integrity.
 - Supporting engagement with national and global multistakeholder fora and engaging with social media and tech companies on policy debates, norm setting, experience exchanges, and information sharing.
 - Designing and supporting efforts to build resilience to mis- and disinformation for example through strengthening the skills and capacities of local media, increasing access to trustworthy information online and offline, and supporting fact checking, prebunking and improved digital and media literacy.
 - Supporting processes which enable media organisations to engage with large digital platforms to build the sustainability of public interest media, increase access to trustworthy information online and offline, and minimise the risks of stifling legitimate freedom of expression.
4. **Strengthen local leadership and ownership**, empowering media partners as well as other actors in the information environment such as civil society organisations and online content creators to meaningfully participate in policies and programmes.

This may include:

- Building on acquired good practices for the meaningful participation of local actors in diagnostics, priority-setting, design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes.
- Contextualising risks and opportunities for public interest media and information integrity, tailoring assistance to each individual context and with particular attention to underrepresented and marginalised groups.
- Ensuring that assistance responses remain grounded in local realities, bottom-up, evidence-based, and demand-driven, with audiences and the public interest always at the centre.
- 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 and ensuring a more significant share of ODA for media development reaches local and regional actors directly, fostering their longevity, resilience and viability.

- Increasing the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible, and reliable support, including core funding and longer-term, multi-year funding, where appropriate and feasible.

5. Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment, both among donor agencies and between development and diplomatic efforts to support media freedom, especially in contexts of crisis.

This may include:

- Building on good practices to improve donor coordination at the national and global level, including opportunities for joint, locally led diagnostics and data sharing.
- Ensuring coordination efforts in individual countries meaningfully involve local partners and foster accountability towards them.
- Ensuring multistakeholder coordination with tech companies, tech developers, content creators and young people, as appropriate.
- Consider including funding for coordination and collaboration between actors in public interest media and the information environment.
- Streamlining administrative requirements for support to lower transaction costs for actors and providers and incorporating 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.
- Broadening coordination efforts to initiate dialogue with non-DAC development co-operation providers, philanthropic organizations and other development co-operation providers to the media sector.

6. Invest in knowledge, research, and learning.

This may include:

- Drawing on the experience and research 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 and incentivise new research.
- Exploring new pathways to media viability, including digital media trends, audience analysis, national laws and regulations, self-regulatory bodies and professional associations, advertising markets, government subsidies, and business models.
- Remaining up to date with rapid advancements in technology, including algorithms, bots, surveillance, and artificial intelligence and their potential threats or benefits to media sustainability, journalism safety, and information integrity.
- Sharing of findings on context specific approaches that work, including approaches that are effective in building resilience to mis- and disinformation, and in strengthening democracy, human rights and gender equality.

- Supporting innovation and experimentation; incorporating adaptation into policy, planning, and implementation, and ensuring ODA projects and programmes adapt quickly considering lessons learned.
- Facilitating the inclusion of new knowledge and learning in school curricula (particularly in journalism schools).
- Supporting the development and use of metrics and indicators to understand and analyse national information ecosystems.

The application of these principles is proposed to be discussed every two years by GovNet members based on voluntary member reporting.

Annex: Definition of key concepts

Public interest media are media that create and distribute content that:

- Exists to inform the public on matters that concern them;
- Provides fact-based information in a trustworthy manner;
- Commits to the demonstrable pursuit of truth, for example through sourcing practices and the representation of the audiences it hopes to serve;
- Is editorially independent;
- Is transparent about processes, finances, and policies used to produce it.⁴⁰

The global **information environment** is the space where humans, and increasingly machines, process information to make sense of the world. It includes the norms and rules determining information processing and content, the technologies used (print, radio, TV, digital, etc.) and the different forms in which information is presented (spoken, written, image, etc.).⁴¹

An **information ecosystem** is a geographic subset of this information environment where information is processed to generate a shared understanding.⁴²

Information integrity refers to the consistency and openness of access to pluralistic sources of verifiable information. Information integrity also requires audiences that understand information as originally intended by the producer/sender and an environment characterised by physical and digital safety.⁴³

⁴⁰ Definition taken from the [International Fund for Public Interest Media](#).

⁴¹ Wanless, A and Shapiro, J (2022) [A CERN Model for Studying the Information Environment](#)

⁴² Adam, I et al (2023) Emergency Management and Information Integrity: A Framework for Crisis Response; Radsch, C (2023) [What makes for a healthy information ecosystem? A new visual tool](#)

⁴³ United Nations (2023) [Information Integrity on Digital Platforms, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8](#)