Good journalism
Better societies
Annual Report 2020
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Page 12 Training in investigative journalism helped Sudanese reporter to document abuse in 23 schools.

Page 44 IMS gender advisor Laura Gil has seen up close how journalists, often unknowingly, transform women social leaders’ strong, active narratives into stereotypical, victimizing portraits.

Page 48 While trust in the media is challenged, independent documentary film has become one of the most influential ways of telling stories.
In these turbulent times, people the world over are turning to the media for information they can rely on; quality media coverage that contributes to positive social, political and cultural change, which advances human rights and democracy in the digital age.
Defending societies with good journalism

Along with the climate crisis, the decline of freedom and basic rights are currently the biggest global issues we face. Instead of cherishing free media as sources of critical, life-saving public information during the Covid-19 pandemic, many leaders around the world responded with crackdowns and restrictions, creating further challenges for public interest media in 2020.

Popular protests call for change

However, the people have not stayed silent. The pandemic has weakened governments’ images of benevolent but firm authority, leading to popular uprisings calling for more participation, representation and accountability. Throughout 2020, decentralised popular protest movements around the world showed their dissatisfaction with the political leadership in countries such as Belarus, India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Peru and Kyrgyzstan, while protesters continued their on-going struggles in Sudan and Hong Kong – to name just a few examples.

The common denominator of these movements has been that they are taking place in regions where democratic rights and basic freedoms have been limited. And, most importantly, these movements are proof that democracy and human rights are still valued and still resonate, despite developments in the world in general.

In this context, journalism has an important role to play – and an equally big responsibility. Trust in national governments and the international community has plummeted, but in many places the media have experienced a different movement. Throughout the pandemic, the media have contributed to and enabled populations’ rightful demands by distributing trustworthy information, practicing what we know as public interest journalism. And it has resonated widely with news consumers.

Our partners around the world have reported massive increases in readership – especially in the early phases of the pandemic – illustrating how public interest journalism provides real value that state-controlled media in many places simply cannot provide. This is indicative of the essential function media have in societies and the trust many people still have in journalism as a source of accurate information. A well-informed public is able to actively participate in society, which is the core of any democracy. And the distribution of factual information through the media supports that agency.

New approaches

In light of developments of the last few years, where the people have protested authorities’ threats to democracy, new approaches are needed to both safeguard and promote democratic values. 2020 has seen IMS partners come up with new, innovative solutions, such as online media outlets, pop-up newsrooms outside urban centres to cover a wider range of stories and include more diverse voices, or our fact-checking partner in Zimbabwe, ZimFact, making sure reliable information about the pandemic was made accessible, despite many political actors’ disregard of facts. Looking at the bigger picture, however, we have been forced to accept that merely defending democracy is at least as important as promoting and developing democracy.

Democratic values in practice

An example of both the long-term perspective and the importance of civil society’s involvement in democratic development is Tunisia. It was not civil society that deposed dictators across the entire region as part of the Arab Spring – but it is to a great extent to civil society’s credit that democratization is still in progress in Tunisia more than 10 years later, despite various bumps in the road and regressions.

A comparable dynamic could be seen in Myanmar at the beginning of 2021 – though with the opposite outcome. After more than 10 years of largely positive democratic development, Burmese civil society is now playing an essential role in organizing peaceful protests, securing broad, popular support and attracting international attention. All of this is an effort to protect the progress that had been made now that the democratic space is closing to an unbound extent and human rights violations are piling up.

But it is in this interplay of progress and setbacks that civil society comes into its own everywhere in the world: on the one hand, as advocates for rights and popular involvement when society becomes more open, and on the other, as a bulwark against restrictions on freedoms and democracy when the grip on civil space is tightened.

Civil society is perhaps the closest we come to democracy in practice. This is why it is essential that IMS’ work takes a holistic approach to strengthening free media, supporting civil society organisations and ensuring that they have the necessary capacities to withstand autocratic pressure and operate in a way that truly represents the diversity and entirety of their communities.

Democratic values in practice

Civil society and public interest media play a key role in ensuring long-term democratic development and short-term defence. It is a priority for IMS to ensure that individual organisations and organisations are in the best position when sudden shifts occur and the civic space either opens or closes.

A question of priorities

Part of the pragmatic work needed to keep the democratic ball rolling requires engaging in topics that are less controversial in the eyes of autocrats. This can then lead to feasible development projects such as support for digital development and regulation, collaboration between educational institutions and universities, environmental protections, anticorruption measures, media literacy or networking between local, national and regional organisations. These are areas which can help promote – if not directly, then indirectly – a pro-democracy agenda, and can slowly push the tectonic plates of society towards a democratic rupture.

If we don’t use our utmost to support the calls for democracy and freedom – which in recent years can be heard louder and louder from around the world – it will not only be a moral failing but will also do long-term damage to basic human rights and democratic values. We must set the course of action using the developments and lessons learned from 2020.

We will not be able to turn back the tide of authoritarianism with a flick of a wrist. But it is our choice to either stand idly by or stand up and unequivocally support democratic forces around the world, so that more people in the future can live their lives in better and freer societies founded on democratic values.

Jesper Højberg
IMS Executive Director.

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IMS Executive Director.
Where we work

IMS works where the need for reliable, fact-based media content is greatest and the risks to independent media are most perilous: In countries experiencing armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, rapid political change or authoritarian rule.

Programme countries

In 2020 IMS worked long term with partners in 24 programme countries. Engagement over long periods of time enables the organisation to build up relations as well as react to opening and closing spaces.

1 Afghanistan 13 Pakistan
2 Algeria 14 Palestine
3 Cambodia 15 Philippines
4 Burkina Faso 16 Somalia
5 Egypt 17 Sri Lanka
6 Iraq 18 Belarus
7 Morocco 19 Syria
8 Libya 20 Tanzania
9 Jordan 21 Tunisia
10 Mali 22 Ukraine
11 Myanmar 23 Yemen
12 Niger 24 Zimbabwe

Thematic interventions, regional programmes and short-term engagements

In addition to long term country programmes, IMS engages in global and regional programmes, thematic interventions and short-term projects, as well as responds to crises through IMS’ rapid response mechanism. In 2020 these engagements were expanded to provide urgent Covid-19 support to local independent media.
How we work

IMS combines long-term, trusting partnerships with media outlets and other organisations with shorter intervention in crisis and catastrophes. We work with partners to build a strong, inclusive and sustainable media sector; one that promotes debate and holds leaders to account by covering issues of public importance.

Where appropriate, IMS facilitates alliances and other forms of collaboration to strengthen societies. Our flexibility allows partners to adjust to the inevitable changes they encounter in what are usually volatile environments.

In 2020 this was very much the case due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the UNESCO World Press Freedom Conference in December former and existing IMS partners described how IMS and our partners adapted.

"Traditionally, women in journalism often have only freelance positions, so they tend to be the first to be sacrificed or the most vulnerable, when newsrooms are cutting costs. In this period, we were providing basic support, such as good internet connectivity, while highlighting the gender specific experiences of women journalists. We noticed the extra labour that women often take up, including the personal, domestic and emotional work as primary caretakers of their households."

Roula Asad, Syria

CEO, Syrian Female Journalists Network, shared the gender specific vulnerabilities that Syrian female journalists faced.

"We had a regular podcast, but Covid-19 meant that we could no longer go to our studio, we were stuck at home, but still had to inform our audiences. Instead of competing with news coverage, we brought together the narrative of people on the ground - those traveling, in hospitals and directly affected. We used our time to stitch together slower, more complex stories."

Carl Javier, The Philippines

COO, PUMA Podcast on how his team overcame the challenges of reduced newsroom budgets and reached new audiences.

"It has been an extremely challenging year for fact-checkers across the globe, during the Covid-19 crisis, which has been billed a ‘disinfodemic’. We check for the most viral pieces of misinformation on social media and speak with health experts, scientists and officials to debunk the myths. As part of ‘Network of Fact Checkers,’ we gather every month to look at emerging trends and exchange ideas and information."

Lifaqane Nare, Zimbabwe

Editor, ZimFact on the role of Africa’s leading fact-checking initiatives during Covid-19.

"In Belarus, our government discarded Covid-19 as something not serious during the first wave, while hiding the real numbers. It was independent media that played a vital role in uncovering the truth and reporting about the real situation. At the same time, it was citizens and volunteers who mobilized support for frontline workers in the pandemic. Our role in this period has been organic, as fostering civic engagement is at the core of our editorial policy."

Iryna Vidanava, Belarus

CEO at the former IMS partner Citydog, Belarus on how online media enhanced their role as a mobilizer.

"Given that we have extended local networks in our communities of coverage, we quickly adapted to the Covid-19 situation, with local, contextualised information. One of the main challenges we saw with our audiences is that many did not believe in Covid-19. Many thought that Covid-19 did not affect Muslims and that they simply had to pray for it to go away. So, we included many Islamic leaders in providing medical and factual information related to the pandemic in order to reach our target audiences."

Abdirahman Sharif Mohamed, Somalia

Editor, Radio Ergo on how the station focused on local voices on humanitarian issues.

IMS hosted a session at the World Press Freedom Day under the headline 'Global Challenges - Local Solutions.'
Push for Quality Journalism

IMS supports journalists and documentary film makers who look to tell compelling, fact-based stories about topics of public importance in an ethical and professional way: stories that stimulate debate and hold those with power to account; stories that challenge discriminatory stereotypes and norms; stories that dig deep and deepen understanding; and stories that articulate the views and perspectives of those underrepresented in the media or with limited access to it. IMS encourages innovative use of the technologies that have transformed the ways in which these stories can be told and received.

Going viral

By providing reliable, in-depth information about the coronavirus, the pan-Arab digital media outlet Daraj thrived in 2020 — and made the case for independent media.

Lebanon

“There was so much noise and so many unknowns,” recalls Alia Ibrahim, co-founder and CEO of the independent media outlet Daraj, about the coronavirus pandemic that began in early 2020. “Now we know what Covid-19 is, but back then, even the word ‘pandemic’ was new to our vocabulary.”

Like so many organisations, Daraj soon found itself scrapping best laid plans. Founded in November 2017, the Beirut-based organisation had fast become one of the most credible pan-Arab sources of information. Thanks to a network of journalists striving to tell stories that traditional media in the Middle East and North Africa typically overlook, by early 2020 it covered more than 50 cities across the region.

“We had our proof of concept and we had planned our strategy for the next two years,” Ibrahim says. “When Covid-19 happened, we were working on projects for testing our revenue stream and diversifying our platforms. We had to put that aside and start working on creating space for coverage of the pandemic.”

Its pivot came amid fierce political headwinds. With at least four revolutions taking place in the Arab world in 2020, governments had the “perfect excuse” to clamp down on civil liberties, Ibrahim says, while the region’s traditional media was doing little to combat the spread of “fake news, propaganda, and all kinds of conspiracy theories and crazy ideas”.

In this light, Daraj sought to “declutter” the news and provide “good, factual information” about the virus. To meet the demand for reliable coverage, Daraj’s 16-strong editorial team created a Covid-19 landing page — and soon saw a 49 percent increase in monthly unique visitors. “It makes the case for why people need independent media in a time of crisis,” Ibrahim concludes.

Of course, Covid-19 wasn’t the only crisis that Lebanon faced in 2020. As well as biting economic hardship, the country was roiled by a deadly explosion in the port of Beirut in August. Ibrahim and her team worked around the clock from their home offices to keep people informed.

“It’s in our DNA,” she says. “The reason we were born was out of a true belief that one of the reasons the Arab Spring failed was the lack of independent media.”

Eventually, Daraj carried out investigations and published articles that had a tangible impact. Standout stories in 2020 included an investigation of Lebanon’s central bank, a look at the gender consequences of the coronavirus crisis and an examination of how fundamentalist groups such as ISIS have been affected by the pandemic.

Ultimately, says Ibrahim, having core funding guaranteed for more than a year was critical. “What allowed us to keep our feet on the ground, despite all the destabilising factors, was the support we got from our core donors including IMS,” she says. “That sense of stability made the difference. It meant we could focus on dealing with what was happening.”

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Alia Ibrahim, far left, with Daraj co-founders Hazem el Amin and Diana Moukalled.
The virtues of virtual

Unable to offer journalists on-the-ground media training amid the pandemic, a leading pan-Arab organisation swiftly pivoted to digital — and has never looked back

Middle East

Rawan Damen was barely six weeks into her new role as Director General of the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) when the majority of the world went into lockdown as part of efforts to combat Covid-19. “Everything changed,” Damen recalls. “It was extremely successful,” Damen says. “They all got very emotional at the end and it was difficult to turn off the cameras and say goodbye.”

ARIJ ran its virtual workshop 30 times throughout 2020 — a “pivot to digital” that culminated in its 13th Annual Regional Forum, #ARIJ20, which took place in November and December. Because of the pandemic, it proved to be ARIJ’s first fully virtual forum — and possibly its best yet. The event gave journalists a chance to network and share knowledge with the leaders of Arab and global investigative journalism, discover new reporting skills and new tools, and get acquainted with the latest trends in investigative reporting. It was also an opportunity to network with broadcasters, technology companies, and universities from around the globe.

“Our secret sauce is that we’re a network. We support journalists and they need to be able to reach out to others in our network. That cannot be [through] small chunks of online.”

In fact, in the first “virtual workshop” that ARIJ ran in 2020, no fewer than 24 journalists from six Arab countries received online training from five different trainers. “It was extremely successful,” Damen says. “They all got very emotional at the end and it was difficult to turn off the cameras and say goodbye.”

ARIJ ran its virtual workshop 30 times throughout 2020 — a “pivot to digital” that culminated in its 13th Annual Regional Forum, #ARIJ20, which took place in November and December. Because of the pandemic, it proved to be ARIJ’s first fully virtual forum — and possibly its best yet. The event gave journalists a chance to network and share knowledge with the leaders of Arab and global investigative journalism, discover new reporting skills and new tools, and get acquainted with the latest trends in investigative reporting. It was also an opportunity to network with broadcasters, technology companies, and universities from around the globe.

“Everyone advised us to do it small, for the usual reasons. Because small is beautiful. Because people have ‘Zoom fatigue’.” Damen says. “No, it will be big and huge.”

In fact, the forum saw more than 1,500 people participate in over 50 sessions and attracted more than 160 speakers from 40-plus countries — half of whom were women.

As well as putting on dozens of sessions, ARJ even organised an awards ceremony — and secretly arranged for the partners of the winners to surprise them with their award in person, wherever in the world they were. It was a theatrical touch that wouldn’t have surprised anyone familiar with Damen’s background. A filmmaker and media consultant, she has more than 20 years of experience in television and digital media production, and has produced and directed many award-winning documentaries and investigations.

According to Henrik Grunnet, a senior adviser at IMS, ARIJ’s success last year was built on the platform established by co-founder Rana Sabbagh. As ARIJ’s Executive Director until 2019, she delivered several big investigations — a legacy that Damen continued amid the more restrictive environment for media organisations in 2020.

“Rawan is doing an excellent job,” Grunnet says. “The virtual forum was especially impressive in how well-organised it was.” Another indicator of the success of that ARJ enjoyed in 2020, he says, was the continued quality of its investigative journalism — such as its “phenomenal” award-winning story on religious trials in Sudan, which it produced with BBC Arabic.

“Every year there are stories that have big impacts, but in 2020 we were lucky with several stories,” agrees Damen. As well as the Sudan story — which prompted a parliamentary inquiry — she says ARJ’s investigation of hundreds of people imprisoned without charge in Yemen demonstrated the organisation’s strength. That story also had an immediate impact, with about 1,600 Yemeni prisoners released a few weeks after its publication. Of course, concedes Damen, not every story creates such big waves.

Programme facts

**Programme Period**
2016–2022 (Norway 2023)

**Focus Areas**
- Media content production
- Investigative reporting
- Online media training
- Strengthening regional networks
- Supporting new initiatives
- Documentary films
- MENA law reform

**DONORS**
SIDA, DAFF, Ford Foundation, OSF, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Swiss Development Cooperation SDC from 2021 onwards.

“Due about 50 to 60 investigations a year and have success with perhaps 10 to 15,” she explains. It’s very difficult because in many cases the government or parliament doesn’t react [to the story]. But it doesn’t stop us from doing them because one day someone will come and use our investigation for real change.”

Damen believes the shift to working online will be temporary. “Some people working at ARJ meet twice a week online and [are bonded] like siblings by now. But people are social beings and love to see one another, to talk and walk together.”

Damen anticipates adopting a hybrid model, where the real world coexists with the virtual. Because by offering its training online, ARJ opened new doors:

“Going online helped us reach people whom we could never have reached before, especially women in conflict zones who could never travel,” says Damen. “We had women in Gaza City, Libya and Iraq — women journalists who cannot travel but are getting the same attention as everyone else from our trainers. It gave them a huge push to work and learn — and it was emotional for them. We would love to continue doing that.”

For 18 months, reporter Fateh Al-Rahman Al-Hamdani went undercover inside 23 schools for BBC News Arabic across Sudan documenting students in chains, beaten, tortured and sometimes kept in a prison cell for days. From the start of the investigation, Fateh Al-Rahman Al-Hamdani was supported by Arab Reporters For Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), a network for investigative journalists in the Arab region funded by IMS among others.

“I was amazed by the real world coexisting with another, to talk and walk together.”

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Laughing matters

A potent mix of street journalism and satire helped the online media outlet Bustop TV focus on topical issues in 2020 — including the coronavirus crisis.

Zimbabwe

Social distancing, lockdowns and access to healthcare might not seem funny — but all three were topics that Bustop TV mined for comedy in 2020. The Zimbabwean youth-run media house, which was established in 2014, is known for satirical skits that tackle economic, political and social issues. Published online, the skits have a huge audience.

Kudzai Kwangwari, a community media advocate working with IMS, says Bustop TV is “daring and disruptive” — and that its use of comedy is especially potent. “They can cover any issue, from policy issues to presidential statements, and convert it into humour, which really works,” he says. “It encourages the public to engage in discussion and dialogue.”

According to Simbiso Marimbe, Zimbabwe programme manager at IMS, “content creators are finding new ways to express public sentiment about governance” in the southern African country, where freedom of expression is curtailed. The pandemic provided plenty of grist for the mill at Bustop TV. A case in point? A skit about how the government managed to erect a private ward to care for the political and economic elite, while ordinary citizens infected with Covid-19 had to make do with poorly maintained public hospitals.

While satire remains Bustop TV’s calling card, the Harare-based outlet enjoyed straight-faced success last year as well, venturing into urban communities to interview ordinary people about the delivery of public services such as healthcare, utilities and education, as well as more controversial topics like child marriage and LGBTQ+ rights.

Initially, the plan had been to travel by bus along popular routes, pick up locals and interview them in an onboard studio. When the pandemic parked the idea of the “People’s Bus”, the reporters headed into those communities anyway.

According to Bustop TV’s founder, Lucky Aaroni, they “managed to cover stories that the mainstream media does not prioritise”. Marimbe adds that with Zimbabwe’s mainstream media “restricted to elite spaces and elite issues”, Bustop TV’s approach enabled it to “bring more voices to the fore” and produce more “inclusive journalism”.

Indeed, not only did the Harare-based organisation reach its target audience of people aged 16 to 35, it also managed to bridge the urban-rural divide and address women’s issues.

Aaroni says support from IMS was crucial in 2020. In particular, IMS helped Bustop TV to produce the People’s Bus series, as well as source experts and professionals to take part. IMS’s support also means that Bustop TV can afford to pay contributors to its news website, while the capacity-building workshops that IMS hosted in 2020 “contributed to the growth of Bustop TV as an organisation and us as individuals,” Aaroni says.
Sustainable media improves society

Business viability advisor Clare Cook wants partners to look at strategies that will consider both the long-term growth of public interest journalism and anticipate how to withstand short-term shocks

Interview

Clare Cook is IMS’ business viability advisor. In her role, she supports IMS partners in tackling the business side of running a media outlet by looking at strategies that will consider both the long-term growth of public interest journalism and anticipate how to withstand short-term shocks.

“I believe support can be a catalyst for independent media becoming progressively more self-reliant through income diversification, new products and formats, better audience knowledge and data usage,” says Clare Cook. “IMS’ partners need business sustainability to help protect editorial independence. Ensuring sustainability is important, not just for those working in the news media industry, but for better societies. Without it, their position as part of plural and diverse media landscapes will be thwarted.”

The building blocks of sustainability

Paradigm shifts over the past two decades in modes of consumption, competition, data and production have brought massive upheaval. Media outlets at all levels have struggled to maintain revenues and have faced challenges, whether transitioning to a sustainable model for digital distribution or designing new approaches that are native to the web.

“We know media sustainability is a major challenge for our partners – and there’s little about the playing field that’s level,” says Clare Cook. “While the barriers to entry are low, the barriers to sustainability are anything but: high costs for technological tools, patchy audience data, under-resourced and overworked teams having to grapple with opaque algorithms.”

Having spent the last decade researching, consulting and mentoring independent news media globally has given Clare Cook a unique perspective on the field as well as a network of contacts in technology, media development and business. And unlike many media owners who often consider sustainability to be a dark art, Clare Cook feels confident this is something that can be won.

“Often a clear vision and mission are building blocks. Some technology partners need to offer more, some news media need to do more of the heavy lifting in terms of experimenting and then sharing lessons learned – but together there are many challenges that can be overcome.”

The value of collaboration

While many partners face similar challenges, each is still working in a unique context, and the solutions offered to them need to meet their individual needs. The approach

Quality news costs money but finding diversified revenue sources is a fundamental challenge for media.
Clare Cook and her team take tailored support for each partner, whether through new products or services, creative advertising formats, new distributed content or membership packages.

“We can work with media outlets to generate revenue in ways that fit with their values: leveraging the relationships they’ve built with their audiences and offering products and services that strengthen those relationships by giving extra value to the communities they’ve created. We look for opportunities to offer solidarity, advice and networking, bridging the tech world to media development, between partners and agencies. There is also a growing recognition of the need to collaborate among media partners,” she explains.

Recognising the value of collaboration between partners led to a series of IMS partner webinars, which throughout 2020 provided public interest media with an opportunity to share lessons learned and best practices. One webinar showcased remarkable initiatives by Somalia’s Radio Ergo, Zimbabwe’s Bus Stop TV and Pakistan’s Lok Sujag-initiated pop-up newrooms to cover more stories outside urban centres.

Meeting the demands of 2020

2020 was coloured by the effects of the pandemic, and public interest journalism was no exception. The demand for reliable reporting at the peak of the Covid-19 crisis underscored the value of independent media outlets. While IMS partners saw record traffic on their websites, their revenues fell. For these partners to survive under continuously challenging conditions, Clare Cook recommends they lean on what makes them unique and take a diverse approach to improvements.

“A common thread is that independent public interest media sustain their operations by adapting to their niche in ways not seen by corporate or legacy media. This includes stimulating their ability to try new things out, and to showcase others in similar contexts facing similar challenges to identify incremental steps that work. Contributing to sustainability is as much about small improvements in workflow as it is about rapid response, low-cost distribution solutions or building a new, high-end media platform. All are valid and valuable.”

Media culture house connects journalists and community – and increase revenue

With support from IMS, Tunisian independent media platform Nawaat has established a new cultural hub in Tunis where their members can attend documentary film screenings, exhibitions, concerts and other events. According to co-founder Sami Ben Gharbia, these activities benefit the editorial room by keeping their fingers on the pulse of the community. “Our close relationship with our readers improves our ability to produce relevant public interest content,” he says. On top of this, the new space allows Nawaat to rent out their event facilities and office spaces, and activities related to the house are expected to cover up to 30% of the media outlet’s expenses. A true win-win situation and currently a one-of-a-kind in Tunisia.

As Covid-19 paved the way for false information and conspiracy theories in Tunisia, independent media platform Nawaat saw a growth in readers engaging with accountability journalism to counter fake news on social media. Nawaat’s new cultural space in Tunis improves the media’s ability to produce relevant public interest content.

There is a spectrum of enhancements that can be made as part of different business viability strategies, all working towards long-term sustainability. Providing better access to quality journalism through improved user experiences, using audience discovery and new audience engagement techniques and using data to inform decisions can amplify content outside of existing echo chambers. Partners’ ability to leverage technological advances – such as a promising new podcasting app for low-cost distribution that speeds up journalistic production workflows – in the short-term can also help them future-orient their responses.

Tackling trust deficit in media with public interest journalism

As censorship pressures have increased in recent years on legacy media in Pakistan, it has been forced to abandon its public interest mission resulting in a trust deficit for media consumers in a country of 200 million people. In the backdrop of exploiting internet access and affordability, public interest news and information – as well as audiences – have migrated online hosted by non-legacy indie media start-ups high on passion but low on technical resources. “We have long struggled with aligning our journalism mission with a business viability,” says Badar Alam, editor of Lok Sujag, a platform that has become representative of Pakistan’s nascent but growing ecosystem of public interest journalism start-ups. With technical assistance of IMS, Lok Sujag in 2020 honed their new institutional strategy redefining their mission “(voices from the margins of power)” and developing a business plan that fits. “We have improved our outreach to audiences through customized content for marginalized communities and began attracting advertisers to our model,” says Alam.

“Ultimately, I want to ignite interests and enable media partners to feel more confident in the business side of operations. Zooming out, I am committed to informing policy changes for better societies based on grassroots experiences in some of the most fragile markets in the world.”

Our definitions moving forward

**Business viability** refers to the capabilities on the business side of media operations at the organizational level and requirements of running those over time.

**Viability** is the potential or existing ability of individual media partners to cover the cost of producing and distributing public interest journalism without having to compromise their values and ethical standards. They fulfil a demand or perceived need for content.

**Sustainability** in economic and business terms is the ability of firms to continue their activities and endure over time. Media organisations and practitioners sustain the production of public interest content in the medium-to-long term and can withstand short-term shocks.

**Resilience** adds to sustainability the possibility of making a profit or growing. It refers to a site’s ability to adapt in the longer term, and to being particularly adept at dealing with a lack of universally applicable or permanent solution. It requires having strategies for adaptation and to withstand shocks.
Access to reliable information is (also) a question of inequality

Online disinformation has become one the most discussed themes in relation to the challenges media faces. Here, Andreas Reventlow, Deputy Director of IMS, shares his view on the challenges laying ahead and why he is still an optimist.

In which ways does the issue of disinformation relate to IMS’ work?

“The partners we work with are those who guarantee good, trustworthy information. The whole point of disinformation is to undermine the concept of “truth” and the idea that you can actually trust something. It is not that people should uncritically trust journalism, but good pluralistic journalism is required as a base for that trust to emerge - which is the premise of journalism. In that sense disinformation is a threat to journalism since it undermines the trust between public interest media and the public.”

If we use Covid-19 as a prism to observe and understand the most recent developments around disinformation and digital freedom, what are we seeing then?

“In general, social, economic and health disparities seem to have only gotten worse, Andreas Reventlow joined IMS in 2011 and has extensive experience managing programmes on independent journalism, press freedom, and technology and human rights.
and what Covid-19 has highlighted is also how access to information – both online and offline – is a marker for inequality. It’s become clear how little essential information actually reaches the less privileged groups worldwide, and during a pandemic, the health consequences have become all too obvious. Add to that how disinformation disproportionately affects these groups, and you have a very unfortunate cocktail."

Where does this development leave IMS, our partners and public interest media in general?

“One of the biggest challenges for everyone who supports or produces public interest journalism and humourous visuals that set the bar for others to follow. And they manage to do this in repressive contexts and under conditions that are extremely harsh. Few reach very large audiences in their home countries. However, the number of these incredible outlets we’re supporting have been growing over the past ten years, despite the overall deteriorating conditions for media in that period. So as long as there are these bright spots in an otherwise bleak 2020, then I believe there’s reason to be optimistic.”

and the numerous media freedom restrictions that many governments have imposed using Covid-19 as a pretext to undermine critical, independent media."

Can you elaborate on what the obstacles are for public interest media when we talk about tech?

“First of all, with the current surveillance capitalist model that the biggest tech companies are built on, there’s little incentive to give access to public interest journalism. Basically, journalism that works solely to give access to public interest journalism and marvellous visuals that set the bar for others to follow. And they manage to do this in repressive contexts and under conditions that are extremely harsh. Few reach very large audiences in their home countries. However, the number of these incredible outlets we’re supporting have been growing over the past ten years, despite the overall deteriorating conditions for media in that period. So as long as there are these bright spots in an otherwise bleak 2020, then I believe there’s reason to be optimistic.”

ZIMBABWE

The political misuse of Covid-19 information in Zimbabwe

Covid-19 has played well into the political climate in Zimbabwe where facts do not always matter. "The government has used disinformation to portray itself as handling the Covid-19 pandemic in an exemplary manner, while opposition parties have used false stories to try and discredit the work that the government has been doing," explains Lilipapa Nare, Head of Programmes at Zimfact, an IMS partner and Zimbabwe’s first fact-checking platform. Since the arrival of Covid-19 in early 2020, Zimfact have had their hands full debunking stories circulating on social media about alternative cures and immunity, but also with misleading or false statements from political actors in Zimbabwe. Official information is either slow or non-existent, creating an environment where misinformation flourishes. To Ona Chiruka, founder of ZimFact, their mission is clear: "We need to make it easier to find reliable information."

 instanceof articles by media partner Frontier that – inspired from the ‘Shark-tank’ model by former Philippine IMS/partner Rappler – tracked and exposed online disinformation networks operating especially on Facebook. The coverage revealed several disinformation actors, which led to Facebook removing vast amounts of false and misleading content on the platform in addition to removing several accounts and pages spreading disinformation. Through transparently exposing these disinformation networks and the methods used, the effort also had an educational element to readers by highlighting various signs of inauthentic behaviour and showcasing how to verify online information.

There are more than 28 million Facebook users in Myanmar, a four-fold increase compared to the previous election in 2015.

REPORTERS AT WORK IN THE STREETS OF YANGON, DECEMBER 2020.

Reporters at work in the streets of Yangon, December 2020.

and what Covid-19 has highlighted is also how access to information – both online and offline – is a marker for inequality. It’s become clear how little essential information actually reaches the less privileged groups worldwide, and during a pandemic, the health consequences have become all too obvious. Add to that how disinformation disproportionately affects these groups, and you have a very unfortunate cocktail."

Where does this development leave IMS, our partners and public interest media in general?

“One of the biggest challenges for everyone who supports or produces public interest journalism and humourous visuals that set the bar for others to follow. And they manage to do this in repressive contexts and under conditions that are extremely harsh. Few reach very large audiences in their home countries. However, the number of these incredible outlets we’re supporting have been growing over the past ten years, despite the overall deteriorating conditions for media in that period. So as long as there are these bright spots in an otherwise bleak 2020, then I believe there’s reason to be optimistic.”

and the numerous media freedom restrictions that many governments have imposed using Covid-19 as a pretext to undermine critical, independent media."

Can you elaborate on what the obstacles are for public interest media when we talk about tech?

“First of all, with the current surveillance capitalist model that the biggest tech companies are built on, there’s little incentive to give access to public interest journalism. Basically, journalism that works solely to give access to public interest journalism and marvellous visuals that set the bar for others to follow. And they manage to do this in repressive contexts and under conditions that are extremely harsh. Few reach very large audiences in their home countries. However, the number of these incredible outlets we’re supporting have been growing over the past ten years, despite the overall deteriorating conditions for media in that period. So as long as there are these bright spots in an otherwise bleak 2020, then I believe there’s reason to be optimistic.”

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When a bomb rocked the northwestern Syrian city of Azaz, local journalist Sajid Al-Shimali grabbed his camera and headed to the scene. A security officer soon blocked his path. “He prevented me from filming and, when I wanted to talk to him about it, he was violent towards me and went as far as pointing his gun at me”, recalls Al-Shimali, whose work documents Syria’s humanitarian crisis.

The incident typifies the challenges faced by journalists trying to cover the Syrian civil war, which is now in its eleventh year. In areas outside regime control, media workers struggle to operate safely or without harassment.

In 2020, however, significant progress came from a series of “stakeholder dialogue workshops” held in northern Syria between June and August. To discuss the challenges that journalists face and find ways to make the media sector more secure, two of IMS’s local partners — Baytna, a civil society organisation, and the Stabilisation Unit, an infrastructure development organisation — facilitated five workshops in three cities, including Azaz. The workshops were attended by 180 participants, including media organisations, freelance journalists, and local council representatives.

The workshops revealed that many locals view the media dimly, deeming journalists to be unreliable, partisan or profiting from people’s suffering. Local authorities also fail to provide support, in part because they misunderstand the role of independent media. And women journalists face particular challenges, including underrepresentation and cultural barriers.

Following the workshops, IMS helped its partners give journalists tools to communicate constructively with their local communities and build trust and respect between them. One immediate consequence was a sharp drop in violations against journalists in the relevant region — from 34 in the first half of 2020 to four in the second half.

According to Bashar Abdul Kader, a key member of the Stabilisation Unit, the manner in which local security forces interact with media workers is changing and “local security forces are becoming more trusted by media workers”.

The aim, Kader says, is to hold “regular meetings between media workers, local government authorities, decision-makers and security forces to ensure the constant development of safety mechanisms and keep up to date with safety/security threats facing media workers”.

The stakeholder dialogue project will also try to help women journalists operate more securely within their communities, as well as to combat the pernicious influence of social media platforms.

Sajid Al-Shimali, who attended two workshops in Azaz, has already noticed the difference they’ve made, too. “The margin of freedom to cover the work and activities of institutions is somewhat more significant”, he says.
Mission control

IMS continued its long-term support for the Gambian media sector in 2020 — paving the way for a groundbreaking legal challenge

Gambia

Emil Touray has no trouble recalling how parlous life was for Gambian journalists during the 22-year rule of strongman Yahya Jammeh. “Persecution and prosecution of media workers, particularly journalists, were the hallmarks of the Jammeh administration”, says Touray, a former president of the Gambia Press Union who’s now executive director of FAME-DVE Gambina, a women’s communication and media entity whose main objective is to advance women’s rights through media advocacy and capacity building. “Torture was a tool for coercion and repression. The climate of fear we operated under forced us to engage in self-censorship so that we would not be brutalised by state security agents.”

Jammeh’s hatred of the free press — he routinely described journalists as “dead rotten horses” and the “illegitimate sons of Africa” — also stoked a culture of impunity in which violence against journalists was commonplace. But his repression was also an opportunity. “The climate of fear we operated under forced us to engage in self-censorship so that we would not be brutalised by state security agents.”

In political transition has also provided IMS with a unique opportunity. In early 2017, IMS began a long-term, cross-sector engagement with multiple stakeholders in the west African country’s media sector. The mission involved a series of interviews with multiple actors in the media reform sector aimed at grasping the scope of the challenge, plus the establishment of a strategic media steering committee.

Two years later, IMS led a follow-up mission in the wake of a report presented to the UN’s Human Rights Council by Agnès Callamard, following her office’s inquiry into the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Callamard recommended several ways to fight impunity, including the development of a global protocol for investigating and responding to threats against journalists. To help support the development of a mechanism based on her recommendations, IMS launched a pilot project in Banjul in November 2019.

As part of this mission, IMS staff — along with expert legal consultants — met with lawyers, government officials, police personnel and other key players, including the Gambia National Human Rights Commission and the Gambia Press Union. IMS’s mission report was published in August 2020 and recognises that responding to threats and attacks against journalists means being prepared to scrutinise investigations and the laws that govern them. The overall mission reflects not only IMS’s innovative approach to holding perpetrators of attacks, killings and disappearances of journalists, media workers and human rights defenders to account, but also the value of the relationships that were established with key stakeholders during its 2017 mission to The Gambia.

Blossoming engagement

IMS’s long-term engagement with the Gambian media sector blossomed again in 2020. IMS enjoyed an ongoing partnership with GAMES (Gambia Media Support) and its partner GPU (Gambia Press Union), a collaboration that will include a series of training on digital safety, first aid for reporters and reporting during elections.

IMS was also invited to support strategic litigation aimed at challenging the constitutionality of Section 60 of the Criminal Code of The Gambia, which covers “defamation of foreign princes” and has been used to impose draconian penalties on journalists, including prison sentences. (Local journalists like to say that the country’s biggest problem is no longer its dictatorship, but its statute books.)

Specifically, IMS supported litigation research that began in July 2020 and led to FAME-DVE Gambina filing a case at the Gambian Supreme Court in March 2021. IMS is also supporting advocacy efforts to explain to the public why the law is unconstitutional and harmful to press freedom. “This is a colonial-era law which is inimical to press freedom,” says Touray, adding that if the Supreme Court strikes it down, “it will enlarge the democratic space and pave way for people to exercise their right to freedom of expression without fear of facing prosecution and arrest.” The hard work for the Gambian media continues, though the road ahead looks far less treacherous than it once did.

“The climate of fear we operated under forced us to engage in self-censorship so that we would not be brutalised by state security agents.”

Collaborations with the Gambian media sector resulted in a report that informs the struggle against impunity.

“Prospect for change in The Gambia: Collaborative support to combat impunity.

PHOTO: HAROON SABAWOON/GETTY IMAGES
BAJ of honour

In the face of unprecedented hostility towards the media, one organisation worked overtime to ensure the safety of journalists whose rights had been violated.

Belarus

Natalia Lubneuskaya should have been safe. A reporter for Nasha Niva, one of the oldest weekly newspapers in Belarus, she was wearing protective vests marked with the word ‘PRESS’.

But that made no difference to the security forces. “We’ve used all available channels at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in an attempt to negotiate the release of journalists and get permission to give food and clothes parcels to colleagues in prison,” he explains. “And we’ve changed our tactics. Since August, we’ve been doing our best to respond to incidents with reports as fast as possible. Every day, even in the evening and at the weekend, the BAJ team are always available to find lawyers, promptly prepare all necessary legal documents, collect and disseminate information about the incident, convene a press conference, send out a press release, and provide legal and other assistance to journalists.”

Of course, BAJ faced another challenge in 2020: the need to operate during a pandemic. But in these circumstances, BAJ managed to reach a whole new level of performance.”

One indicator of BAJ’s success in 2020 is the surge in membership it has enjoyed. “Many journalists joined BAJ in the fall, seeing the quality and scope of our work, and made donations,” Haretski says.

Haretski also says BAJ benefited from collaboration with Belarusian and international organisations in 2020. Their support was “extremely important”, he says, especially in terms of “disseminating information and drawing attention to the problems of journalists” and ensuring that the situation in Belarus remained in the spotlight thanks to international media coverage.

Many months on from the start of the protests, Belarus continues to endure brutal repression, while its opposition has fragmented. The public face of the opposition, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya — who claims she won the election and is intent on toppling Lukashenko — remains in exile in Lithuania.

Despite the uncertainty, BAJ has its eye on the future, though. Its volunteers and lawyers have interviewed more than 120 journalists whose rights were violated, gathering documentation that may one day be used to hold the perpetrators to account — including the law enforcement officer whose rubber bullet put journalist Natalia Lubneuskaya in hospital for more than a month.

In November 2020 BAJ won the Canada-UK Media Freedom Award. The organisation was singled out for its ongoing commitment to journalistic ethics and principles and its perseverance and self-sacrifice in the face of crackdowns on media in Belarus.

BAJ was nominated by the European Federation of Journalists and IMS.
The Safety Fund

The DJ Safety Fund supports journalists who are victimised as a direct result of their journalistic work. The support is made possible through donations made by members of the Danish Union of Journalists (DJ) and is used in cases where a journalist needs immediate protection as a result of a direct threat. Funds may cover urgent relocation, basic needs and legal or medical assistance.

In 2020 a total of 41 media workers from 13 countries received individual support. The list includes freelancers, staff journalists, photographers, camera persons and a cartoonist. A professional from a Latin American journalist union also received support. 15 percent of all beneficiaries are women.

All cases are carefully vetted, and support is coordinated with other members of the Journalists in Distress (JID) Network, a group of 19 international organisations assisting journalists and media workers whose lives or careers are threatened because of their work.

For more information about how to apply, visit mediasupport.org

Illegal spying on photographer

In May 2020 a prominent Colombian magazine published an exposé about journalists, politicians, NGO leaders and others subjected to illegal surveillance by counter-intelligence officers. The exposé alleged that Colombian military intelligence officials carried out an extensive monitoring operation targeting more than 130 individuals, including more than 30 national and international journalists. The photographer ‘Antonio’ (name changed for safety precautions) was on the list and felt at risk. Antonio believes he was spied on because of his reporting on illegal armed groups, drug trafficking, the country’s peace process and environmental conflicts. Given the general global Covid-related travel restrictions in place at the time he could not go to a safer place. He was advised by media safety organisations to not take any assignments and lay low a little while as it was impossible to leave Colombia. Left without any income DJ Safety Fund helped the photographer with funds to cover his basic needs. “I greatly appreciate the financial support as this helped cover my basic expenses and to pay for legal advice about the espionage of which I was a victim. I could focus on my safety and protect myself until I was able to resume my work again.”

The Colombian Defense Minister later announced the firing of 11 officers for “irregularities” in military intelligence work.
Rapid Response

IMS’ Rapid Response Mechanism address the immediate needs of independent media and their audiences while longerterm solutions are put in place. Often these are a response to the flare up of a conflict or a humanitarian emergency, in which case Rapid Response interventions focus on ensuring that media can continue reporting as professionally and as safely as possible under the circumstances.

Countering one-sided conflict reporting

Armenia/Azerbaijan

On 27 September 2020, conflict broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Control of the region has been an area of contention between the two countries since the breakup of the Soviet Union and a war that ended with a fragile ceasefire in 1994. Since then, Nagorno-Karabakh has remained part of Azerbaijan but controlled by separatist ethnic Armenians backed by the Armenian government. In both countries, media helped fuel nationalistic sentiments and thus contributed to the conflict. IMS decided to engage in order to promote impartial and professional coverage of the aftermath of the interstate conflict and facilitate discussion and debate between the two sides.

The intervention was two-pronged: linking Armenian journalists with experienced European reporters in a mentorship program, leading to the production of more impartial and professional coverage of the aftermath of the conflict and the current political crisis; and establishing a partnership between two media partners from either side of the conflict. Here, Azeri IRFS and Armenian Epress.am jointly organised and produced a series of live programs facilitating discussion and debate regarding issues such as hate speech to women’s role in peacebuilding. The two media organisations produced and broadcast a total of 20 live programs involving women and men from both countries. Statistical analysis showed a total of 980,000 views, 25,000 likes and 11,000 comments on Facebook and YouTube. Moreover, the live programs shed light on a number of important—and underreported—issues and acted as a countermeasure to the otherwise biased and one-sided coverage on both sides.

The brief but bitter and violent conflict killed several thousand soldiers on both sides and displaced tens of thousands of civilians. Hostilities came to an end with a ceasefire agreement signed on 10 November 2020, under which Armenia will return to Azerbaijan territories it occupied in 1994. The activities were intended as a response to the immediate needs in the wake of the conflict and therefore designed as a standalone effort. However, IRFS intends to continue the cross-border radio programs.

Cyber-attacks no more

Venezuela

The situation in Venezuela has been going from bad to worse over the past five years, with the government and opposition engaged in a bitter power struggle and widespread discontent fuelled by hyperinflation, power cuts, and shortages of food, water and medicine. More than five million people have left the country, including journalists who were facing arrest or other threats to their work and lives. Armando.info is an influential investigative journalism website reporting on all matters that contribute to the crisis in Venezuela, including corruption in other countries. As a result of their reporting Armando.info has experienced a number of serious cyber-attacks, compelling it to publish through social media rather than through a paywall, which affects its business model. To help secure and improve Armando.info’s website IMS linked the media with a Swedish organisation specialising in secure hosting and with a website expert from Danwatch in Denmark with a view to upgrade and better secure its website.

This collaboration led to a migration of all content to Wordpress and a user-friendly website, which is also easier to update and better secured against future attacks.

Mozambique

Originally planned to enable community radio stations to follow aid money pouring in after devastating cyclone Idai in Mozambique in 2019, this accountability journalism intervention launched in early 2020 but then had to be put on hold due to the Covid pandemic.

IMS and FORCOM, a national network for community radios and an implementing partner, agreed to build on the trainings that had already happened and launched a Covid awareness campaign instead. Through dedicated radio programs listeners were educated about how to prevent contagion. Another component included a community mobilization and awareness campaign that saw radios joining hands with local health experts and workers to reach faraway communities. Armed with megaphones and pre-designed messages, community radio staff fanned out to remote districts and met people in central squares, markets etc. The ten participating radios broadcast close to 2,000 spots in local languages and in Portuguese. Protective masks and disinfectants were also provided to the community radio stations.

“I am very happy for everything that I am listening to on the radio. Here in my community, there are few people who have television. Many people lost everything because of the cyclone. It is radio Búzi that is giving us information about Covid-19.”

Alima Saquina, Mozambique

BUZI DISTRICT, SOFALE PROVINCE

“With the messages on Nhamatanda radio, I start to get very worried and to know how to take care of myself. You saw that I only put on the mask when you started to send prevention messages”

Selestino Abilio, Mozambique

NHAMATANDA DISTRICT, SOFALE PROVINCE
Challenge Repressive Laws

Laws ultimately define the environment in which the media operates, and therefore IMS supports partners looking to navigate and challenge laws that restrict media freedom, as well as partners pushing for reforms that uphold international human rights standards for free expression. This may entail defending media workers and contesting unjust laws in court, as well as identifying laws that need to be changed, working for their reform and, once passed, making sure they are applied. IMS pays particular attention to finding balanced solutions to disinformation and hate speech, and the regulation of online content.

Ethiopia

Amid renewed concerns about Ethiopian press freedom in 2020, IMS helped shepherd the passage of a long overdue new media law accountable to the executive branch, in particular,” says Solomom Goshu, the former head of independent Media Law Reform Working Group (MLRWG) who is now the Programme Officer for IMS-Fojo, responsible for its media reform component. “The laws were instrumental in opposing freedom of expression and press freedom, and journalists and media institutions were harassed as a result of them.”

The legislation process was supported by the Swedish-Danish media programme in Ethiopia, Media Reform in a Time of Change – Promoting Journalism and Democracy. The programme — which was developed and implemented by IMS and the Swedish Fojo Media Institute — was central to the process of supporting the MLRWG, which has formulated most of the legal texts as input to the reform. The programme also supported the work of getting Ethiopia’s media sector parties and the government united in a common cause.

Better legislate than never

According to Goshu, it was vital to ensure that the proposed legislation was in line with best practices internationally and IMS was instrumental in “hiring international legal consultants who supported the drafting team on the international standardisation of the submission regarding freedom of expression”.

While 2020 ended on a worrying note, there is much hope now that the new law will help promote the democratic transformation that the government promised back in 2018 and genuinely improve freedom of expression and media freedom in Ethiopia.
Network effects

Inspired by an IMS-organised trip to Myanmar, a group of Sri Lankan media lawyers have started to make concrete interventions on behalf of their country’s media sector.

Sri Lanka:

When a Sri Lankan television station asked President’s Counsel Jagath Wickramanayake about the legal consequences for journalists who interview Covid-19 patients and their families, the eminent lawyer didn’t mince his words. “There’s no way that journalists can trespass into the homes of ordinary people to video-shoot them without their permission,” Wickramanayake said — adding that those who did could well find themselves being accused of breach of privacy, criminal trespass and defamation.

Wickramanayake’s advice to journalists — which came on World Press Freedom Day — wasn’t the only welcome contribution he made to the Sri Lankan media sector last year. The President’s Counsel also helped launch the Media Law Forum (MLF), an informal collective of senior lawyers that is hoping to address two shortcomings in Sri Lanka’s media landscape: the absence of a robust media law and policy framework — particularly when engaging with the government on new or amended media legislation — and the lack of media lawyers or organisations capable of providing journalists with legal aid.

“We were in a vacuum,” says Ranga Kalansooriya, Asia Regional Advisor at IMS, about the circumstances that led to the launch of the MLF. “We had two very urgent requirements: to help journalists facing legal threats and to be engaged in the government’s media law reform process. But we didn’t have experts who could represent civil society and press defenders on legal grounds, so we had to start from scratch.”

That process began in 2017, when IMS took a handful of Sri Lankan lawyers to Myanmar — and in 2018, IMS took a handful of Sri Lankan lawyers to Myanmar. IMS initially hosted the collective’s weekly meetings, until Covid-19 restrictions forced them to convene online. IMS has also helped introduce the 15-strong group to other international donors.

The MLF has a dual mandate: to provide legal support to the media sector and to build a collective platform for media reform in Sri Lanka with the participation of lawyers, journalists and other relevant stakeholders.

“After two to three years in the making, we are live and will pioneer proactively sharing regional and international media law best practices with lawmakers, journalists and other stakeholders, so that Sri Lanka’s landscape for a free media and free expression remains dynamic and inclusive,” says Wickramanayake.

Wickramanayake was one of the lawyers who travelled with IMS to Myanmar in 2018 and describes the trip as instrumental in his thinking. “Conceptualising Sri Lanka’s Media Law Forum is an honour and a responsibility,” he explains today. “My inspiration for media law as a discipline came after an exposure visit to Myanmar where I realised that the media’s freedom to report the truth must not come at the expense of the public’s right to privacy.”

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Future plans for digital media start-ups

IM’S work in Sri Lanka looks to craft new narratives for digital media start-ups, helping to build a collective platform for media reform in Sri Lanka with the participation of lawyers, journalists and other relevant stakeholders. The methodology is to provide input on an anti-fake-news bill that the government is considering, which would provide a framework for taking action against anonymous social-media accounts and ostensibly allow the government to control dissent.

The MLF is aiming to develop and implement an outreach and sustainability plan; operate a legal mechanism to facilitate pro bono support for journalists and content producers; provide legal and digital protection and interventions for journalists and media workers; and generate more awareness about the legal and digital assistance available to them. Kalansooriya is cautiously optimistic about the impact of these efforts. “We’re seeing light at the end of the tunnel,” he says.
Striking back against SLAPP

In 2020, a new coalition made the case for adopting new EU rules to shield civil society organisations from a notorious type of legal harassment

Global

When the Swedish business publication Realtid began looking at off-market transactions of shares in Eco Energy World (EEW) last September, ahead of EEW’s stock market launch, it could never have imagined that its pursuit of public interest journalism would lead to an English courtroom.

But that’s what happened just two months after Realtid’s reporters put their questions to EEW and its Swedish owner, Svante Kumlin. Instead of exercising their right of reply, Kumlin and EEW filed a libel lawsuit in London against Realtid, its editor-in-chief and the two reporters. According to civil society groups, the lawsuit against Realtid is a prime example of a form of legal harassment known as a Strategic lawsuit against public participation, or SLAPP. SLAPP suits are typically pursued by law firms on behalf of powerful individuals and organisations seeking to avoid public scrutiny. Their purpose is to drain defendants’ financial and psychological resources and silence critical voices — to the obvious detriment of public participation.

Efforts to combat the use of SLAPP suits got a boost in 2020, when almost 30 civil society organisations launched the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE). Their aim is to speak with one voice and make the case for the EU adopting targeted rules to specifically shield civil society organisations from SLAPP suits. The culmination of their work in 2020 was a model EU anti-SLAPP law proposing a set of rules which, if implemented, would help secure a safer environment for public watchdogs and public participation in Europe.

One of CASE’s founder members is the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation — named in honour of the Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was assassinated in 2017. At the time of her death, she was fighting 47 libel suits, most of which had been brought against her by people in the Maltese government or businessmen with close links to the ruling party.

"Over the last few years, we have seen a growing trend of abusive lawsuits such as these" says her son, Andrew Caruana Galizia. "They target anyone whose role it is to hold the powerful to account, journalists, activists, whistleblowers, advocacy groups, and public watchdogs. With no laws currently in place in Europe to protect public watchdogs, there is little to stop the rich and the powerful from weaponising the legal system against their critics." His testimony appeared in a web video that IMS produced after it joined CASE in 2020. With the pandemic preventing in-person meetings, the video was a clever way to communicate CASE’s goals and was widely shared, among both coalition members and IMS’s media partners in the EU.

"We certainly helped spread the word," says Colette Heefner, a Global Safety Advisor at IMS. "The video crystallised everything the coalition had talked about." The video has since been translated into German and attracted the attention of IMS’s media partners who risk similar lawsuits in non-EU countries like Colombia, The Philippines, Belarus and Ukraine. In the face of legal harassment, then, civil society is increasingly looking to slap back.

Efforts to combat the use of SLAPP suits got a boost in 2020, when almost 30 civil society organisations launched the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe.
When media strengthens human rights – and vice versa

2020 underlined the close linkage between human rights and media development, as well as showed the need for more and stronger collaborations, Gulnara Akhundova, Head of Global Response says.

Interview

In Burkina Faso and Mali, local radio’s ‘women’s listening clubs’ supported by IMS bring topics of public interest to a wider audience. In 2020 the station for instance broadcasted stories on why the women’s rights to buy land on equal terms as men, in Tapoa in Burkina Faso, are not upheld and pointed to environmental problem with plastic waste in the town of Gao in Mali.

“Our policies, projects and programmes – everything we do at IMS – aim at the realisation of human rights. Human rights principles guide our programmes in all phases – from initial assessment to final evaluation,” head of Global Response at IMS, Gulnara Akhundova, explains.

The focus leads to changes; like in the two above cases, where women in Tapoa now can acquire land by purchasing and the local authorities in Gao put in place a new sanitation strategy based on the proposals made by the women.

“The way we see it, robust, inclusive journalism that holds power to account is essential for the achievement of human rights. Journalism influences duty bearers, like governments, and holds them to account, but it also - when it has a human rights-based approach – sensitize right holders, the people, about their rights. Bolstering this type of journalism is IMS’ raison d’être. And our partners are subscribed to human rights-based approach, which leads to a stronger impact of our work,” Gulnara explains.

As part of IMS’ human rights based framework Gulnara Akhundova is responsible for the organisation’s work to push for media freedom and freedom of expression in global and regional policies.

“IMS continues to explore the untapped potential of media to advocate for the sustainable development goals and the realisation of human rights. Good journalism however cannot bring about change on its own — but it can be a strong part of a bigger coalition of actors and events that do bring about change,” Gulnara Akhundova says. This range from the global level, like the coalition of Safety of Journalists which works to promote the UN Plan of Action, (IMS is co-chairing), to supporting and partnering with local civil society organisations. “One of our strengths are that we can bring forward local solutions to global problems and vice versa,” she adds.

Global and local solutions

In 2020 this work has been even more important than what we’ve seen before, due to Covid-19 and a rising tendency to closing spaces,” Gulnara Akhundova says, adding that the linkage between human rights, the Sustainable Development Goals and media is still somewhat new in media development.

Having a human rights based approach for instance means that a media ensures that a piece of vital information is not only accessible for a certain segment of the audience, but that this content is produced, packaged and distributed in a way that no individuals or groups are left behind, Gulnara Akhundova, Head of Global Response says.

In 2020 an example of how civil society and media on local level works to strengthen human rights, comes from Iraq, where IMS’s partners work to encounter hate speech.
Interview with Gulnara Akhundova

Pan-Asian journalism series sheds light on rights violations

Six media organisations from the IMS Asia Media Start-ups Network joined forces in the Asia Covid-19 Rights Repressed Journalism Series in October 2020 to shine light on human rights setbacks during Covid. Through podcasts, videos, stories, blog posts and articles, media from Nepal, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Cambodia and the Philippines documented how emergency laws, lockdown restrictions and clampdowns on media and civil society during the pandemic are affecting the most vulnerable. One example of a story is Herre Kartz’s story which points to migrants moving back and forth in poverty between Nepal and India, left to their own devices during times of high infections. Coupled with supporting op-eds in The Diplomat (EU) and Altinget (Denmark) on the authoritarian trend sweeping through South and South-East Asia, the initiative had an estimated audience reach of more than 275,000 people.

“The eyes of the international society have been directed towards Eastern Europe during 2020. From examples of crackdowns on the freedom of expression in some countries to grave human rights abuses and unspeakable violations of international law following the elections in Belarus. Though, what gives inspiration and hope is the tenacious, persistent and incredibly brave efforts of civil society and media, not the least in Belarus”, Gulnara Akhundova says.

In response to democratic challenges in the region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark in December 2020 presented ‘The New Democracy Fund’, which aims to support civil society partnerships to strengthen democratic development. IMS and four other Danish-based organisations are partnering with local organisation in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to promote democratic organisation of civil society; people-to-people exchange of experience and regional networking.

“The new partnership embodies the way of working: An active, independent, and diverse civil society, including media, who works united around core values of democracy, human rights, diversity and inclusion are important cornerstones of peaceful, and stable societies,” Gulnara Akhundova states.

Since 2006, more countries have become less democratic. During 2020 Covid-19 added pressure on democracies and human rights. In 2020 of all human rights violations, those against freedom of press topped the list. [source Svenske V-Dem Institute]
The good and the ugly side of media

Laura Gil is the programme advisor of IMS’ 1325 programme. It is named after UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) which seeks to increase women’s participation and representation in peace processes, and it runs simultaneously in Colombia, Myanmar and Syria — three countries which are all torn by lengthy, brutal armed conflicts and which in different ways strive to find peaceful solutions.

IMS’ programme focuses on increasing the number of women journalists reporting on peace processes and conflicts as well as making stories from women in excluded groups known to the public and decision-makers.

Prior to joining IMS, Laura Gil, who has a background in international relations, worked on the drafting and implementation of the Victims and Land Restitution Law, a law that ultimately opened the door to peace negotiations in Colombia. In parallel to this, she had a column in the country’s biggest newspaper. “I was a human rights defender who by accident became an opinion journalist, and I learned about the good, the bad and the ugly sides of media — for example how journalists, often unknowingly, transform women social leaders’ strong, active narratives into stereotypical, victimizing portraits.”

But Laura Gil also realised the positive power that media can perform. “I came to see journalists not only as simple messengers, but actors of change,” she explains. It is one of the main reasons she finds IMS’ 1325 programme extraordinary. “This programme has an innovative twist that I haven’t seen anywhere else: instead of considering the media an ally in promoting the gains of the 1325 resolution, IMS turned media into an active implementor.”

Reservation plans

A main goal of the programme is to further collaboration between local women’s rights organisations and local media to promote a diverse coverage, expert knowledge and a gender and conflict sensitive approach. An example of this is a podcast published in 2020 with personal interviews of a group of indigenous Awá women from the south of Colombia. These women had all moved to a nearby big city as very young — down to eight years — in the hope to escape poverty and find a steady income to support their families, many lured in with false promises of education and fair salaries alongside their work as housekeepers for city residents.

In the podcast they told their stories: after working under conditions bordering to slavery for decades, they attempted to move back home to their birth reservations, but the local indigenous authorities questioned their Awá identity and denied them access. After the podcast had aired on local indigenous radio, it stirred an intense debate among the local authorities and Awá women who are now trying to set up their own women’s reservation.
“I learned about the good, the bad and the ugly sides of media - for example how journalists, often unknowingly, transform women social leaders’ strong, active narratives into stereotypical, victimizing portraits.”

“This issue is now discussed broadly, and the indigenous authorities is forced to take it seriously. To me, it’s amazing that these women – who have been largely invisible in public life and debate - have joined forces to establish a new life and demand to be heard,” Laura Gil says and underlines: “It’s a long and complex process to set up a new reservation, but I see it as a major contribution that they now are in a position to negotiate with authorities. It’s a great example of the power of media to push for positive change and women’s rights.”

Via two local partners, a media and women’s organisation, IMS supported the production of the podcast, from the initial research to publication and distribution. The programme supported trainings of the journalist in gender sensitive reporting and interviewing of sources. Thus, the podcast is also a good example of its untraditional approach to working with media. “We believe that media shouldn’t only engage with women’s organisations when they publish the main findings of a report – it should be a close, mutually beneficial collaboration where the organisations help the media gain access to stories, sources and expert knowledge, and women’s many roles and voices in society will be portrayed accurately, respectful and stereotype-free,” Laura Gil explains.

2020: a trying year

It is no secret that 2020 was an exceptional year in many ways. According to UN, the outbreak of Covid-19 put at risk all the gains on women’s rights made during the past decades, and gender-based violence rose dramatically. As sad as this fact is, it also established the importance of programmes like IMS’ 1325 programme which focus specifically on those who are most vulnerable during conflicts and crises. “Women’s voices and needs were overlooked in media coverage of the pandemic as well, and it clearly emphasized that there is still a great need to work on gender equality in the media everywhere in the world – especially during a crisis,” she states.

The IMS programme managed to continue in all three countries during the pandemic, but with necessary adaptations: “As many of those we work with are women, we had to consider the gendered differentiated implications of the pandemic – we knew that men and women would be affected differently and that much of the domestic and caretaking work would fall on our women collaborators and sources, for example, so we had to be sensitive to their needs,” Laura Gil explains.

While 2020 was by all means a challenging year for women and for women’s rights, it also fired up the fight. “It felt like a collective sentiment of women all over the world that this is it! We’ve had it with the inequality and injustices. Structural changes must be made,” Laura Gil recalls. “At no other point in my lifetime, the gender differentiated consequences of a crisis has stood out so clearly, and everywhere I looked, women were calling out for change.”

GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Rising abuse prompts media collaborations

Domestic violence on the rise amid Covid was a joint journalistic production on rising gender based violence amid the Covid lockdown in 2020 initiated by IMS. Led by media start-ups Hari TV in Sri Lanka and Lok Sujag in Pakistan in cooperation with Rozana, Syria and Inkyfada in Tunisia and a freelance journalist in the Gambia, the montage series documented the lives of different protagonists – woman, men, LGBTIQA+ individuals, who have experienced heightened hardship or violence during Covid. The violence often sprang from social stigmas, political repression or economic discrimination related to gender norms in the respective country contexts. The series also provided a glimpse of how these individuals were overcoming the obstacles, or even thriving and how civil society initiatives or their own innovations were aiding their situation and that of others in their societies. The series was aired on the platforms of participating media in all four countries and led Hari TV in Sri Lanka to further produce a 12 episode flagship talk show focusing on the challenges facing women and LGBTIQA++. 

BIO

Laura Gil is IMS programme advisor in Colombia and a feminist foreign affairs expert committed to the defense of human rights. Laura Gil has a broad experience as commentator.

Fighting sexist job advertisements to promote gender equality

In April 2020, the Somali National TV (SNTV), run by the country’s government, advertised two vacant positions that could “only be applied by female journalists meeting the following conditions: 1) She must have at least a university degree; 2) She must not be older than 25 years of age; 3) She must have a TV style look in terms of body weight, height, and physical beauty. 4) She must have a media excellence voice and good style in clothing.”

IMS partner Somali Women Journalists Organization (SWJO) led dozens of critical statements directed at the Ministry of Information for their discriminatory and unequal treatment of women media workers, demanding an official apology and an immediate retraction of the advertisement. After three days of strong condemnations and public discussions, the ministry recalled the advertisement, apologized and later fired the director of SNTV.
IMS Documentary Film works with independent filmmakers from around the world to develop new projects, especially in countries with a small or non-existing documentary film scene or in areas affected by conflict or unrest, and have a special focus on inclusion, gender equality, marginalised groups and diversity.

**Storytelling that moves the world**

While trust in the media is challenged globally, the independent documentary film industry and its audiences are growing. It has become one of the most influential ways of telling stories.

IMS Documentary Film works with independent filmmakers from around the world to develop new projects, especially in countries with a small or non-existing documentary film scene or in areas affected by conflict or unrest, and have a special focus on inclusion, gender equality, marginalised groups and diversity.

**Breaking migration taboos**

An example of this is the The Last Shelter, filmed in Mali during 2020, which won the main award at CPH:DOX 2021 - one of the world’s most prominent documentary film festivals.

**Getting the films “out there”**

In addition to the relatively small seed funding, IMS provided expert input and facilitated collaboration and linkages to the film industry. Henrik Underbjerg, IMS Documentary Film Advisor, explains:

“This boosted us a lot and enabled us to finish our production, leading to the creation of this beautiful movie,” film director Ousmane Samassekou states. To IMS, finding and supporting local filmmakers is not only about the individual film, but also a way to support the development of film makers in often overlooked corners.

Over the past 15 years, IMS has worked with documentary filmmaking and its ability to contribute to social, political and cultural change in some of the most trying parts of the world. By amplifying overlooked issues and voices rarely making it to mainstream media and public debate, the films supported by IMS have served as vehicles for developments in countries across Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

**SAHEL**

**Will I die from Covid-19 or from starvation?**

Empty streets, no planes were the sky, everything was silent. While international travel restrictions and pressure on local journalists mounted under Covid-19 lockdown, IMS contracted filmmakers around the world to document their experiences during this very special moment in history. The outcome was “Living in Times of Coronavirus”, a series of short films exploring a pandemic with perspectives and who are in a position to incite change,” Henrik Underbjerg explains.

IMS also organised public screenings at the Danish Embassy in Mali and in Burkina Faso, and to ensure broad local audiences access to the film, IMS is negotiating with national TV stations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to broadcast it, reaching potentially up to 60 million people in areas with many young people - a group likely to consider migrating.

“The aim is to support films and stories, which would not have made an impact on important audiences without IMS - audiences, both local and global, who are in need of nuanced perspectives and who are in a position to incite change,” Henrik Underbjerg explains.
IMS HAS SUPPORTED JOURNALISTS WITH PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT (PPE) ACROSS PROGRAMMES.

IN SOMALIA

1,000 journalists received PPE throughout 2020.

A Nepalese health personnel in protective gear collects nasal swab sample of a Nepalese journalist in Kathmandu, Nepal, May 2020. Nepal has designated media workers and journalists as essential workers.
Building strong programmes for greater impact

2020 is the first implementation year of the IMS Strategy 2020-2023. In order to deliver on its goals, the organisation works with three so-called institutional ‘HOWS’, which cover how IMS enables programmes and partners to progress towards greater impact

**HOW 1: Adjusting strategies and enhancing internal capacity**

- In 2020 geographic departments and country programmes initiated a process of adjusting strategic goals and approaches. This entailed comprehensive consultations.
- Covid-19 provided a sense of shared challenges propelling a series of trainings and webinars for staff and partners globally to share experiences and spur on the development of new media collaborations across countries and regions.
- IMS local partners are losing key means to generate income, which was exacerbated by the effects of Covid-19, making IMS ramp up its internal capacity on media business viability.

**HOW 2: An adept, accountable organization, ensuring equal opportunities**

- As part of its ongoing work to safeguard staff and partners, IMS boosted internal procedures on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. IMS took concrete steps throughout the year to re-affirm its strong commitment to battling such injustices.
- As Covid-19 forced our staff to work from home all over the world, IMS developed a fully digital workflow for internal processes. This enabled us to continue to support our partners from the first day of pandemic shutdowns and throughout the year.
- In 2020, IMS continued its strong focus on developing its financial management and compliance capacity to handle the increasing number of grants.

**HOW 3: Diversified and durable funding**

- In 2020, IMS secured important multi-year grants from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which are key to sustain the organisation’s operations and strategic development. These grants also provide key support to our rapid response interventions in emergency situations.
- In 2020, IMS continued to diversify its funding sources and attracted new grants from the EU and from the Swiss Development Cooperation. These grants contribute to our work in Africa, MENA and Asia.
- IMS is also growing its public engagement in especially Denmark. In 2020, IMS’ supporting members scheme saw a solid 54% increase to a total of 573 individuals, who directly support independent journalism, and at the same time saw an increase in reach, including a 100% growth in traffic to IMS platforms and doubling its Twitter followers.

**VISION**

Peaceful, stable societies based on democratic values protected by strong public interest media to a world with freedom of expression and access to information

**WHERE WE WORK**

Where independent media is at greatest risk: in countries experiencing armed conflict, humanitarian crises, rapid political change or authoritarian rule.

**HOW WE DO IT**

We build partnerships and couples rapid response with long-term efforts, creating a basis of trust and collaboration, finding local solutions to global problems and vice versa.

**AREAS OF WORK**

- **Push for quality journalism**
  - Inclusive, ethical content that audiences can trust, produced by viable, independent media
- **Keep media workers safe**
  - Protect media workers of all genders, both off and online, during crises and in daily life
- **Challenge repressive laws**
  - Repeal restrictions to human rights and development, such as fake news, violent content, and access to information online and offline

**GLOBAL THEMES AND APPROACHES**

- **Connect to international human rights and development agendas, working with international institutions**
- Fight all forms of iniquity, especially that of all genders and marginalized communities have access to safety and free expression
- Focus on digital rights and values and the role of tech companies
- Facilitate action, coalitions, and other collaborations, countering media and tech society

**CONTEX SPECIFIC APPROACH, ADAPTED TO CLOSING AND OPENING SPACES**

**ims’ strategy is centred on three key areas of work.**

**IMS Board 2020**

- **Andrew Puddephatt** Chair of the board, International Media Support, Board member, Global Partners Digital
  - United Kingdom
- **Ann-Magrìt Austenà** Vosdrijf of the board, Leadership Development, Vosdrijf, Church of Norway
  - Norway
- **Trine Nielsen** President, Danish School of Media and Journalism
  - Denmark
- **Amanda Aune** President, The Danish Union of Journalists
  - Denmark
- **Louise Brincker** Journalist and media consultant
  - Denmark
- **Edetana Ojo** Executive Director, Media Rights Agenda
  - Nigeria
- **Annika Palo** Senior Advisor, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SDA)
  - Sweden
- **Gene Kimmelman** President and CEO, Public Knowledge, Georgetown University
  - United States
- **Lars Møller** Journalist and media consultant
  - Norway
- **Eva Grambye** President and CEO, Public Knowledge, Georgetown University
  - United States

“Freedom of the press is essential for providing citizens with access to trustworthy information, a right which is fundamental for societies if they aim to be free and democratic. Freedom of the press is under pressure everywhere in the world, on- as well as offline, and this development undermines both the fundamental structure of our societies and our trust in one another. IMS does impressive work to counter this development, and I am glad to be able to support these efforts as a board member wherever I can.”

Eva Grambye
Deputy Executive Director, International Division at The Skal Institute For Human Rights, joined the IMS board in the Fall of 2020.

“IMS builds long-term and trust-based relationships with media in very difficult environments. Enabling partners, ranging from innovative start-ups to stronger independent media houses or coalitions, is key to the organisation’s success in creating impact. At a time when the need for independent media is even greater than ever, it is such a pleasure to be part of this work.”

Moukhtar Kocache
Independent Adviser focusing on independent creative platforms, cultural and social justice philanthropy and other areas, joined the IMS board in 2018.

IMS Board Members are volunteers; receives no salary for their work, except the chairperson, who receives a nominal fee.

President, The Danish Union of Journalists
Trine Nielsen
Oslo Diocese, Church of Norway
Vicechair of the board, Leadership development, Ann-Magrit Austenà
Chair of the Board, International Media Support, Board member, Andrew Puddephatt
Global Partners Digital
Chair of the Board, International Media Support, Board member, Andrew Puddephatt
Global Partners Digital
Chair of the Board, International Media Support, Board member, Andrew Puddephatt
Global Partners Digital
Chair of the Board, International Media Support, Board member, Andrew Puddephatt
Global Partners Digital

Financial overview 2020

### Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>EUR</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish embassies and Sida</td>
<td>8,551,346</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish embassies and Danida</td>
<td>6,204,547</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies and Norad</td>
<td>2,775,390</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2,339,094</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other donors</td>
<td>888,580</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total funding</strong></td>
<td>20,758,957</td>
<td>100%</td>
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### Expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>EUR</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>18,333,309</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of doing business</td>
<td>1,975,428</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development &amp; other activities</td>
<td>450,220</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenditures</strong></td>
<td>20,758,957</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Turnover 2009 - 2020

- **Swedish embassies and Sida**: 8,551,346 EUR (41%)
- **Danish embassies and Danida**: 6,204,547 EUR (30%)
- **Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies and Norad**: 2,775,390 EUR (13%)
- **EU**: 2,339,094 EUR (11%)
- **Other donors**: 888,580 EUR (4%)

**Total funding**: 20,758,957 EUR (100%)

### IMS quick facts

- **Staff members**: 142
- **New staff members in 2020**: 38
- **Female staff**: 58%
- **Average age**: 36
- **Supporting members**: 573

### Regional expenditures

- **Asia**: 14%
- **Africa**: 52%
- **Middle East & North Africa**: 17%
- **Eastern Europe**: 9%

### Rapid response expenditures

- **Asia**: 85%
- **Africa**: 5%
- **Middle East**: 2%
- **Latin America**: 1%

### Examples of IMS partners’ reach

- **The Sahel Network of Community Radio Reached**
  - 2 million rural Sahelian citizens

- **The Myanmar Fact-Checking TV Programme by DVB Reached**
  - 2.9 million viewers

- **The Somalia Radio Ergo had estimated**
  - 6 million listeners

- **Sri Lankan Hari TV grew It’s Subscription Base**
  - 45% in 8 months

- **Partners in the Middle East and North Africa reached an estimated total of**
  - 292 million citizens on Facebook alone
Thank you to our donors

IMS’ cause is increasingly important and a rising number of donors* are committing to support the work. For that, we are grateful! We strive to have a diverse funding portfolio to enable our ongoing development and support to the media corporations, journalists, start-ups, alliances and coalitions that we partner with.

* WE KEEP OUR INDEPENDENCE AND SUPPORT WILL GIVE NO ACCESS TO DECISIONS NOR CONTENT NEITHER WITHIN THE ORGANISATION NOR AMONG IMS PARTNERS.

In 2020, we also received support from a number of other donors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Foreign Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ford Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Google News Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Open Society Foundations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Members of the Danish Union of Journalists</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

During a pandemic journalists all over the world need protection gear. In 2020 this demand led the Swedish company Gibson Medical to donate 10,000 facemasks, to be distributed among IMS’ partners and media workers. Michael Yin, Founder, says:

“Journalists are in the frontline and necessary in times of crisis. It was an easy choice for Gibson Medical to support IMS with an in-kind donation, given with no restrictions.”

In Denmark IMS invite individuals to become individual supporting members. This is a way for people to support the mission of strengthening good journalism and improve societies. Robin Johansen, an individual supporter explains:

“People can only live and function well if they can also think and speak freely. That is why free media and independent journalists are crucial for citizens around the world. We need a free press in order to develop open and democratic societies.”

Support independent media

Democratic values are under threat worldwide. You can help push back against the rising tide of disinformation and authoritarianism by supporting independent media in some of the most repressive environments across the globe.

Your donation makes it possible for local journalists to uncover corruption, giving people news and channels, so that they can demand accountability.

Support our work

International donations: mediasupport.org/donate

Donations from within Denmark: mobile pay: 98209 dk.mediasupport.org/stot/donation/

Be part of the IMS network

Sign up to receive news from IMS mediasupport.org/newsletter

Follow us on social media

InternationalMediaSupport

Contact us with questions on how to support our work at info@mediasupport.org
IMS’ vision of peaceful, stable and democratic societies sustained, supported and promoted through strong and effective public interest media has never been as relevant during the organisation’s 20-year history as it is today.

mediasupport.org

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