
Strategy 2020-2023



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Behind the scenes at Kenya's NTV TV channel during their news broadcast NTV Today. Photo: AFP

IMS

Nørregade 18

1165 Copenhagen K

Denmark

+45 8832 7000

info@mediasupport.org

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IMS (International Media Support) is a non-profit organization working to support local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition.

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“*Mada* has always been a project of inquiry, of curiosity, one that particularly extends to the darker rooms of power, spaces that we barely see or know. When we started publishing in 2013, many thought of us as a media by and for the children of the 2011 revolution. We are indeed the children (and the makers) of 2011. But we are far more ambitious than that. We are specific to the context we are born in, the here and now... We want to stitch together an account of this life and how it is changing, from all its different angles: our society, our economy, our health, our urban environment, our education. We pay attention to culture and cultural production and how it interfaces with this reality. We bounce between negotiating and resisting a new-old type of authority, in a wide spectrum of practices for survival. This calls for a constant exercise of dissecting power, and this intellectual exercise can only start from an empirical place: information first.”

Lina Attalah - Chief Editor of *Madr Masr* in an article published on November 28 2019 in which she explains why she and her colleagues published an article that resulted in their arrest by the Egyptian authorities.

Introduction

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. This strategy lays out how, over the next four years, we intend to strive for this vision in an increasingly troubled world.

When we started to review our strategy in early 2019, our partners and staff were feeling the full force of a perfect storm of resurgent authoritarianism, climate change and technological disruption that was brewing when we drew up our previous strategy. After a year of careful reflection and consultation, as we made the last adjustments to this latest strategy, Covid-19 struck, laying bare the paradox this strategy seeks to address: while the need and demand for reliable information - in the form of ethical and trusted journalism and other forms of fact-based media "content" - is greater than it has been in decades, the media's ability to produce and distribute it in viable ways is severely challenged. No more so than in the places where IMS works; countries and regions experiencing armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, rapid political change and authoritarian rule that also rank among the most hostile and volatile media environments in the world.

Therefore, ensuring the viability of public interest media is paramount. But viability is about more than just making money. All aspects of IMS' strategic approach – quality content, audience engagement, business development, safety, gender equality and policy and law reform - contribute to this viability; and requires innovation.

Those familiar with previous IMS strategies will notice that our approach is now more focused, grounded and nuanced. The most clear change which the strategy introduces is to make IMS' *raison d'être* more explicit: IMS is not in the business of developing good journalism for the sake of merely having good journalism. Rather, we support journalism that has the potential and the intent to bring about positive change – be it social, political, or cultural – journalism that can further accountability and people's human rights. This approach has been an implicit part of our programming since the beginning, but in making it more explicit we believe we have a clearer and more bold mission on our hands. The strategy thus takes a clear stand in that complementary – and often cross-sectoral – partnerships must be sought proactively and continuously. Often civic organisations can provide media with access to those on the sharp end of poverty, inequality and other topics of public interest that media workers look to cover. IMS will facilitate these alliances, as well as act as a bridge between our local partners and relevant global policy fora, representing partners' views and interests to the latter and feeding back to the former.

As always, the foundations for IMS' work are international human rights standards and the principles of ethical journalism, which also prescribe the role of proactive, civic-minded media that IMS is looking to foster. Such a role is necessary if public interest media are to gain, develop and maintain the trust of their audiences through creative forms of engagement that are now essential for the media's long-term viability. Such clarifications in our strategic purpose in turn clarify who IMS must partner with and influence in order to effect the changes we are working towards.

Andrew Puddephatt
IMS Chairperson

Jesper Højberg
IMS Executive Director

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Key terms explained

IMS' *raison d'être* is journalism and documentary film that is in the public interest ("public interest content"). IMS' work is geared towards helping locally-based "public interest media" operating in countries affected by authoritarian rule, armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, and rapid political change, both positive and negative, to provide the public and "civic organizations" with public interest content they can trust and use.

Public interest content is guided by internationally accepted ethical standards and can be in any format and genre. It informs members of the public about the issues that shape their lives in ways which serve the public's rather than any political, commercial or factional interest. Public interest content encourages and informs public debate and dialogue across society, holding those in power to account in the public interest. Therefore, public interest content is inclusive and diverse; it questions and challenges discriminatory societal norms, stereotypes and taboos.

Public interest media are editorially independent media operations that strive to produce and distribute public interest content. Public interest media can be commercial, public service or community media and can operate online, as broadcasters, and through print or other channels. The strategy refers throughout to both journalists and **media workers**, in recognition of the fact that IMS' work does not merely benefit individuals who self-identify or professionally trained as journalists, but a wider group of people who work in media content production, including photographers, video and film producers, bloggers, developers, social media professionals, and a wide range of other creative individuals.

To fulfil their civic purpose at a time when state and corporate interests increasingly dominate and restrict civic space¹, public interest media must – without compromising their editorial values and independence – proactively seek a complementary relationship with civil society organisations and civic groups that respect human rights and address issues of public interest. **Civil society organizations and civic groups** are entities other than political parties that represent the interests of different groups (e.g. trade unions, employer federations, religious and issue-based pressure groups), charities, community self-help schemes, human rights campaigners, and other non-governmental organizations. They may range from informal groups of people to formalised organisations and other entities.

Although public interest media can be run as a business operating in a market, they inform and facilitate debate within civic space. Their editorial values and ethical standards provide the parameters for doing this in a transparent and accountable way. This does not prevent public interest media taking sides on issues of public interest but should be transparent about this.

¹ "Civic space is the place, physical, virtual, and legal, where people exercise their rights to freedom of association, expression, and peaceful assembly. By forming associations, by speaking out on issues of public concern, by gathering together in online and offline fora, and by participating in public decision-making, individuals use civic space to solve problems and improve lives. This can only happen when a state holds by its duty to protect its citizens and respects and facilitates their fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully and freely express views and opinions (<https://monitor.civicus.org/whatiscivicspace/>).

Context

IMS' latest analysis of the context in which we operate globally² identifies challenges and opportunities that fall into three main categories:

- *Those public interest media have a duty to cover:* Major challenges to and opportunities for democracy and sustainable development including those addressed through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- *Those that impact on the environment in which public interest media operate:* notably the continued democratic backsliding and the state and corporate capture of the Internet and other areas of civic space, which has bred rampant mis-and-disinformation.
- *Those that impact on public interest media's viability*³: media's continued efforts to pay for the production and distribution of public interest content in challenging environments.

Coverage in the public interest

Media around the world struggle to cover issues relating to sustainable development in an informative, critical, creative and inclusive manner – for understandable reasons. A survey of IMS' partners in 2019 showed that climate change and other development priorities were less important to respondents than, for example, their safety, their sustainability, threats to their local democracies and gender inequality. Nonetheless, there is an immense need for media to provide the public with informed and critical journalism of the development challenges their societies face so that the public are properly informed about these issues and their leaders can be held accountable for the commitments they make and the things they do to develop their societies.

The climate crisis is perhaps one of the most urgent issues of our lifetime, given how it touches on every aspect of life. Another is the Covid-19 pandemic, which engulfed the world as this strategy was being finalized. Responses to these and other global challenges need to be shaped by local experiences of them; experiences that local public interest media can convey to national, regional and international decision makers.

Each country's development priorities will differ, as will the media's coverage of them. But women and members of socio-economically disadvantaged groups around the world are disproportionately affected by the development challenges their countries face. For example, United Nations (UN) figures indicate that 80 per cent of people displaced by climate change are women. Yet women remain conspicuous by their absence from media coverage throughout the world⁴.

Development challenges are often felt most acutely by those living out of the view and reach of predominantly, urban-based media. Media closer to the story tend to lack resources needed to cover these issues in any depth and may not reach decision makers back in the cities.

² 'Global retreat amid global issues: The need for strategic synergies in media development' (IMS 2019)

³ IMS shares the view of UNESCO and the Deutsche Welle Akademie that viability is not limited to financial sustainability but also the ability and capacity of media outlets to produce high-quality journalism in the long term.

⁴ Global Media Monitoring Project 2015: Who Makes the News?, 2015. Available from https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/Who_makes_the_news_-_Global_Media_Monitoring_Project_2015.pdf [accessed September 20 2019]

IMS' response

IMS will help public interest media to produce and distribute in-depth, ethical content on relevant democratic development issues by brokering mutually beneficial relationships between media partners and civic organizations who can facilitate the media's access to affected communities and expert sources. These stories can then inform civic organizations' advocacy and awareness raising that, in turn, promotes dialogue and the accountability of decision makers. We will draw lessons from our partners' coverage of Covid-19.

The media environment

Rights and the new world (dis)order

The rights-based world order is challenged, posing both a huge threat and an opportunity to public interest media given that the public needs reliable information more than ever. Freedom House's global freedom index has declined for 13 years in a row⁵, and nearly six out of ten countries are now "seriously repressing civic freedoms".⁶ The last few years have seen an alarmingly high number of journalists jailed, which suggests that "the authoritarian approach to critical news coverage is more than a temporary spike".⁷ There has also been a widespread pushback against women's rights.⁸

Many of the regimes now restricting human rights are democratically elected ones with authoritarian tendencies that are quick to limit or curtail the rights of information, assembly and expression, particularly in digital and networked spaces. International commitments to gender equality are threatened, limiting women's opportunities to participate in politics and peace building, which hampers efforts to prevent and end conflict.⁹ In many of the places where IMS works, autocratic ruling elites and allied businesses have captured much of the mainstream media.

However, there have also been moves towards greater democracy and freedom, often with little warning and led by popular movements, as in the Gambia, Tunisia, Armenia, Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon and Ethiopia. There has also been a new wave of national, media-savvy movements that challenge the root causes of gender inequality, inspired by global feminist movements such as #Metoo and #UnVioladorEnTuCamino¹⁰. These moments of change present windows of opportunity for improving the media environment. But reform can be hampered by the lack of preparation for a new, more conducive media environment and a limited understanding of the role of public interest media.

⁵ Freedom House: [Democracy in Retreat: Freedom in the World 2019](#)

⁶ CIVICUS: [New Report: 6 in 10 countries now seriously repressing civic freedoms](#), 27 November 2018

⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists: [Hundreds of journalists jailed globally becomes the new normal](#), 13 December 2018

⁸ AFP, *UN chief warns of worldwide pushback against women's rights*, March 11, 2019. Available from <https://www.france24.com/en/20190311-un-chief-warns-worldwide-pushback-against-womens-rights> [accessed September 24 2019]; OHCHR, *Women's rights facing global pushback from conservative and fundamentalist groups, UN experts warn*, June 22, 2018. Available from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23244&LangID=E> [accessed September 24 2019]

⁹ Taylor, S., & Baldwin G. (2019) *The Global Pushback on Women's Rights: The state of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*. Available from https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/1909_Global-Pushback.pdf

¹⁰ For example, the Palestinian #Tali3at protest movement that erupted following the brutal killing of instagrammer Esraa Gharib in late 2019, the #Collectif490 movement in Morocco that was ignited by the arrest and conviction of a Moroccan journalist and her partner and campaigns for the abolition of a law that criminalises sexual relations beyond wedlock, and the Tunisian #EnaZeda movement against sexual harassment.

Both media and civic organizations have a responsibility and mutual interest in pushing for democratic reform where opportunities arise, and in resisting the further curtailment of rights when threatened. New alliances and networks are being initiated among civic organizations nationally and internationally to do this.

IMS' response

IMS will continue to enable women to contribute to peace processes through our support to media coverage of gender issues related to conflicts¹¹; an initiative that has already demonstrated how public interest media and civic organizations can find common ground for closer co-operation on issues of public interest. This requires building trust between public interest media and civic organizations that may not necessarily see defending the free expression and access to information as a priority. Our efforts to support media partners' rigorous and in-depth coverage of public interest issues will be a catalyst for raising the profile of public interest media and promoting an understanding of the crucial role public interest media plays in a vibrant and inclusive civic space.

Technology, money and power

By 2030 the Chinese economy is likely to have surpassed that of the United States.¹² Meanwhile, the economies of big technology companies such as Apple, Samsung, Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Facebook, Amazon, Huawei, Microsoft, and Tencent now match those of some middle-income countries. This is having geopolitical implications, with a split into a Western and a Chinese controlled internet starting to emerge.¹³ States are surveilling and censoring online activities, often with the compliance of technology and telecommunication companies eager to maintain their operating licenses.¹⁴

Social media platforms have become the gatekeepers of news and information without any real accountability or regulatory oversight. From the United States to Myanmar, social media are surpassing print newspapers as a news source for all consumers.¹⁵ How especially Facebook and Google choose to operate as the gatekeepers of information has enormous consequences for media worldwide, but particularly in countries where media literacy is low and internet penetration is on the rise, with many people considering Facebook on mobile devices to be the Internet¹⁶. While social media can be used to democratize, it has increasingly been used to disrupt and undermine democracy.

¹¹ As per as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which acknowledged the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls and calls for consideration of the special needs of women and girls during conflict, repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.

¹² World Economic Forum: The global economic balance of power is shifting, September 20, 2017. Available from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/09/the-global-economic-balance-of-power-is-shifting> [accessed September 13 2019]

¹³ Kathimerini: Ian Bremmer: How digital TPP could help world chart digital way forward, August 3, 2019. Available from <http://www.ekathimerini.com/243247/opinion/ekathimerini/comment/how-digital-tpp-could-help-world-chart-digital-way-forward> [accessed September 13 2019]

¹⁴ The New York Times: For the U.S. and China, a Technology Cold War That's Freezing Over, March 23, 2018. Available from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/23/technology/trump-china-tariffs-tech-cold-war.html> [accessed September 13 2019]

¹⁵ Pew Research Center: Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source, December 10, 2018. Available from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/> [accessed September 13 2019]; IMS-Fojo: Myanmar's media from an audience perspective, September 2018. Available from https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Audiences-in-Myanmar_2018_finalweb.pdf [accessed September 20 2019]

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 54-57

Never has so much information been available to the public. Mis-and-disinformation¹⁷ is being put out in large quantities along with junk news¹⁸. Much of this mimics bona fide journalism, further blurring the distinction between mis-and-disinformation and reputable and reliable public interest media. Some countries have turned to legislative efforts to combat online hate speech and so-called “fake news” which unduly restricts the right to freedom of expression. But ultimately governments alone are not equipped to regulate the myriad of challenges posed by the internet. Citizens, technology companies, governments and civic organizations must work together to find solutions.

Women are disproportionately affected by these trends. Not only are women severely underrepresented as sources in the news both in print and digital¹⁹, women’s access to digital news is also unequal. In middle-and-low-income countries, women are 26 per cent less likely to use mobile internet than men.²⁰ The digital gender gap is further exacerbated by gender biases in the coding of digital applications and artificial intelligence technologies²¹. Misogyny and gender-based violence and harassment are rife online, with one UN commission finding that 73% of women have been exposed to or have experienced some form of online violence.²²

IMS’ response

IMS will work with its public interest media partners to develop new business models that maximize the benefits of digital technologies and enhance audience engagement so that public interest content is more widely available on social media and other online platforms. Media workers should be able to analyze and understanding digital information. And by engaging with their audiences, public interest media can encourage audience members to think critically about the information they receive. IMS and our partners will also participate in national, regional and global policy responses to mis-and-disinformation and hateful content online, as well as efforts to make the Internet a safer space for women.

The viability of public interest media

Trust, innovation and youth

If public interest content is to be more widely available, public interest media must become more viable. But media are losing their advertising revenue to the technology companies, while the availability free online content makes it difficult to charge people for quality journalism. The economic fall-out from the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to further undermine the viability of public interest media already grappling with a myriad of challenges in volatile environments. As the pandemic spread, the audiences of many public interest media doubled or tripled overnight as the public sought out reliable information. But at the same time their revenues plummeted.

¹⁷ National Endowment for Democracy: ISSUE BRIEF: DISTINGUISHING DISINFORMATION FROM PROPAGANDA, MISINFORMATION, AND “FAKE NEWS”, October 17 2017, available through <https://www.ned.org/issue-brief-distinguishing-disinformation-from-propaganda-misinformation-and-fake-news/> [accessed August 30 2019].

¹⁸ University of Oxford, Junk News Aggregator: available through: <https://newsaggregator.oii.ox.ac.uk/methodology.php> [accessed August 30 2019]

¹⁹ Global Media Monitoring Project 2015: Who Makes the News? 2015, p. 8. Available from https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/Who_makes_the_news_-_Global_Media_Monitoring_Project_2015.pdf [accessed September 20 2019]

²⁰ Sey, A. & Hafkin, N. (Eds). (2019). Taking stock: Data and evidence on gender equality in digital access, skills and leadership, p. 25. Available from <https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/EQUALS%20Research%20Report%202019.pdf> [accessed September 23 2019]

²¹ UNESCO, EQUALS Skills Coalition “I’d Blush if I Could: Closing Gender Divides in Digital Skills Through Education” (2019) <https://bit.ly/2wYllyK> p.4

²² <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/highlightdocumentenglish.pdf>

Technology can overcome the friction of distance between stories, media and their audiences caused by large distances, insecurity and a lack of resources. Internet and smartphone penetration in many of IMS' programme countries remain relatively low, which means older technologies are still prevalent. This gives us more time to experiment and learn from the disruption that has wrought havoc with business models in more developed media markets. A number of IMS' existing partners are already ahead of the game and serve as both role models and potential resource people for other IMS partners.

Viability increasingly depends upon the relationship media have with their audience.²³ Public interest media are looking to gain the trust of their audience by making the newsgathering process more transparent, and by making audience engagement a part of both content creation and distribution. There is also a business as well as an ethical case for public interest media becoming more diverse. Diversifying newsrooms could attract more women as readers and listeners, resulting in new audiences and revenue streams²⁴ which public interest media need to survive.

IMS' response

The capture of many mainstream media by political and commercial interests means the pool of public interest media for IMS to work with is relatively small, and these will be increasingly vulnerable following the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore IMS' ambition is to work with and grow the public interest media that exist, helping them to weather the Covid-19 storm, while also identifying and nurturing new "start-ups", particularly those involving women and young people who are conspicuously underrepresented in all aspects of the media. Nurturing young media workers and entrepreneurs is essential if public interest media is to have a future beyond the next 30 years. IMS will harness the experience and expertise of existing digital frontrunners for the benefit of other public interest media partners. This is with a view to nurturing a cohort of media workers who can make public interest media appealing and relevant to the digital-first generation.

Safety

By the end of 2018, 80 journalists had been killed while 348 were in prison and a further 60 were being held hostage²⁵. All these figures were higher than 2017, and reflect a steady rise in hostile, anti-media rhetoric by political leaders who try to discredit legitimate media coverage as "fake news," an increasingly common way of undermining the right to freedom of expression and delegitimising independent media.²⁶ At the same time, media workers – women in particular²⁷ – have endured a surge in online harassment. There has also been an increase in lawsuits filed by powerful institutions and individuals against media that shed light on issues of public interest, the defence of which can be both time consuming and financially draining.

Women media workers are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault in reprisal for their work. Many "are subject to a particularly damaging brand of vitriol that includes, in high volume, explicit threats of

²³ <https://medium.com/de-correspondent/optimizing-journalism-for-trust-1c67e81c123>

²⁴ Zeisler A. (2017), Media's Gender gap: Investigating Relationships between women's news production and consumption. Available through: <http://www.mediaimpactproject.org/uploads/5/1/2/7/5127770/womennewsroom.pdf>

²⁵ Reporters Without Borders. *Annual Report 2018*, available through: https://gallery.mailchimp.com/5cb8824c726d51483ba41891e/files/e227a03e-3eb1-4cc4-818f-9741cb92b00a/Annual_report_RSf_2018.pdf [accessed September 2, 2019]

²⁶ UNESCO (2018c), p. 114.

²⁷ Internet Health Report 2019: <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/women-journalists-feel-the-brunt-of-online-harassment/> [accessed September 6, 2019];

Chen, G. M. et al. Women Journalists and Online Harassment (2018), University of Texas. Available through <https://mediaengagement.org/research/women-journalists/> [accessed September 6, 2019]

sexual violence, personal insults and circulation of private information or demeaning images.”²⁸ In one survey, 40 percent of respondents said they avoided reporting certain stories because of online harassment.²⁹ Online threats compound the stress and trauma experienced by all media workers, which may cause resistance or isolation.³⁰ In some cases, media workers find ways to cope but many resort to self-censorship, which is likely widespread but, by its nature, difficult to track.³¹

Seven years after it was approved, the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity has focused attention on the dangers that media workers face. But, for lack of political will, the UN action plan has done little to deter those responsible for the escalation in attacks on the media. All this further undermines the viability of public interest media by inhibiting their coverage of public interest issues.

IMS' response

In partnership with other key stakeholders, IMS will continue to actively promote the UN Plan of Action by:

- Supporting locally anchored, comprehensive and gender-sensitive safety mechanisms;
- Highlighting and addressing the specific safety and protection concerns of women media workers;
- Strengthening coordination between national and global responses;
- Encouraging the participation of like-minded civic organizations;
- Alleviating the psycho-social toll working in volatile and often violent societies has on media workers.

Greater attention will be paid to addressing impunity through independent state mechanisms that require legal powers, long-term funding and suitably skilled personnel. IMS will garner the active support of like-minded civic organizations while also strengthening the ability of judiciaries and security forces to apply international and regional standards on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

Public interest media tend to be exposed to greater risks because of the topics they cover and the powerful interests they scrutinize. Therefore appropriate, context-specific safety measures will be integral to the package of support IMS provides to all our public interest media partners. We will also make sure women media workers who are already under-represented in newsrooms are not lost to public interest media because of the hostility and abuse they can encounter.

²⁸ International Media Support (2019). *The Safety of Women Journalists: Breaking the Cycle of Silence and Violence*. (p. 9) <https://bit.ly/39VTenD>

²⁹ IWMF and Troll Busters. *Attacks and Harassment: The impact on female journalists and their reporting*, 2018, pp. 6-7, available through: <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Attacks-and-Harassment.pdf> [accessed September 2, 2019]

³⁰ See for example, A. Feinstein, *Mexican Journalists: An Investigation of Their Emotional Health*, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, August 2012, 25, 480–483, and M. Betz, *Commitment Amid conflict: The experience of Central African journalists covering their country's war*, in *Media and Mass Atrocity*, 2019.

³¹ For further discussion of this see *Civics People Power Under Attack* 2018.

IMS' core values

These are the values IMS strives for in our partnerships, and the way we design and manage every aspect of our interventions from start to finish:

Comprehensive: IMS considers all the main components of a democratic media ecosystem in every intervention. This does not mean that we support all these components at the same time. IMS makes strategic choices based on the priorities of each country, what others are already doing there, and our own strengths.

Collaborative: In order to be comprehensive, IMS collaborates with others working in the media development field. IMS' partnership approach stems from this principle.

Catalytic: We strive to be flexible and to adapt our interventions to the changing needs and priorities of each country we operate in and the partners we work with. We are always on the look-out for innovative ways of doing things.

Accountable: We strive to document and explain in a transparent manner what has been done and achieved with the funds we receive. We monitor and evaluate our work so that we know what effect it is having and, if necessary, we adjust what we do based on this evidence. This is so that our donors know that their money has been used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Theory of Change

IMS envisions peaceful, stable and democratic societies with accountable institutions that are sustained, supported and promoted through strong and effective public interest media in an enabling environment with freedom of expression and access to information. This requires a vibrant and inclusive civic space in which media audiences and civic organizations share and discuss public interest content produced by media they trust.

Therefore, IMS helps public interest media in countries experiencing armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, rapid political change and authoritarian rule to tell compelling, fact-based and contextualised stories that give their readers, viewers and listeners a rounded view of topics of public interest. IMS also helps public interest media to build strong and trusting relationships with their audiences, and to adopt innovative business models and practices so that they can afford to produce and distribute public interest content.

To further enhance the quality and viability of public interest media, IMS also works with media, media support organizations and other civic groups to:

- Ensure members of the public can access, participate in and be fairly portrayed by the media, regardless of people's genders, identities and socio-economic circumstances;
- Protect media workers of all genders from risks and threats that may prevent them from producing and distributing public interest content;
- Challenge disinformation and hate speech;
- Advocate for laws and policies that protect free expression and access to information, as well as promote transparent and accountable self-regulation of content.

Assumptions

Our theory of change is based on the following assumptions:

- Public interest media partners value ethical standards, viability strategies and gender equality;
- Public interest media partners recognise the newsworthiness of topics related to the democratic and sustainable development of their societies;
- Civic organizations respect the editorial independence of media partners, and are willing and able to provide media partners with access to communities directly affected by issues media workers are looking to cover;
- Audience engagement, diversified income streams, organizational development, collaboration between public interest media and innovation are the building blocks for viable public interest media;
- Audiences are more likely to consume, identify with and ultimately trust public interest media that proactively and respectfully engage with them;
- Public interest media partners and their allies can identify areas of common interest that provide the basis for alliances and coalitions that advocate for these interests;
- Public interest media and technology companies recognise areas of common interest that provide a basis for addressing mis-and-disinformation and hate speech online;

- The owners of public interest media take responsibility for the safety of those working for their media and make sure their media workers can access and apply available safety and protection measures.

IMS' contribution

With funds we raise from public and private sector donors, IMS designs and manages projects and programmes that support the role of public interest media in countries experiencing armed conflict, humanitarian crises, rapid political change and authoritarian rule, where civic space is usually restricted and fragile, and the institutions that hold those in power to account – including the media – tend to be under-resourced.

Before starting a project or programme, IMS systematically assesses the coverage and needs of public interest media, the environment in which they operate and those with an interest in and influence over this environment. IMS then provides selected local partners with funds, advice, mentoring, training, expertise, facilitation and links to other resources that help partners address these needs through the most appropriate and feasible combination³² of strategies aimed at a) enhancing the quality of public interest content and the viability of public interest media, and b) creating a more enabling environment for public interest media to operate in.

A context specific approach

The extent of these changes, and the time they take vary from country to country depending on the context, the needs and capacity of those we work with, as well as IMS' own capacity and resources. Each intervention will therefore have its own specific results chains and assumptions based broadly on the overall theory of change described above, which serves as a framework for our programmes and projects.

Let us apply the theory of change to two hypothetical scenarios: one with an opening civic space and the other a closed or closing civic space. Broadly speaking, in a closed or closing space the authorities' appetite for democratic reform is minimal or none-existent, and there is intolerance of public interest media and the work of reform-minded civic organizations. An opening space is the opposite: the authorities are committed to reform and democratisation, which breeds greater tolerance of and respect for public interest media and civic organizations.

When civic space does begin to open, IMS and our partners look to establish and advance a vibrant and viable culture of bold and strident public interest media, while remaining sensitive and alert to the inherent division within the society. We push hard for policies and laws that enhance and protect free expression and access to information, and vigorously resist attempts by those in power to back-track.

In a closing or closed space, IMS and our partners need to be more cautious. We test but do not overreach the boundaries of what public interest media can and cannot cover while helping them to survive and make ends meet. We resist further restrictions the authorities try to impose and seize opportunities to challenge existing restrictions, while quietly preparing the ground for when the opportunity for greater openness eventually arises.

³² Depending on what others are already doing to meet the needs of public interest media, the resources IMS has available, the partners in each country as well as their priorities and capacity.

Partners and stakeholders

IMS supports and works directly with “partners” who, in turn, work with and influence other individuals and groups (“stakeholders”) who can also influence the changes envisaged in our theory of change. Whereas all programmes will work with a selection of partners, the relationship with stakeholders will be determined by the context as often it will not be possible or beneficial to work with certain stakeholders.

Partners

Public interest media committed to public interest values that reach and engage with members of the public who are the ultimate beneficiaries of IMS’ work.

Media support organizations such as unions and associations of media workers, institutions, as well as individuals who train and regulate media and media workers, as well as human rights defenders, lawyers and safety specialists who protect and promote the interests of public interest media.

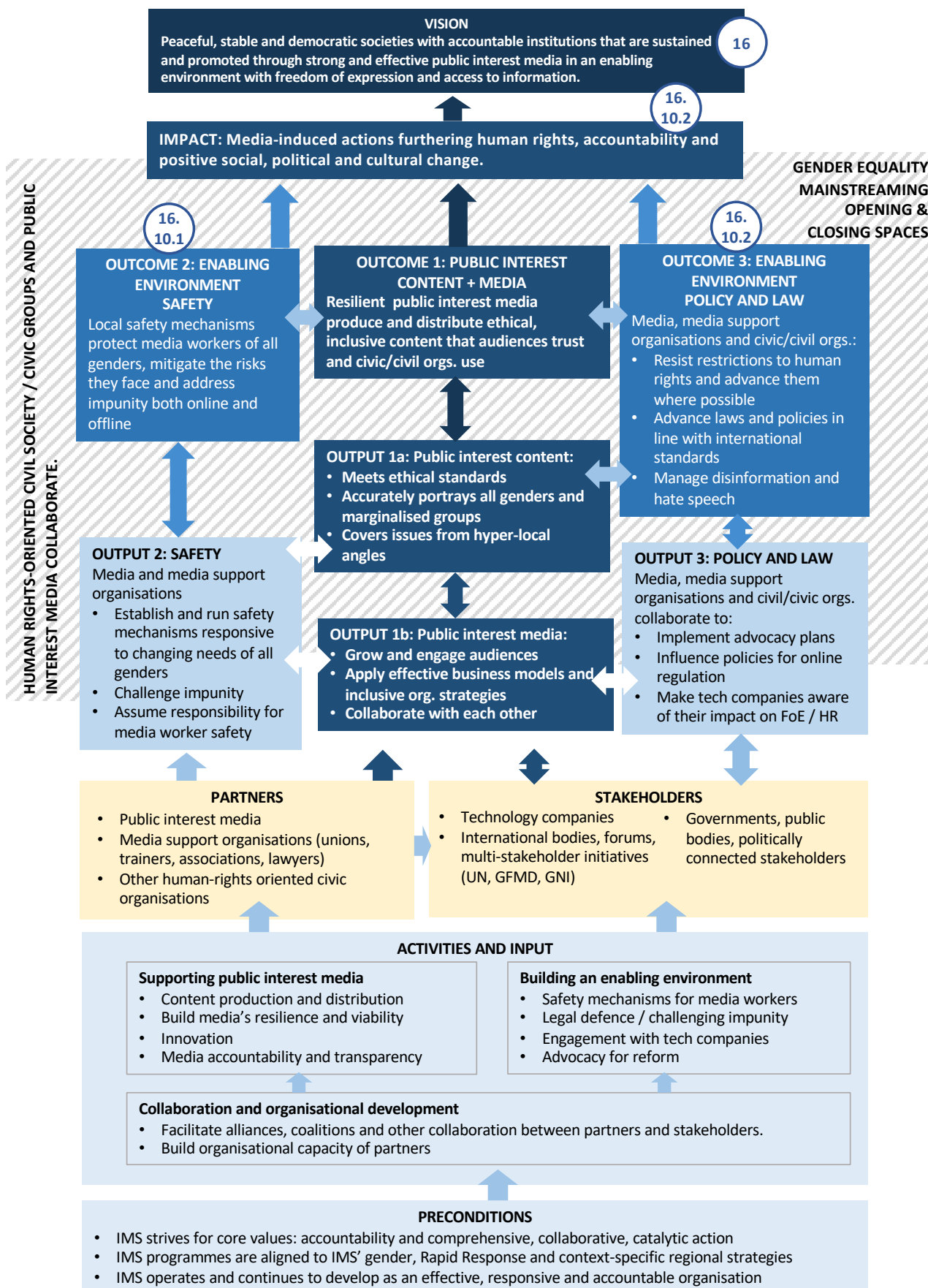
Civic organizations and civically-engaged individuals who respect human rights and can provide IMS’ public interest media partners with access to the information and sources they (the media) need to produce their stories. They may also use and distribute public interest content once it is produced and can further help media and media support organizations to advocate for a more enabling environment.

Stakeholders

Technology companies that control the hardware, software and communication channels on which public interest media increasingly rely to produce and distribute their stories. Therefore, they influence the viability of public interest media and the public’s access to information more broadly.

International bodies and forums that influence the policies, decisions and debates that shape the environment in which IMS’ partners and their beneficiaries operate. They may set standards that other stakeholders follow or may help IMS and our partners to access and influence these other stakeholders.

National governments and public bodies that make and implement the policies and laws that directly influence the environment in which IMS’ partners and their beneficiaries operate. Government and public bodies are essential for long-term, sustainable change in these countries, but are often a barrier to the changes IMS and our partners strive for. In which case, IMS and our partners may look to influence individuals within these bodies who can, in turn, influence change from within.



Strategic priorities

IMS' goal is to contribute to a vibrant and inclusive civic space where the media induces actions that further human rights, accountability and social, political and cultural change. As part of this, our goal is to have public interest media reach relevant audiences so that they can discuss, share and act on this content, and to have media and civic/civil groups and organisations to collaborate to bring about this change.

IMS has three strategic priorities to bring about its overall impact goal:

1. Enhance the quality and inclusivity of public interest content and the viability of media producing and distributing this content;
2. Create conditions that encourage the viable production, distribution and consumption of inclusive public interest content (an “enabling environment”);
3. Undertake the organizational development necessary for IMS to implement this strategy.

Strategic priority 1: Enhance public interest content and media

Main outcome: By the end of 2023, IMS' public interest media partners produce and distribute ethical, inclusive coverage of public interest issues that audiences trust and civic organizations make use of.

What this requires from IMS and our partners

Ethical and inclusive content

IMS will continue to support the production and distribution of public interest content with funds and expert mentoring, with a focus on in-depth and investigative journalism and documentary film, as well as coverage by hyper-local media. IMS will facilitate collaboration between public interest media, as well as their co-operation with civic organizations that can provide information and access to sources the media need for their coverage, particularly on topics related to democratic sustainable development. This is with a view to civic organizations then using the content in their work and distributing it to their beneficiaries where possible. This co-operation should also assist media partners' access to those on the sharp end of development challenges, particularly women and other groups who are often overlooked or inaccurately portrayed in media coverage.

For this to happen, IMS will help both parties to identify mutual benefits from co-operating in this way; the benefit to public interest media of accessing new information sources and the benefits to civic organizations of having access to quality, editorially independent content when it comes to influencing and holding decision makers to account.

All content IMS supports will be guided by ethical standards that the media partner and IMS agree to up front. These standards will, among other things, address the fair and accurate portrayal of all genders as well as marginalized groups. Together, IMS and the media partner will then assess the extent to which these standards have been met and how the partner could further enhance the quality of their coverage if necessary.

Viable media

At the same time, public interest media partners need to be able to produce and distribute their coverage of public interest issues without depending on donor funding or risk of being captured by political and commercial interests. Therefore, public interest media partners will also receive bespoke assistance that helps them to:

- Grow and engage with their audiences in a way that builds the audience's trust in the media, and enables audiences to assess information more critically;
- Diversify their income streams;
- Develop and apply innovative business models and inclusive organizational strategies;
- Survive shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Collaborate with other media in areas of common interest.

For these and other viability strategies to succeed, public interest media need the time and space to experiment in a way that reduce the risks of trying out new technologies and approaches. IMS has a growing network of innovation hubs and digital media frontrunners we can work with to inspire, nurture and mentor other public interest media, particularly those involving young people and women.

Implication for IMS

IMS will develop our expertise in media business development, gender-transformative content production and facilitating new linkages with civic organizations as we go. IMS will also bolster our experience and expertise in digital platforms and information analytics, as well as our knowledge of how media audiences access and use information during conflicts, crises and periods of rapid political change. We will also revise our needs assessment and media content monitoring methodologies to improve our analysis of public interest media coverage.

Strategic priority 2: Enabling and inclusive environments

Safety, protection and impunity

Main outcome: By 2023, local safety mechanisms protect media workers of all genders, mitigate the risks they face and address impunity both online and offline.

Policy and law

Main outcome: By 2023, media, media support organizations and other stakeholders:

- Resist restrictions to human rights;
- Advance laws and policies in line with international human rights standards;
- Address disinformation and hate speech.

What this requires from IMS and our partners

Safety, protection and impunity

IMS will continue to work with national and international partners to set-up and run locally anchored, mechanisms that address the safety of media workers. These will be responsive to the differing safety and protection needs of different genders working in the media. No single tool improves the increasingly hostile conditions in which many media workers operate. Rather this requires a multi-pronged approach that promotes the “three P’s” (prevention, protection and prosecution) adopted by UNESCO, the UN agency coordinating the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. It takes unity, collaboration and

a joint strategic approach among different stakeholders to effectively address such a wide scope of actions and ensure states are held accountable to their commitments under the UN plan.

Policy and law

IMS will engage with social media platforms more directly about the impact they have in conflict zones and look for ways in which disinformation can be rapidly identified and addressed. At a national, regional and global level, IMS will contribute to the ongoing search for balanced policy solutions to disinformation and hate speech, and the regulation of online content with a view to improving audiences' access to and trust in public interest content and preserving freedom of expression more broadly.

Meanwhile, IMS and partners will build and strengthen advocacy alliances and coalitions in programme countries that involve not just media and media support organizations, but also civic organizations and movements with an interest in creating an open and inclusive civic space – particularly those representing the interests of women and marginalised sections of society. Where appropriate, these alliances and coalitions will also resist the further limitation of human rights, as well as prepare for and then push for reform when opportunities arise.

Implication for IMS

IMS will continue to review and refine our approach to safety, protection and impunity so that this remains responsive to partners' needs. IMS will build on and consolidate our growing knowledge and experience regarding the safety needs of women working in the media. Meanwhile, IMS will further strengthen our ties and collaboration with the many experts and specialist organizations dealing with digital rights and Internet freedom by making sure the interests of our partners are understood and addressed. IMS will also consolidate our approach to supporting advocacy alliances and coalitions.

Strategic priority 3: The further development of IMS

Whereas Strategic priority 1 and 2 focus on the programmatic results and impact of the institution – what is found in our ToC – Strategic priority 3 in turn provides the overview of what needs to be in place in order for those results and impact to be brought about, namely IMS' three HOWs, which are detailed in the organisation's institutional results framework:

Main outcomes: By the end of 2023, IMS will have in place:

- HOW 1: An effective programme portfolio that builds on strategic development and quality programme management, reflecting IMS' strategy and building on best practice;
- HOW 2: An adept and accountable organization committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all and the eradication of discrimination and harassment;
- HOW 3: Diversified and durable funding.

What this requires from IMS and our partners

IMS will implement organisational developing according to its institutional results framework and annual work plans. Both will be reviewed and adjusted annually.

Cross-cutting elements

These are integral to all our strategic priorities and are mainstreamed within all our programmes.

Rapid response

IMS' Rapid Response (RR) mechanism represents the organization's ability to provide – at short notice and with flexible funding - timely and unique support to local media caught in emergencies, conflict or sudden political change. The mechanism is global and entails interventions that are context-specific, targeted, and limited in scope as well as duration. The aim is to enable media to continue operating and to do so safely, while producing reliable, accurate, diverse and conflict-sensitive information for the public. At times, RR will act as a preventive measure during an unexpected clampdown on media and civic actors. At other times, it will be a response to situations in which media experience a sudden opening-up of a previously closed society. RR interventions are planned and implemented in line with IMS' overall strategy and in close coordination and cooperation with relevant IMS departments, units, regional offices and experts. Details of the justification, entry criteria, methodology and tools for RR are described in the RR Strategy for 2020-23.

Gender equality

Societies are not peaceful and democratic without gender equality, and public interest media cannot contribute to a vibrant and inclusive civic space if they perpetuate or reinforce gender inequalities. Therefore, IMS' gender approach advocates for public interest content and media that address the needs and interests of all genders. In line with Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, IMS works to ensure that all genders will have the same rights to freedom of expression and access to information. IMS also recognizes the intersectionality of genders and a wide range of other categories used to oppress including sexual orientation, race, class, ability, religion, and so forth. IMS adopts a broad understanding of gender issues to include men and masculinities, as men are also affected by the patriarchy and by its harmful gender stereotypes and norms which the media can perpetuate and reinforce. IMS' commitment to gender equality in and through the media is summarized as:

- Promoting ethical and diverse public interest content that is gender-sensitive and transformative;
- Developing gender-sensitive policies and practices in media houses that encourage women's participation in media production;
- Ensuring that all individuals regardless of gender as well as members of marginalised groups have access to public interest content that is relevant to and representative of them.

Digital freedom

Media workers operating online need to be safe and protected from attack just as those operating offline do. All media workers need laws, policies and regulations that uphold and protect their rights to free expression, information and privacy. The Internet and other digital communication technologies influence every aspect of IMS' work. The online media environment requires knowledge and expertise that IMS is looking to mainstream within all its areas of strategic focus. While IMS' staff need not be technological experts, we all need to be aware of technology's influence on IMS' work and to remain abreast of rapid technological change.

Topics of special public interest

Where appropriate, IMS will prioritise support for media coverage of specific topics of public interest that are having a profound effect on the global humanitarian and development agenda. These topics may include:

- The climate crisis
- The Covid-19 pandemic
- Gender-based violence and discrimination
- Migration
- Accountability of development aid and humanitarian assistance
- Transitional justice
- Peace processes
- Elections
- Violent extremism

IMS will elaborate upon its strategic approach to specific public-interest topics as and when they arise, in a series of strategy papers.

