
November 2023

Policy

Partnership Policy

Partnership Policy 1.1

Revision history

Version	Date	Name	Description
1.1	November 2023	GOLD/THG	Adopted by EMG October 27, 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

IMS is nothing without its partnerships. Since its formation, IMS has put partnerships at the very heart of its identity - vision, mission and operations based on a fundamental belief that real and sustainable social change is best achieved by collaboration and partnerships between likeminded people and organisations in pursuit of shared interests and aligned objectives.

This policy is intended to clarify IMS's engagement in partnerships. The partnership policy should be read in connection with relevant guidelines and templates that support its operationalisation¹.

2. WHY WE WORK IN PARTNERSHIPS

IMS promotes better societies supported and fuelled by good journalism around the world. This vision is only achievable through engagement, collaboration, and creation of synergies between likeminded local and international stakeholders to effectively align and concert efforts, resources, and capacities to strengthen media freedom, freedom of expression and access to reliable information.

IMS's efforts to contribute to positive change starts and ends with the lived experience, knowledge, dedication, and courage of those directly affected on the ground. Embracing the principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, IMS holds that those affected in a national or regional setting should lead and hold ownership of their own development agendas, thus subscribing to the principle of "*Nothing about me, without me*".

Through partnerships with likeminded local media and civil society actors, IMS places the people, media and media ecosystem actors, human rights and civil society groups directly affected at the centre of agenda setting, strategizing and implementation of its programmes. IMS believes that local ownership and leadership is the most effective way to create long-term social change on the ground. Local actors hold unparalleled knowledge and understanding of contextual needs, social dynamics, challenges, potentials to inform efforts and to drive change. Close and trust-based partnerships with key local actors and agents of social change therefore form the very cornerstone of any IMS strategizing, programming, and operation.

IMS also engages and develops close partnerships and networks with likeminded international organisations and agencies with shared interests and aligned human rights-based approaches. Through partnerships with key international media development and freedom of expression actors, IMS works to harmonize international development agendas, support, and promote concerted efforts, operationally and strategically, that are informed by, respect and align with local priorities without overburdening local actors. Furthermore, partnerships with likeminded international organisations in the media development and freedom of expression sphere serve as important vehicles to effectively advocate and promote media freedom, media development, freedom of expression and safety of journalists' issues in international fora and interstate agencies – and to offer benchmarks and best practices for national actions.

¹ Available for staff at WIRE, and for partners through the partner portal (to come)

3. WHO WE PARTNER WITH

IMS enters partnerships with key local, regional, and international media and civil society actors with whom we share strategic interests in furthering good journalism for better societies.

Depending on the context IMS partners with a host of different types of organisations and entities, these include:

- *Media Content Production Partners* engaged in public interest content production or distribution in the form of journalism in a wide variety of shapes and forms (radio, television, online productions, incl. SoMe, bloggers, print, documentary films, etc.).
- *Media Ecosystem Partners* engaged in establishing an enabling environment for public interest media and freedom of expression. These include partners engaged in media development, advocacy, legal rights related to freedom of expression and access to information, safety for media workers. It furthermore counts media and journalist organisations, media associations, media research institutions, media training institutions, etc.
- *Civil Society/Civic Groups* covers an array of partners with a focus different from media, but that is still relevant to reach our shared goals. This could be organisations or groups focusing on youth, women, LGBTQI+, environment, migration as well as broader human rights agendas, humanitarian, or development organisations/groups.
- *Other* actors IMS collaborates with may be state or autonomous public institutions at national or regional levels, UN agencies, multi-stakeholder initiatives, etc.

Partners must be committed to furthering inclusive coverage of public interest issues, incl. diverse gender representations and inclusion of minority groups, and marginalised communities. In addition, IMS aims to engage with partners who either want to or already contributes to gender transformative change in their contexts.

Partners may be not-for profit organisations, NGOs, CSOs, private companies, loosely formed or un-registered groups², public or semi-public institutions.

IMS collaborates with these groups at all levels, whether local, national, regional, or international.

4. HOW WE IDENTIFY PARTNERS

The identification of partners most often happens as part of the analyses IMS engages in before starting operations in a new country or setting, sometimes in connection with starting a new programme phase or as part of emergency response or in connection with major political changes.

² Even though a formal registration is preferred, lack of registration is not an obstacle to a partnership as we understand that contextual challenges may not allow for such.

The identification unfolds in several ways depending on IMS's prior knowledge, network, and access to the given country or setting as well as the social changes and impact sought for the envisioned engagement.

The identification process always includes a context analysis and a mapping of stakeholders, including potential partners. The analysis, shall preferably, also include a power analysis to identify groups in marginalisation and underserved groups, as a means to leave no one behind. IMS seeks to always involve stakeholders from the media and freedom of expression sector in the mapping and analyses to ensure that key issues and their root causes are identified within a collaborative and contextually driven approach that fosters ownership and sustainability among key actors in the context of engagement.

In line with IMS's principle of working comprehensively to address media development and freedom of expression, context based; and with a view to not duplicating what other actors are already doing, IMS's partner portfolio is most often composed by a variety of different partners and categories of partnerships and may count partners working on different levels, across sectors, including duty-bearers and rights holders organised in various ways.

The selection process of partners can take many forms. In some contexts, open calls may be used to ensure transparency and to promote the sector wide approach of IMS publicly. Most often, however, IMS operates with curated identification or closed calls due to volatile and conflict-ridden contexts, characterised by distrust, and perhaps a weak media sector, where IMS risks playing into local power dynamics not conducive for the future programming. In these contexts, it is often not meaningful to make open calls since these can risk compromising reputation, safety, security issues, and in worst case constitutes life treats to potential partners.

In other cases, the context may be stable enough for open calls, but the media sector is weak or non-existing, why potential partners' capacity for engaging in open call is low, or the media sector is small leaving only a few actors eligible for collaboration, which thus calls for more suitable approaches, such as consultative processes or similar.

Whether potential partners are identified in one way or another, there is always a process of analysis and reflection leading up to suggesting a given partner for partnership. These reflections are recorded, clarifying the justification for the given selection. This includes assessment of:

- Partners' strategic *relevance* to the context in which the programme will work.
- Partners' ability to or *potential* for achieving tangible results and/or lasting changes (in the context and sector).
- Partners' *relevance* within the partner portfolio as a whole (including comparative advantage if there are more than one to choose from);
- The quality and feasibility of a partnership, including partners agreement to key principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)
- The added value of the partnership to the partner and to IMS.

Combined these key criteria help IMS to scope its interventions in collaboration with partners and to ensure that IMS adds value and that resources invested are spent aimed at promoting good journalism and better societies.

5. HOW WE WORK IN PARTNERSHIPS

IMS believes that mutual trust is an essential component in a fruitful partnership. IMS strives to develop and nurture trust-filled relationships with its partners, grounded in values of integrity and solidarity, and based on dialogue, mutual accountability, and transparency.

While IMS seeks to uphold these values in and across all partnerships, IMS recognises that there is a power imbalance between IMS and partners – and that each partnership is unique.

IMS distinguishes between three partnership categories: Strategic partnerships, activity partnership or associate partnerships. The categories serve to clarify expectations and establishes the ways in which IMS can engage and contribute to a partnership. IMS may engage in:

- *Strategic partnerships* with media content production and media ecosystem actors that are strategically important parts of a healthy and flourishing media ecosystem or key drivers of media development and freedom of expression in their local context.

Strategic partnerships are aimed at enabling long-term viability and impact of key drivers of a healthy media ecosystem in the specific local context. Partnerships may entail a variety of contributions from IMS (in terms of funding, capacity development support, networking etc) tailored specifically to serve the needs of the strategic partner in question.

- *Activity partnerships* can be extended to media content producers, media ecosystem, civil society as well as other relevant organizations and entities with shared interest in implementation of time-specific activity in their local context. Activity partnerships are focused on ensuring the partner's implementation of a strategically important activity in the local context and are thus short-to-midterm focused and time specific with eventual IMS support focused on the exact activity/project.
- *Associate partnerships* are extended to international organisations for joint action, consortia or coordinated strategic collaborations. The engagement is activity/project/grant time-specific and does not entail capacity development support between the parties. Activities are often implemented outside the partner's own context.

IMS's partnership categorisation is a descriptive typology. Alas, the categorisation does not indicate that one partner holds more value than another, but simply that it is a different type of partnership. That said, the resources and engagement invested by IMS differ across partnership categories. The long-term involvement and provision of comprehensive tailored support to strategic partners with core operations within IMS strategic outcome areas are cornerstones and strategic priorities in any IMS programmatic engagement.

For the sake of mutually accountability, transparency and management of expectation, IMS relies on written agreements to provide a detailed, clear, and mutually agreed framework for each specific collaboration.

6. HOW WE PREPARE FOR EXIT & ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY

IMS's partnerships are not intended to continue indefinitely nor to remain static.

During a partnership, there will often be different phases. A partnership may be entered as an **activity** partnership, to build up trust and test possibilities of working well together, and then later be transformed into a long-term **strategic** partnership. Or a partnership may be financially supported in some instances, and in other it may be an intentional working collaboration based on an MoU and shared goals without any financial transactions.

No matter the partnership category, IMS's ambition is to work with partners on our shared strategic or activity goals and ideally withdraw when these have been reached, or until the involvement of any of the partners is no longer adding value.

IMS is conscious that sustainability of media and other partners is very hard to achieve, and that partners may depend on external sources of funding and the international networks they become part of for protection and visibility. IMS and partners shall therefore strive to gradually diminish the dependence in the partnership by actively preparing for ways of diversifying income and consolidating the organisation in terms of governance, administrative and finances. Likewise, IMS works actively to introduce partners to business options, relevant international networks, and platforms, that can also bolster their survival and independence. This said, there may be contexts and situations, where exiting a partnership, will imply that the partner is no longer able to operate. IMS approach to this, is both being flexible to extend partnerships, for as long as outcomes are meaningful to the context and undertaken with a view to value for money; and IMS can secure funding. Reflections on this are documented in the renewal of justification notes.

IMS operates with different types of exit and transitions depending on the partnership category³. Across the categories, IMS applies its HRBA principles of accountability, participation, and transparency to ensure that the partner and IMS have shared understanding and agree on the partnership trajectory. As such the exit or transition strategy is developed and implemented in an inclusive manner, where both (all) partners take leadership and ownership of the process⁴.

The dialogues around planning and preparation for exit or transition varies depending on the partnership category. For **strategic** partnerships, IMS and the partner are encouraged to discuss the endline and sustainability from the outset of the collaboration to assess the added value of the partnership for both parties. Ideally this shall be followed up on an ongoing basis, including regularly revisiting of plans and perspectives for the partnership and by gradually preparing for a time, where the partnership is ending or transitioning into a different relation .

For **activity** and **associate** partnerships, the endline, is normally defined up front in that, they are focused on the implementation of a specific activity or project. Both the partner and IMS

³ See section 5 for an elaboration of the partnership categories.

⁴ Further details and guidelines for 'Planning for sustainable and responsible exit' can be found in IMS PCM guide (to come).

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are aware of this, and that the partnership will need renewal to continue after it has been completed.

An additional type of exit may be as part of crisis management. IMS is morally and contractually bound by ethical guidelines, principles of anti-corruption, PSEAH and other which also applies when working in partnerships that equally can cause the termination of the partnership⁵

⁵ This is further explained in the formal Partnership Agreement.