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DEVELOPMENT

Report
Coordinating Media Assistance and Journalism Support Efforts

November 2022

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Executive Summary

> For the purposes of this study, coordination is defined as follows:
>
> *A collective effort by development actors to avoid duplication, explore synergies, and secure consensus on a common strategy that is informed by an analysis of local beneficiary needs and priorities as well as ongoing assessment of impact.*
>
> *Coordination work should ensure that all parties have an overview of the existing media development landscape in any given country and can shape their projects to complement other programmes and address gaps in provision.*

The need for coordination within the media development industry is widely recognised—particularly in the wake of conflict or crisis. Common wisdom holds that it plays an essential role in avoiding duplication or contradictions between programmes funded by different donors and offers a unique opportunity to explore synergies between complementary strands of work. Stakeholders suggest that coordination can also help to harmonise or combine efforts to assess the needs of beneficiaries and to evaluate the impact of programming across a wide portfolio of projects.

Ideally, then, coordination should involve donors, implementing agencies, and where appropriate, local organisations involved in coordination efforts alike thereby ensuring that the development community can make optimum use of available resources by determining priority areas and apportioning spheres of interest and responsibility. This approach can facilitate and strengthen advocacy or lobbying initiatives by ensuring that stakeholders are able to present a united front and agree on short-, medium-, and long-term goals.

As highlighted above, effective coordination also enables media development actors to address diverse needs within any given media ecosystem and therefore ensure that the impact of any one project is not undermined or blunted by endemic weaknesses in the operating environment.

However, for the most part, initiatives aimed at introducing or improving coordination mechanisms have failed to live up to expectations. While it is accepted that some of these initiatives may have had a short-term mandate or may have been established to achieve a finite goal, instances of coordination bodies that maintain momentum over time or evolve in line with changing circumstances are particularly rare. Experience suggests that after the initial enthusiasm has worn off, regular meetings tend to be viewed as routine or even burdensome. Furthermore, the level of donor participation in groups convened by implementing agencies has been underwhelming and, in at least one country, donors on one side and implementers and

local organisations have formed separate coordination bodies that work in parallel and are connected only through a shared mailing list.

Common obstacles to success include widespread competition between media development actors, which is driven primarily by the rigid mechanisms used by donors to disburse funding, as well as the perennial need to cover institutional operating costs through project-based income. Furthermore, the donor-implementer-recipient relationship remains top-down and is shaped by shifting programmatic priorities that may reflect political imperatives rather than the results of periodic needs assessments.

Nevertheless, a perceived change in the media development ecosystem has cast the need for improved dialogue into sharp relief. Stakeholders across the sector argue that traditional funding mechanisms need to be revised and that donor support needs to be mobile, flexible, and properly targeted. Presented with such evidence, at a coordination meeting organised by GFMD in 2021, a representative from one major donor organisation expressed a readiness to move toward "longer-term programming whereby donors, media development organisations, and media partners can sit together and develop a plan that considers how we can best support and bring added value to media organisations."

Based on these priorities and trends, the study concludes that there is value in developing and defining models for coordination that can be adapted for use in different scenarios. It finds that a best-practice approach should include all or some of the following elements:

- Strong impartial leadership that ensures proper inclusion and full participation
- A stable and predictable source of funding
- Sufficient resources and skills to provide a consistent, tailored service to members
- Adequate communications and knowledge-sharing platforms with guaranteed data security
- A quorum of media development actors representing a balance of local and international organisations
- An effective interface with the donor community (if donors are not directly involved in the coordination process)
- A good level of visibility and an ability to engage with multiple external stakeholders when required
- Sufficient agility and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances

Objectives

Commissioned by the Global Forum for Media Development, the study embraced two main objectives that can be summarised as follows:

- To analyse current practices in information-sharing and media-assistance coordination efforts, highlighting common pitfalls as well as best-practice approaches
- To prepare recommendations for coordination models with examples of practical mechanisms that could be successfully used in future media assistance coordination efforts by organisations (especially donors and implementers) attempting to support such initiatives, including in conflict and emergency situations

The study acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all model for coordination. Each initiative of this kind needs to be adapted to the specific nature of the local operating environment. With this in mind, the report proposes a series of solutions that draw on a variety of experiences and lessons learned.

It is anticipated that this report will feed into some of the ongoing coordination efforts as well as provide a tool for shaping future iterations of coordination mechanisms.

Methodology

The methodology of this report was designed to reflect widespread recognition among the media development community of the need for coordination despite the fact that there are some fundamental challenges to facilitating and executing effective mechanisms and practices.

The report is based on desk research and a series of interviews that were conducted in June 2022 with key stakeholders who have participated in coordination groups over the last five years. Case studies of historical and existing coordination mechanisms were identified to capture crosscutting issues. The report also taps into the previous experience of both of its authors in developing and participating in coordination projects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

> **Research methods used**
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> Desk research**:** A thorough analysis of existing literature around coordination mechanisms was conducted. This included policy papers, end-of-project evaluations, and meeting notes and minutes from existing coordination groups.

> Key informant interviews: The consultants identified key informants from across the media development community who have been involved or who are currently participating in coordination groups. The primary aim of these semi-structured interviews was to gather in-depth insights into the main priorities, challenges, and activities associated with the coordination of media development work.
>
> Auto-ethnographic approach: The consultants drew on their own previous experience and involvement in coordination mechanisms. Situating their own experiences within the context of media development coordination allowed this process of reflection to provide another analytical tool for data collection and helped validate the findings from other coordination experiments.

This combination of research methods was aimed at ensuring that the report could contribute to the development of a theoretical approach that could be used to identify social phenomena, relationships, and patterns of behaviour for successful coordination.

The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)

As the media development sector's key network for collaboration, coordination, and collective action, GFMD has supported and facilitated a number of coordination efforts, notably the recent initiative to support the work of media and journalists in Ukraine by mapping needs and providing access to available funding opportunities. Drawing on its previous experience of engaging with national and regional coordination groups, GFMD was able to provide the report authors with access to reports and papers on previous and ongoing initiatives as well as links to relevant members of the network.

This research paper was developed with support from GFMD IMPACT, GFMD's International Media Policy and Advice Centre, an initiative that helps donors, funders, policy makers, practitioners, and other stakeholders make informed, evidence-based decisions on strategies, programming, funding, and advocacy for media development and journalism support.

GFMD IMPACT[1] is a collaborative learning and exchange project designed to bring together media development and journalism support groups, donors, funding organisations, academic and research institutions, and technology, media, and governance experts.

The Consultants

Michael Randall has worked in the media development sector for more than 20 years, mainly for BBC Media Action and predominantly in the countries of the former Soviet Union. He has an exceptional track record in designing, managing, and evaluating projects and has written

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[1] Contact: GFMD Executive Director, Mira Milosevic (director@gfmd.info).

successful proposals for a wide range of donors including the European Commission, the FCDO, USAID, and UN agencies. Michael is a regular contributor to GFMD initiatives and is the author of the Forum's Fundraising Guide, which was launched in 2021.

Aida Al-Kaisy is an experienced media development consultant, academic researcher, and evaluator who has worked extensively on media projects across the MENA region. She is currently working on projects that focus on issues related to the development of independent media platforms, media and journalism in conflict, and countries where freedom of expression is challenged. Aida teaches at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) and is a researcher for the London School of Economics Conflict Research Programme initiated by the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO). She is one of the founders of the Iraqi independent media platform, Jummar.

Appreciation

The research that informed this report was conducted as part of an information-sharing effort inviting media development and journalism support organisations, both international and local, to coordinate recovery and assistance efforts in Lebanon. This work is being implemented by GFMD in cooperation with the Samir Kassir Foundation's SKeyes Centre for Media and Cultural Freedom, and with support from International Media Support (IMS).

Limitations to the study

The consultants identified a limited number of case studies to investigate for this study based primarily on their own experience and GFMD's development portfolio. This may have led to selection bias in the number and types of coordination experiences included as a part of this research. For example, the report does not analyse instances of philanthropic foundations and their involvement in the coordination efforts, although they have been active in supporting media in crisis. As a result, this paper does not claim to give a comprehensive view of all coordination efforts in media development. It should, however, serve as a springboard for stakeholders in media development to develop relevant and practical solutions when defining and implementing coordination mechanisms.

Problem Statement

Studies of the media development landscape worldwide have identified the lack of proper coordination between donors and implementing agencies as a key factor in undermining the resonance and impact of donor-funded projects[2]. Specifically, they have noted that coordination is necessary in order to:

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[2] https://www.gao.gov/assets/a247294.html

- Avoid duplication, wasted resources, and contradictory activities
- Explore synergies and combine efforts where appropriate
- Ensure that donors can make the best use of available resources by agreeing on national or regional strategies that include a clear division of labour
- Demonstrate a united front and a consistent approach to local stakeholders
- Strengthen lobbying on the government level for greater commitment to media reforms
- Pool efforts for needs assessment, monitoring, and evaluation
- Ensure proper knowledge management and capture lessons learned.

Implementing agencies and donors alike agree that proper coordination is a precondition for successful media development programming, and they have invested funds and resources into establishing concrete mechanisms for facilitating this process. In general, these mechanisms have been created in response to conflict (Ukraine, Syria) or emergency situations (Lebanon) or pro-democracy movements (Tunisia). In the case of Tunisia (see more details about the Tunisia coordination on page 19 of the report), a coordination process was set up to deal with the sheer volume of media development projects that were launched in the wake of the 2011 revolution. In 2014 alone, more than 200[3] media projects were being implemented simultaneously across the country.

However, these initiatives have struggled to survive on a sustained basis, often losing momentum or buy-in once the immediate crisis has subsided. In a number of cases, participants have complained that the element of actual coordination failed to materialise and that meetings became little more than an exchange of information about past and present projects. Crucial issues related to longer-term strategy or pipeline work were rarely addressed.

With a few exceptions, donors appear reluctant to take part in coordination activities that will bring them into direct contact with implementing agencies. The reasons for this is that donors need to be fair and objective in their funding decisions and are therefore unable to enter detailed discussions of upcoming programmes with potential applicants. Furthermore, strategic decisions are rarely made in-country, so local grant officers have limited ability to act on information received.
A programme manager for a media think-tank in Eastern Europe highlighted some of the problems.

> *If there is someone who does coordination at the national level and brings an agenda to discuss, then donors are willing to participate. But they are not willing to donate their own resources to this activity. On the other hand, they are reluctant to reveal their true strategies but they will share information about how much they spend and what they spend it on. However, it's all about who is doing what, not about what should be done.*

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[3] The figure was provided by the coordinator of the Tunisian Media Support Group in 2015.

Consequently, coordination bodies have for the most part failed to initiate an open and constructive dialogue with donors. And yet, without a sustained exchange of views, implementing agencies and project beneficiaries remain hostage to the ebb and flow of funding as well as the political priorities of international bodies or government departments tasked with designing and funding development projects. They also have limited opportunities for communicating the needs of beneficiaries to the donor community.

These constraints were highlighted in a report on the resonance of the EU-funded MedMedia project (2014–2018), which was tasked with improving coordination between implementing agencies and donors operating in the MENA region. This activity was supplemented by the creation of an online database mapping ongoing media programmes and by the publication of a white paper highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of international interventions in the South. However, the report stated,

> *Buy-in for regional coordination meetings was, at best, tepid with agencies reluctant to share any information which might give their counterparts a competitive advantage.*

An attempt by the MedMedia project to coordinate media development efforts in Libya between 2014 and 2016 effectively collapsed due a lack of interest and disillusionment among the participants. Multiple reasons were given for the failure of this initiative. Participants complained that they lacked the time and resources to update an online tool aimed at sharing information about upcoming activities while "there were doubts that formal meetings were the best forum for discussing upcoming activities or strategies since these would ultimately be shaped by donor and agency priorities rather than by collective agreement."[4]

Nevertheless, these negative experiences have been counterbalanced by positive examples of coordination that have enjoyed strong buy-in from participants and have continued to operate over sustained time frames. These approaches are not necessarily transferable to all possible scenarios, but they do provide a body of best practices and models for replication. The study focuses on these lessons learned and endeavours to propose solutions to common challenges.

The diagram below maps out a potential development curve for coordination work that draws on recent experience and reflects the ambition of diverse stakeholders.

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[4] From an activity report submitted by the MedMedia project to DG NEAR.

Initiation and set-up	Basic functions	Evolution	Strategy development	Consolidation
• Membership established • Leadership model agreed on • Terms of Reference drawn up	• Regular scheduled meetings • Mechanisms created for information-sharing and knowledge management	• Introduction of thematic groups • Efforts to pool resources around specific initiatives • Fund-raising to support coordination work	• Engagement with diverse stakeholders (civil society, government) • Development of joint strategies that define roles and spheres of interest	• Broad range of activities including advocacy and needs assessment • Sustained dialogue between donors and implementers, drawing on stakeholder input

The table overleaf presents an overview of the coordination bodies that were reviewed by the report authors and offers insight into the key drivers for their formation and evolution.

Name	Time frame	Stimulus	Membership	Initiator/funder	Focus areas
MedMedia Regional Coordination	2014–2018	Growing need to coordinate the efforts of donors and implementers alike in the MENA region	Media development agencies; European Commission (DG NEAR)	DG NEAR through the MedMedia project	- Project mapping - Sharing information and insights - Strategic development
Libya Coordination Group	2015–2016	Chaotic nature of media development efforts relocated to Tunis (as a result of the upsurge in violence in Libya)	Media development agencies and Tunis-based donors	EU Delegation to Libya through the MedMedia project	- Sharing information - Aligning implementation strategies - Exploring synergies
Tunisia Media Support Group	2013–to date	Proliferation of media development projects in the wake of the 2011 revolution	Media development agencies and donors	CAPJC[5] with support from Swiss Embassy and EU	- Sharing information - Knowledge management
Iraq Coordination Group on Journalists' Safety	2016–2020	Joint commitment to improving safety conditions for journalists in Iraq and ending impunity for those responsible for attacks	Media development agencies, mainly international	International Media Support (IMS)	- Information sharing on issues related to journalists' safety - Coordinating joint statements in response to attacks on journalists

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[5] Centre africain de perfectionnement des journalistes et communicateurs, a Tunisian training institute.

GFMD Information Sharing Group on Media Assistance in Ukraine	2022	Urgent need for information sharing and knowledge exchange following the February 2022 Russian invasion	Media development agencies; local organisations from Ukraine and the wider region	Global Forum for Media Development	• Sharing information and insights • Exploring synergies • Forming partnerships and collaborations
Donors' Coordination Group for Ukraine	2015–to date	Dramatic uptick in international support for Ukraine's media following the Euromaidan events	Donors and diplomatic missions; Internews	US and Canadian embassies in Kyiv	• Sharing information and insights • Aligning donor strategies • Identifying opportunities
Febrayer: The Network of Independent Arab Media Organisations	2016–to date	Perceived need for solidarity and self-support among independent media in the MENA region	Independent media outlets; media development agencies	IMS and network members	• Sharing experience and insights • Fundraising • Joint projects
Lebanon Joint Coordination Group	2020–to date	Devastating impact of the August 2020 Beirut port explosion on Lebanon's media community	Media development agencies; some donor engagement	IMS, GFMD, SKeyes and local media development agencies	• Joint fundraising • Sharing information • Coordinating efforts

Focus Areas for Coordination Groups

Understandably, there is no single model for coordination groups, and most have been developed to reflect the contours of the local media development landscape. Typically however, the format for scheduled meetings has been similar and additional activities have included shared databases, online groups, and bespoke events. The paragraphs below consider the different strands of work embraced by coordination groups and examine how they have been addressed in different scenarios.

Case study: Coordination in Ukraine

The media development sector in Ukraine has enjoyed a high level of coordination since the Euromaidan events of 2014, when donors formed a wide constellation of working groups to manage the proliferation of internationally funded programmes in the country. The coordination process for media-related interventions was established by the US and Canadian embassies with substantial input from the EU Delegation and EU member states. Still active in 2022, its activities include:

- Maintaining a "live" spreadsheet of projects and funding amounts
- Sharing insights into new opportunities as well as perceived gaps in provision
- Rallying donors or implementing agencies around specific initiatives
- Organising presentations and knowledge-sharing events focused on effective interventions and methodologies

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, GFMD led a new initiative to coordinate the efforts of media development agencies. This came in response to calls from GFMD members to exchange information relating to current or pipeline projects and thereby avoid duplication of efforts. The group operates an editable spreadsheet of implementers and ongoing initiatives, holds meetings every two to three weeks, and shares the minutes with a list of over 370 donors and practitioners.

The two coordination groups work in parallel. They are largely complementary but serve slightly different constituencies. The GFMD group includes donors on its mailing list and offers them access to shared documents but is focused primarily on the needs of national and international media development organisations. The US-led initiative continues to shape donor strategy while engaging with implementers on an ad hoc basis.

Developing holistic strategies

Strategic development is the holy grail of coordination, the desire to look at the wider picture and determine how individual organisations can contribute to a national work plan based on perceived priorities and imperatives. The goal is to ensure that members of the development

community—donors, implementing agencies and beneficiaries alike—are on the same page with a clear division of labour and a mutual understanding around strategy and well-articulated theories of change.

In real terms, however, developing and implementing a national strategy for any given country is impeded by two recurring problems:

1. The fact that most donors are locked into funding cycles and overarching priorities that are difficult to recalibrate in line with changing circumstances
2. The fact that implementing agencies have overlapping interests and areas of expertise, making it challenging for them to allocate roles and secure consensus on who does what

The best example, perhaps, of a fully joined-up strategy is the approach adopted by international donors in Ukraine as the country emerged from the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014. According to a key member of the group, this was one of 30 such initiatives aimed at ensuring complementary action across the donor community. He said that there had been virtually no attempt to coordinate donor efforts before that time.

The Kyiv group succeeded in bringing leading donors to the table and reaching an agreement on the division of funding priorities. As well as sharing information and insights from the ground, it brought new opportunities and challenges to the attention of the donor community, thereby empowering these stakeholders to make informed decisions on the allocation of funding and to recalibrate their programmes in line with feedback received.

Moreover, the group developed strategies for particular strands of work. For example, it was instrumental in rallying donors and implementing agencies around a major support project for the Ukrainian public broadcaster. As a result of this groundwork, the EU was able to allocate around €5 million to the project, which also attracted contributions from the UK Government, the German Foreign Ministry, and the Japanese International Development Agency.

Fundraising

Following the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, the Samir Kassir Foundation launched a Media Recovery Fund to support outlets and practitioners affected by the crisis. Following an exceptionally positive response from donors, Samir Kassir worked with IMS and GFMD to launch the Lebanon Joint Coordination Group, which was tasked with coordinating the different funding streams. By the following year, nearly $750,000 had been pledged for areas such as livelihood support, medical support, and equipment as well as safety training and investigative journalism grants.

This is a unique example of a media development community agreeing on a joint programme of work and proactively seeking funds from donors to support that programme. As noted in a report

submitted to the GFMD, the strategy was "based on a robust understanding of the reality of the ground, where local partners developed lasting relations with the community in Lebanon, sound administrative and auditing practices, flexibility and thinking outside the project funding box."[6]

Furthermore, the group convinced donors of the need to adjust their traditional funding models to reflect the unique demands of the situation. "We are looking for a leap of faith from our partners," said one of the organisers. "We do want the flexibility to shift funding within six pillars, and we are ready to send the money back to partners if they set strict and rigid conditions for money spending."

Beyond this experience, examples of coordination groups engaging in collective fundraising appear to be rare. In several countries—Kenya and Zimbabwe for example—coalitions of local and international media actors have played a key role in unlocking donor funding for specific initiatives. As noted in a 2021 report entitled "Coalitions for Change" and commissioned by IMS,

> *The Kenya Media Sector Working Group came together and submitted a single plan and strategy to donors while the actual implementation was coordinated by local actors. While the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) has remained largely dependent on donor funding, it has, nevertheless, been able to fundraise on behalf of its members.*

The report went on to say,

> *Coalition members should ultimately feel empowered to define and influence the support they receive from international development partners, thereby ensuring that it fully reflects the needs and priorities of its putative beneficiaries.*

Within Febrayer, the Network of Independent Arab Media Organisations, which brings together like-minded media organisations from across the MENA region, members provide expertise in fundraising to their peers. As noted in an evaluation report by IMS, "The core members [pick] each other's brains on different subjects—and quite significantly so in relation to fundraising." It went on to describe actions by two members to help a peer organisation to secure funding for a Syrian media platform.

Emergency or crisis response

The importance of effective coordination becomes particularly acute when donors and media development agencies respond to a crisis. The war in Ukraine is the most recent example, and the rapidity with which international and local actors have joined forces to support the country's media sector has been unprecedented. A coordination group led by GFMD has played a key role in identifying and convening core players and offering insight into a rapidly evolving situation. In just four months, the mailing list has grown to over 370 people, and its web-based

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[6] October 2020—Lebanon coordination (gfmd.info).

multilingual online resources[7] have documented 18 fundraising and crowdfunding opportunities for journalists and media in Ukraine.

One Ukrainian expert said that the process was particularly useful in understanding what was being done and therefore empowering agencies to ensure that their interventions paid due regard to other strands of work. In his view, the coordination unquestionably limited duplication in the early weeks of the war, when agencies were scrambling to meet overwhelming needs.

However, even in cases such as Ukraine, members may begin to question the longer-term benefits of groups that appear to be limited to information sharing between implementing organisations. An April 2022 discussion held by GFMD on the subject of emergency responses noted that meetings of the Ukraine coordination group were "seen by some as an ongoing parade of international organisations listing what they're doing." While attendance at the meetings has remained consistently high (an average of 40 delegates), at least one member felt that the element of coordination was lacking.

A gradual waning of interest was noted in Syria, where a coordinating mechanism brought beneficiaries together with implementing organisations from 2013 to 2016, "to discuss their needs and develop project ideas, and to build trust to allow better communication given the security situation." Coordination, which was initiated by media development agencies, namely FPU, IMS and IREX and funded by their core funders, was then developed into a project with funding from the European Union.

The project included activities to develop a resource centre for Syrian media based in Gaziantep. A combination of internal dynamics and political context unfortunately impacted on the effective development of the resource centre. In a subsequent white paper, itself a successful output of coordination, written to capture the experience, GFMD reported that its ability to maintain a long-term engagement was stymied by limited and short-term funding. The white paper recommended that "donors provide long-term and stable support for an independent coordination process that includes Syrians, implementers, and donors." It should however be noted that donor priorities in Syria were in flux at this time and support for the media ecosystem became less of a priority compared to projects aimed at 'countering violent extremism' or even support for the revolution itself. The coordination group's move to develop a separate coordination effort on safety and security of journalists with both local and international participation proved to be one of the most effective outputs of coordination overall.

Pooling resources

Exploring synergies or considering ways of optimising existing resources is central to coordination efforts. The ongoing US-led donor initiative in Ukraine has looked at ways that

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[7] https://ukraine-coordination.gfmd.info.

individual funders could join forces to achieve immediate goals while considering longer-term priorities. However, while media development actors in general recognise the need to achieve value for money, they also have financial commitments to their personnel and their partners. Real opportunities for combining budgets are thus limited unless they can be identified during the project development phase (and used in some cases as co-funding).

That said, joint events are not uncommon with multiple projects contributing to the running costs and arranging for their own beneficiaries to take part. Similarly, opportunities for joint training programmes are usually welcomed, thereby ensuring that workshops delivered by different organisations contribute to a sustained development curve for the individuals concerned. In these cases, however, there is still a need to share information on beneficiaries, thereby ensuring that the same people do not attend the same courses (as was arguably the case when training workshops were organised for Libyan journalists in Tunis in 2015).

Several studies argue that media development actors and donors in particular would benefit from forums and conduits for expertise that can inform their strategies and programming decisions. Coordination groups could help provide this service by bringing in external experts to foster the development of joined-up thinking around key focus areas.

Case study: International community of civil society organisations working on safety of journalists

The purpose of the ICSO SoJ Coalition is to provide a forum through which a small dedicated group of international CSOs can ensure close collaboration and maximise the impact of their activities in the target countries and on thematic issues. The coalition includes the following groups:

- Press freedom monitoring and advocacy organisations that monitor attacks on journalists and undertake advocacy with authorities on national and international levels to raise awareness and demand action.
- Media development organisations that manage long-term programmes to build local safety mechanisms and promote shared action plans and best practices. This group also provides assistance to journalists in distress and lobbies for legislative reform.
- Organisations that are representative and/or membership-based from civil society and the media industry, which often undertake a mixture of monitoring, advocacy and safety projects.

Coordination takes place through existing forums and entities such as:

- The Journalists In Distress (JID) network, which shares information about cases and coordinates emergency responses
- ACOS Alliance, a network of organisations working with freelance and local journalists and the media industry

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- IFEX, a global network of organisations working to defend freedom of expression
- GFMD
- The Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network (MFC-CN), the supporting group of CSOs that serves as a conduit for information to the Media Freedom Coalition

Needs assessment and joint research projects

While it is accepted that each organisation has its individual standards for needs analysis and research, it is also true that there is a very significant amount of duplication in this area. Beneficiaries complain of being asked the same questions by different international agencies, and while most are keen to engage in related processes, senior stakeholders have busy schedules and need a compelling reason to find time to respond to surveys and polls.

Nevertheless, the value of effective needs assessment should not be underestimated since it ensures that gaps in knowledge and understanding can be identified and that interventions can be tailored to meet specific needs. Donors also need an evidence base to justify programming and to ensure that project performance can be measured against a credible baseline.

In 2019, one international donor produced a paper on donor coordination in the Eastern Partnership[8] countries that stated,

> *It would benefit each donor country if we were able to share the cost of building a collective evidence base. This could include: media market and trend analysis in key countries, media consumer analysis, comparative research into the impact of capacity building projects, qualitative analysis of media organisations in the region, due diligence reporting on independent media organisations.*

The report went on to recommend that donors commissioned and shared results from training needs analysis/organisation audits, concluding,

> *Sharing the costs of such analysis and the reports themselves could enable other donors to better prioritise complementary activity. Donors could also consider jointly commissioning region-wide analysis on key independent organisations/partners to help improve coordination.*

The 2019/2020 EU Needs Assessment of Independent Media in the Neighbourhood echoed this viewpoint.

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[8] Usually taken to mean Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

It is recommended that donors invest in a robust assessment mechanism that tasks local partners with the collection and dissemination of findings on a rolling basis. This research could also include comprehensive mapping of media projects in partner countries as well as independent impact monitoring.

Information sharing

All coordination mechanisms studied during the research placed information sharing at the centre of their work, and all interlocutors agreed that this was an essential activity that should fall firmly in the remit of such groups. As a rule, the main conduits for information sharing are meetings, spreadsheets, databases, and mapping exercises. For example,

- The EU-funded MedMedia project maintained an updatable database of live media development projects in the MENA region that was publicly available online
- The donor coordination group launched in Ukraine in 2015 and led by the US and Canadian embassies shared a matrix of projects, their beneficiaries, and funding amounts. The group also held regular presentations of ongoing or recently completed interventions, thereby giving participants insight into success stories and replicable models
- The group set up by GFMD to coordinate the media development community's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine operates an editable spreadsheet of implementers and ongoing initiatives
- During its first iteration, the Media Support Group in Tunisia maintained a calendar of activities being run by different projects, thereby enabling members to seek synergies or attend events

A Ukrainian expert who attended meetings of the 2022 Ukraine coordination group convened by GFMD said that the spreadsheet was invaluable since it gave a detailed overview of ongoing projects and enabled implementing organisations engaging with the Ukrainian media to seek complementarities and fill perceived gaps. He also commented that the spreadsheet served as a valuable who's who for the media development community working in or for Ukraine.

Case study: Media Support Group in Tunisia

Established in the wake of the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, the Media Support Group (Groupe d'appui aux médias) was initially hosted by the Centre africain de perfectionnement des journalistes et communicateurs (CAPJC). Its activities were initially funded by the Swiss Embassy in Tunis and then by the European Commission through its MEDIA UP programme.

In the early years, the group performed an essential role in sharing information between local and international actors working in the media development field. This process was

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managed through a small secretariat and underpinned by shared documents and platforms. However, by 2019—when the volume of media development programming in Tunisia had significantly subsided—participants began to express doubts about its added value, commenting that meetings were little more than a *tour de table* promoting ongoing initiatives.

Respondents to a fact-finding mission organised by the EU Delegation in early 2020 suggested that meetings should be organised along thematic lines with members discussing new opportunities and wider sectoral challenges rather than specific projects. Several interlocutors called for a participatory approach that would be aimed primarily at learning from peer experience and building coalitions to address priority issues.

Knowledge management

The sharing of insights and lessons learned presents greater challenges than facilitating a simple flow of information. Much of the knowledge that is of value to the media development community (feedback on partners, beneficiaries, consultants, etc.) is sensitive and cannot be publicly shared. Issues relating to GDPR[9] also need to be taken into account. To a large extent, informal networking meetings are perhaps the best way to share these insights, but there have also been more formal attempts to establish a database of experts (Tunisia) and beneficiaries (Libya).

The experience of the donors' coordination work in Ukraine is interesting because the group devoted considerable efforts to information sharing and gathering through presentations, meetings, a mailing list, and an updatable matrix that in addition to mapping existing support shared experience and lessons learned within the group.

However, as noted by participants in an open discussion on coordination convened by GFMD during the 2022 International Journalism Festival in Perugia, the challenges associated with data sharing include security-related considerations. This was one of the concerns that ultimately derailed efforts to establish a coordination group for Libya in 2014–2016. As noted by an assessment report,

> *Several themes which had been revisited during previous meetings—for example, the issue of data protection and the question of allowing equal opportunities to a broad cross-section of beneficiaries—were impossible to resolve in a way that was acceptable to all stakeholders.*

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[9] The EU's General Data Protection Regulation.

Advocacy

There is thought to be significant potential for coordination groups to engage in advocacy either through lobbying donors to commit funding to specific initiatives (for example, the Media Recovery Fund in Lebanon) or through mobilising members around issues such as reforms to the legislative or regulatory environment.

The Iraq coordination group's focus on advocacy around journalism safety engaged a diverse range of actors and saw some change in practices. The group's specific objective—to push the Iraqi government to take action over the consistently high impunity rate for attacks on journalists—was set by the group, and the main activity was to coordinate joint statements in response to egregious incidents.

Case study: Iraq

The Iraq coordination group was initiated by IMS in 2016 as a locally held meeting where information could be shared between media development stakeholders and international media development organisations that were active in Iraq. According to one stakeholder, initial attempts at coordination were hampered by a lack of willingness to share project information among members of the group. A joint desire to address the declining conditions of safety for journalists that was driven on a global level by UNESCO saw the group redefine its remit to focus on safety and security issues.

The group's specific objective was to push the Iraqi government to address the consistently high impunity rate for attacks of journalists. The main activity was to coordinate joint statements in response to individual cases of journalists being assassinated. Conflict and security issues between local media development stakeholders in Iraq meant that the group's membership consisted primarily of international organisations that shared a preference for advocacy work.

This work was noticed by a human rights coordination group made up of foreign embassies in Iraq that until then had not included press freedom among their programmatic priorities. As a result, these stakeholders and the EU began to make statements and brought the topic of journalism safety further up the agenda.

The Iraqi government at the time was sensitive to the views of the international community, and the prime minister eventually embraced the issue. According to one stakeholder, eight journalism safety cases have since been resolved and the cycle of impunity has been broken as a result of the collective critical mass that was driven by coordination. UNESCO has since facilitated the establishment of a national committee for the safety of journalists in Iraq with funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs via The Free Press Unlimited, one of the lead players in the advocacy campaign.

> **Media coalitions**
>
> In some countries, coalitions of local and international media support organisations have performed an informal coordination role. Created primarily for advocacy purposes, they have been highly effective in securing consensus and driving collective action within the media community, helping diverse stakeholders to devise and execute a common strategy, and defining joint success criteria.
>
> Coalitions have also facilitated capacity-building among their members, accessing and channelling experience from comparable environments that can enrich the local media sector and promote best-practice models. As an example, the Kenya Media Sector Working Group (KMSWG) has accrued formidable convening power for media stakeholders and development partners and has adopted a structured and organised format for engaging with the government. Through this engagement, important pieces of legislation have been passed by Kenya's Parliament including the Media Council Act 2013, which provides for media self-regulation; the Access to Information Act of 2016; and the Data Protection Act of 2019.

Monitoring and evaluation

Several respondents highlighted the value of pooling resources to monitor the progress of a portfolio of projects and to track qualitative changes in media outputs that can be ascribed to grant-funded interventions. This joint approach could be particularly valuable when it comes to expensive and logistically challenging quantitative surveys on a national level. Coordination could help develop surveys that cover multiple interest areas and then ensure a large and scientifically robust sample size.

International donors have expressed an interest in a similar approach. A paper shared by one foreign ministry provided the following insight.

> *Most donors are measuring success through behavioural change in target audiences and/or improvements in the quality and sustainability of independent media in the region. We could consider jointly commissioning evaluation of progress in these areas. Once projects are completed, lessons learnt could be shared, including on M&E and risk.*

In the same way, it may be possible to leverage annual reporting mechanisms for the benefit of the wider media development community. This could be achieved by centralising initiatives such

as IREX's VIBE barometer[10] or DW Akademie's Media Viability Indicators (MVIs) and ensuring that they serve the interests of multiple stakeholders. This could be complemented by a move toward developing an industry standard that multiple donors would recognise as an authoritative source of information and intelligence on the media sector.

Streamlining efforts

A GFMD report on the Lebanon Joint Coordination Mechanism highlighted a number of areas in which improved engagement with donors could help streamline activities linked to fundraising and project administration (including M&E). The report praised recent moves by the European Commission to reduce the administrative burden for grantees, pointing out that media outlets in particular reported devoting disproportionate amounts of time to chasing and documenting grants, which distracted them from their core business.

A June 2022 survey of participants in GFMD's coordination meetings for Ukraine surfaced similar priorities. One respondent asked, "How can all donor or grant-making organisations ensure that with regional media outlets continuing to apply for small pots of funding from different sources, we are not adding 'grant manager' to their list of growing responsibilities and creating additional reporting burdens?"

There is room, therefore, for using coordination groups as a forum for discussing ways of simplifying procedures and ensuring that they reflect the specific contours of the media industry. The success of Lebanon's Media Recovery Fund (MRF) points to a willingness among donors to place their trust in local actors and be guided by their insights. As noted by one delegate at the December 2021 coordination meeting, the MRF had benefited in particular from "strategic thinking owned by a national actor that can ensure there is integrity and support from the sector."

Key Challenges

There are clearly a number of demonstrably effective coordination efforts that have had impact on national and thematic approaches to media development and journalism. It is important to recognise that these efforts have been implemented within the structural parameters of the industry itself as well as the socio-political contexts in which they operate. Given the entrenched hierarchies and often top-down approaches to funding, the political economy of the media development industry can change only as a result of long-term holistic transformations that are inclusive and representative. However, a number of challenges can be identified and thus possibly mitigated against in existing and future coordination projects.

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[10] Vibrant Information Barometer (VIBE) | IREX.

Resourcing and funding

One of the overriding challenges that coordination efforts face is securing substantive, long-term funding that can support the development of resources and tools for more-effective coordination outcomes. All development agencies share frustrations concerning covering their running costs, and coordination can often be viewed as an extra rather than a fundamental element of their activities. Core funding is increasingly harder to come by, and for grassroots local agencies, sustainability is a significant issue.

In some cases, coordination is a component/priority set by the donor as part of a wider project brief/intervention. A good example of this is the MedMedia regional coordination group, which was funded by the European Commission as part of a service contract between 2014 and 2018. The funding was used to facilitate meetings for regional MENA media development stakeholders and to develop an online mapping tool for media development projects in the region. However, coordination activities and regional group coordination ceased once the service contract came to an end. Similarly, the Syria coordination group's activities all ended at the close of the project life cycle.

This is a common problem; it reflects some of the issues with fixed-term funding, which has a finite project life cycle. Unless significant outcomes emerge from the coordination work or efforts are made to ensure that additional funding is secured, coordination is likely to lose momentum or even halt.

Case study: Syria

The Syria coordination work was jointly funded by the US State Department, the European Commission, and SIDA between 2013 and 2016. In this case, implementing agencies derived the initial funding from projects that had a national focus to support independent media and civil society in Syria. A project with one expected result of improved collaboration between Syrian media was developed with financial resources supporting the activities of existing coordination tracks such as the Syria Response Group by providing response mechanisms to emergency needs.

A coordination committee was created and budgets were allocated specifically toward funding regular meetings, digital safety, and secure communications, and building a resource centre in Gaziantep. The project also developed a comprehensive mapping of the Syrian media and civil society landscapes for the media development community. Workshops were convened to cover issues such as conflict-sensitive reporting and gender. The Syria coordination group enabled three types of coordination meetings: 1) between Syrian and international media development organisations, 2) between Syrian

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and international media development organisations, CSOs, and international stakeholders, and 3) among civil society organisations.

Without specific funding and resources, coordination generally relies on the motivation and will of one or two stakeholders. In the Iraq coordination activities, which were funded via a Dutch embassy project, coordination was not one of the original project indicators or outcomes. Coordination work was therefore encouraged by individual stakeholders from within implementing agencies active in Iraq. (See Iraq case study on page 21 for further details.) On a local level, CSOs and media development agencies—many of which are concerned primarily with their own survival and financial sustainability—are unlikely to have the resources to commit in the medium to long Term. This was seen in the Syria coordination efforts, which came at a time when donor interest and funding for Syrian media had waned following political events and concerns about the politicisation of media development support in Syria.

Competitive nature of the development sector

Limited available funding and increased competition in the media development sector has been a hindrance to some coordination efforts. Media development agencies are often chasing the same grants and are thus unwilling to divulge information that might give their rivals a competitive advantage. In Syria, many saw funding as the main challenge to coordination; some actors felt that they were being pilloried for receiving too much funding while those who had no funding felt excluded and in some cases dispossessed. (See Syria case study on pages 24–25.)

Local organisations are also highly competitive, and the political and economic contexts often influence how relationships play out on the ground. In the Iraq coordination group, efforts stalled due to the differing agendas of the two journalism unions, each one funded by a different international agency/donor. Coalition 38, which was created to coordinate during the protest movement in Iraq at the end of 2019, quickly fell victim to the competition between actors. (See Iraq case study on page 21.) The limited engagement of local partners in contributing to the framework for coordination can mean that solutions are often less relevant and sustainable while existing hierarchies within the development community continue to be maintained.

There is a sense too that donors want ownership of projects that are impactful and innovative. Consequently, co-funded projects and basket approaches to funding are seen as less desirable while coordination has traditionally been a tough sell. There is some work to be done to demonstrate to donors how such approaches can unlock the knowledge, experience, and agency of diverse stakeholders and can invite much-needed critical engagement and discussion of local needs and realities.

Engaging with donors

There are very different accounts of relationships with donors across different sectors and actors in the media development community. This points to a lack of standardised practice on how such relationships should be formed and maintained and ultimately how this might impact funding allocations and project implementation.

Most implementers agree that they have little ability to engage directly with decision makers and that there needs to be greater reflection on the challenges of politically motivated interference from donor organisations. Some respondents suggested that the lack of useful feedback on unsuccessful applications to funding programmes meant that implementing agencies gained little insight into donor preferences and priorities over time.

There is frustration with the high turnover of task/project managers in donor organisations. This results in limited ownership for projects as well as elevated expectations of what can realistically be achieved. Some respondents pointed to a disconnect between HQ and local representations, stating that this created problems for the sustainability and relevance of projects on a broader scale. These issues have a negative impact on the possibilities for successful coordination as communications channels are disrupted and relationships are difficult to build and maintain.

A meeting held in April 2022 in Belgrade discussed a set of [principles](#) for effective media development efforts in Serbia, and it focused on the consideration of local needs and the inclusion of local voices. Participants in the group commented on how funding programmes covering multiple countries often meant that local needs were not being properly addressed. Even local representatives from donor organisations felt that they were not being heard. One commented, "Priorities do not reach headquarters due to generalisation. Local input reaches several instances before reaching the headquarters, and there they choose five priorities, and our priorities are not in those five … We do send information to headquarters, but they get lost."

Maintaining neutrality and building trust

Coordination has demonstrated a need for neutral coordinating bodies that can maintain trust-based relationships with all actors and project stakeholders. This was evident in the Syria initiative, which was marked by a low acceptance of the concept of coordination among the Syrian media. Stakeholders from the Syrian media and civil society pointed to a lack of trust that stemmed from a perceived lack of professionalism in the industry.

In this case, the GFMD played a significant and appreciated role "in areas such as information sharing on activities, coordination around journalist safety and protection issues, and efforts to speak in a common voice towards donors." GFMD subsequently coordinated the production of a White Paper entitled "[A Call for Effective Support to Syrian Independent Media as a Key](#)

[Component in Mitigating and Resolving Syrian Conflict,"](#) which was seen to be an effective means of advocacy with donors and was instrumental in the creation of the Syrian Coordination Committee (SCC). (See Syria case study on pages 24–25.)

Securing ownership

In the Syrian example, stakeholders noted that the benefits of coordination were difficult to explain. In contexts where nascent civil society and media organisations are still coming to terms with understanding their needs and priorities, work in areas such as coordination can feel untimely. In this case, it was essential for roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined in relation to benefits and outcomes and for approaches to feel less top-down and more inclusive. This approach can help promote the perception that stakeholders have more to gain than lose by their involvement in the coordination process.

The Febrayer network was created in 2016 with support from the Ford Foundation to bring together independent platforms in the MENA region with a view to discussing the challenges that they faced—sustainability, institution building, professional journalism, political environment—in a collegiate and non-competitive environment. Although the network was supported by International Media Support (IMS), initial meetings and discussions were led by local organisations that identified collective needs on a regional level. Based on contributions in the first meet-up, outlets that did not share the same "editorial values" or "political outlook," which were "stuck in a traditional media mindset," which "were not interested in regional collaboration," or which "didn't have consistency and a strong commitment to journalistic content production" were not included in future iterations of the network's activities.

A series of annual meetings saw different actors involved on various levels according to their ability to contribute to the network's collaborative efforts. One of the main factors in the success of the network was that members were all concerned with the same issues and were addressing their common challenges. The steering committee, which consists entirely of local CSOs, agrees on a division of labour, management, work plans, and subcommittees for implementation. Stakeholders noted that much of their success as a coordination group emerged as a result of their commitment to remaining open and accessible to one another, offering advice and support to other members of the group when needed.

In this case, local ownership of the group meant that coordination was directly linked to the needs of its members. Members who had a greater experience of business development and fundraising support other newer organisations in the network when they applied for funding from donors, providing advice and direct support in writing funding applications. More-established members found that access to different skills via the network (e.g., editorial collaborations on different platforms and institution-building support) was one of the main benefits of their coordination work. Providing access to skills that can benefit members goes a long way to sustaining engagement in coordination mechanisms.

Maintaining momentum over time

The need for coordination can often be subsumed by more-pressing project-related matters. The challenge is being able to justify the time commitment required of stakeholders as well as ensuring that the right people attend meetings and are assigned tasks accordingly. This requires skilful management of coordination groups, which speaks to the need for secure funding and resources to ensure that processes are efficient and effective.

Members of the Febrayer network agreed that its activities quickly moved beyond just discussions and meetings, creating projects such as the Counter Academy, an initiative that would support their work as individual media platforms in finding professionally trained and qualified staff.

Organisers of the Ukraine donor coordination group established in 2015 ascribe its longevity to the shared vision and commitment of its members. One commented,

> *There was a common feeling that was uniting all of us that we wanted to do our best to help the country. The people taking part were those who had experience and wanted to follow through.*

Conversely, the Media Support Group in Tunisia drew criticism from members who said that it had lost its raison d'être. A 2021 report to the EU Delegation suggested that its future depended on the ability of its governing body "to convince other members of the Group that it has a mutually beneficial role rather than simply acting as a mapping exercise."

Handling sensitive information

The collection and analysis of information from projects and organisations is crucial to increasing situational awareness and conducting evaluations as well as delivering effective interventions. Identifying the type of information that needs to be shared while also weighing potential risks is a core concern for coordination projects. Finding a balance between transparency, trust building, and data security as well as establishing proper security protocols is essential to effective coordination.

Case study: Journalists in Distress (JID) Network

JID is an informal forum for sharing information on journalists in distress and developing joint initiatives for emergency responses. It was formed in 2006 to allow international organisations with freedom of expression mandates to more easily discuss specific cases,

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coordinate joint efforts, and avoid duplication. The network does not engage in advocacy or media development.

Security and confidentiality are of utmost importance for the work of the JID Network primarily for the protection of its constituency but also to ensure that members can share frank opinions and/or details of their individual responses. Members are asked to avoid sharing their communications with other individuals or organisations outside the JID Network.

To participate in the JID Network, individuals must adopt baseline security practices to secure all cyber devices that access JID data. These include two-factor authentication and 2FA-protected email addresses. Furthermore, users are asked to agree to access protocols for the JID Slack workspace and to use platforms such as Jitsi, Google Hangouts, Signal, and WhatsApp for video calls.

Findings and Best Practices

Case studies of previous and existing coordination efforts highlight areas that need to be carefully assessed and planned from the outset. Drawing on past experience can help identify appropriate systems and practices for effective coordination.

The usual principles of transparency, diversity, and fairness all apply in this case. Without fair representation, transparent communications and processes, and independent administrative structures, it is unlikely that a united response to national and thematic priorities would emerge.

More thought and consideration regarding the building blocks of successful coordination are essential to ensuring that projects are well executed and their beneficiaries properly catered to. It is clear that there is some work to be done in developing certain mechanisms and services that could improve future coordination work. The following sections will look in more detail at areas where best practices can be established.

Leadership

Strong leadership is an important ingredient for development coordination and one that should not be taken for granted. The work of the Media Institute of South Africa (MISA) in **Zimbabwe** demonstrates the value of placing leadership responsibilities in a local organisation that can generate trust and facilitate relationships among peers and other stakeholders. Such organisations should be independent and professional, and they should have sufficient resources to sustain coordination over time. Having strong existing contacts across the media

and development industry will ensure that they are able to develop a coordination structure that has a lightweight hierarchy but that is inclusive and bottom-up.

MISA led efforts to establish the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe, which coordinates national-level advocacy aimed at improving media freedoms. The alliance collectively identified priorities for the group and was able to ensure a realistic time frame for the delivery of activities that included the development of a national media strategy for Zimbabwe. Key to the success of the alliance was its consideration of gender equality in the alliance and its leadership.

A number of respondents raised the question of whether coordination should be led by donors or implementing agencies. As noted elsewhere in this report, the advantage of donor leadership—as demonstrated by the coordination group established in **Ukraine** in 2015—is that strategic priorities can be set and funding gaps can be rapidly addressed.

However, the experience of the **Lebanon** Coordination Group also indicates that in certain cases, local implementing agencies are better positioned to set the agenda since they have greater insight into local needs and enjoy the trust of local beneficiaries.

A respondent who attended several donor coordination events aimed at determining media development priorities for **Belarus** complained of a lack of leadership in this group that he said appeared content to listen to a series of presentations by Belarusian stakeholders without discussing concrete action.

Administration

Agile working is about mobilising actors, processes, communications, and technology to find the most efficient and effective way of collaboration. It is about working with optimum flexibility and limited constraints while safeguarding the necessary guidelines and processes.

It is important to consider communications platforms and channels that are accessible to the group and ensure a consistent and safe flow of information. In some cases, Facebook and WhatsApp/Signal groups have been created to perform this function; however, some coordination bodies have developed bespoke platforms.

Mawared (resource in Arabic), the online resource centre created through the Syria coordination group project, ensured that the project's main communication platform was effective in generating member interest. (See Syria case study on pages 24–25 for further details.)

Formats for meetings

Identifying the right arrangements and frequency for coordination meetings is essential to ensuring buy-in and maintaining stakeholders' momentum. This issue should be discussed

upfront between all parties, considering members' availability and levels of commitment. Most coordination processes include a periodic exchange of information on developments in the sector including any shifts in national policy. These meetings are seen as useful for building relationships between stakeholders and ensuring a flow of information across the sector.

Meeting procedures should be agreed upon to ensure that they are inclusive and participatory. Some respondents argued that responsibilities for chairing and moderating meetings as well as taking minutes and notes should rotate among key members of the group. Coordination and dialogue bring with them the risk of disagreement. Establishing mechanisms for conflict resolution such as voting and veto procedures will help mitigate against possible differences of opinion in the group.

The Syria coordination group embraced three kinds of meeting formats with different leads for each meeting depending on where and why they were being held. (See Syria case study on pages 24–25.) GFMD's Ukraine coordination group initially held meetings every two weeks and then changed to three weeks as priorities shifted.

The language of meetings should be agreed upon in advance, and provisions should be made for those who require interpretation. Finding the balance can be tricky. The MedMedia coordination group was criticised for holding meetings in English, which excluded certain local media development actors in the MENA region who were more comfortable speaking Arabic or French. Perhaps the most successful meeting of the MedMedia group was held at the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) conference in Jordan in 2016. Not only was translation made available for all languages, but participants also benefited from access to the conference workshops and other services provided by ARIJ. A presence at the conference played an important role in raising the group's visibility and encouraging new members to join.

While face-to-face meetings are generally considered preferable, online engagement has the benefit of being more discreet and allowing a discussion of more-sensitive topics. When Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni was jailed for three years following his work criticising the head of the armed forces and covering protests, FPU and IMS led a series of online sessions between international and local organisations to identify areas for media assistance as well as to share expertise on working in such a challenging context. The online format allowed local organisations in Algeria to engage with funders and discuss development priorities. The Journalists in Distress (JID) Network (see case study on pages 28–29) specialises in taking swift action in response to individual cases and ensuring a high degree of digital security in all its operations.

Establishing the scope and focus of work

It is important to define the objectives, outcomes, and structure of the coordination project as well as to identify its target groups and core activities. Terms of Reference (ToR) should lay out

the working arrangements of the group and the roles and responsibilities of its members. Annual activity plans are a useful way of establishing a clear framework for coordination, which can be reviewed as needed.

The **Sudan** coordination work, which was initially driven by the FCDO with a meeting facilitated by the GFMD, evolved into a roadmap for far-ranging media development and reform activities aimed at reengineering the media ecosystem in Sudan. The roadmap was conceived by several media development actors working in the country, but it was subsequently derailed by political events in Sudan, which saw donors limit or even withdraw their funding. It is important that any such coordination mechanism can maintain sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and seize available opportunities as they present themselves. Ensuring that the coordination group's functions are not duplicating the work of other organisations or structures is also key.

Embracing thematic priorities

A focus on thematic areas or national priorities for media development helps align coordination with sector-level reform or policy making. Themes that resonate with a broad constituency of local stakeholders and that require urgent action are likely to secure greater ownership and engagement. In Iraq, initial attempts at coordinating the media development community became more effective when members introduced a focus on safety and security, an issue of growing concern in 2016 and one that UNESCO was also pushing on a global level. (See Iraq case study on page 21.)

A survey of participants in GFMD's coordination meetings for Ukraine suggested that there was an appetite for a thematic approach driven by local actors. One respondent commented,

> *There is a need to differentiate areas of focus and recognise lead actors in each. Information sharing is the first priority, but cooperation, coordination and complementarity should be the goals. Local actors should be enabled to set the agenda, priorities and follow-up action.*

Another recommended,

> *Break down coordination into more specific and manageable areas (emergency response/crisis management, media viability, funding, etc.).*

Driving innovation

In several cases, coordination has moved beyond its initial focus on information sharing to providing platforms for promoting lessons learned, sharing expertise, and driving innovation. Bringing in external expertise can serve to enrich the knowledge and skills of members,

enabling them to become more-effective media development actors and build better relationships with donors. In some cases, coordination groups can act as conduits for services that can be offered to similar organisations and even donors.

The **Syria** coordination group facilitated an innovative workshop that brought together Turkish and Syrian journalists and produced a set of unique recommendations for Turkish media on ways to avoid stereotypical portrayals of Syrian refugees as well as on ways to improve cooperation with their Syrian peers. (See Syria case study on pages 24–25.) The group eventually produced a white paper that was aimed at providing the donor community with an overview of the key challenges faced by media in both countries.

Involving local actors and establishing equal partnerships

Local organisations can often feel disconnected from the international development community. In most cases, they have limited capacity and smaller budgets, and consequently, they feel less able to invest time and energy to make sure that their views are taken into account. Introducing effective mechanisms for including and listening to local views, needs, and priorities makes coordination more relevant. Due consideration given to the local context is paramount, and roles, responsibilities, and priorities should be apportioned accordingly.

The Lebanon Joint Coordination Group is an exception to the rule. Efforts have been driven by the Samir Kassir Foundation, which enjoys longstanding relationships with international agencies such as IMS, Free Press Unlimited, and Canal France International. It also collaborates with other local media assistance organisations such as the Maharat Foundation, which has a strong partnership with the Deutsche Welle Akademie and Internews. Local partners established the scope and focus of the Media Recovery Fund, set the priority areas for funding, and successfully negotiated with donors to ensure that decision-making powers remained within the group.

One similarity between the Lebanon and Ukraine examples is that GFMD, as a network with members in both countries, has been able to use this status to bring local and international actors together, ensuring that stakeholders on all levels can contribute where needed.

The Febrayer network is composed entirely of local organisations that facilitate cooperation among their peers in areas such as content production, fundraising, knowledge sharing, business model development, and joint educational programmes.

Acting as an interface between multiple stakeholders

Dialogue is at the core of coordination, but it is often perceived in different ways by diverse stakeholders. Negative perceptions are fed by experiences of long, circular conversations that produce little in the way of conclusions or clear action points. It is important that coordination is

managed in a way that takes advantage of common interests and minimises the potential for conflicting agendas to cause internal divisions. Establishing focal points and presenting a proper rationale for the division of labour will reassure stakeholders that they have an equal stake in coordination meetings. Credible and professional moderators or experts can also contribute to a greater feeling of inclusion by all partners. There are several examples of negative synergies between stakeholders that could have been avoided with more-strategic thinking about the push and pull factors of coordination.

Agility and flexibility

While established systems and processes provide structure and clarity, coordination bodies should also have the flexibility to take advantage of new opportunities for engagement. In Iraq, sector-level coordination took a back seat to address the more immediate imperative of journalists' safety. A pivot toward human rights–related priorities secure the support of international embassies and donors in advocacy efforts to end impunity in relation to attacks against journalists in Iraq. (See Iraq case study on page 21.) Rallying forces beyond the immediate membership of a coordination group can increase the resonance of activities and lead to the development of national plans and strategies.

Recommendations

All respondents in the interviews—including those who shared a negative experience of coordination—agreed that at a minimum, sharing information and exploring synergies should be fixtures of the media development landscape in any given country. The positive impact of such activities on value for money, aid effectiveness, and public perceptions of development programmes was recognised across the board and particularly in the context of the fundamental principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (see below).

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness

The 2005 Paris Declaration outlines the following five fundamental principles for making aid more effective:

- Ownership: Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions, and tackle corruption.
- Alignment: Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
- Harmonisation: Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures, and share information to avoid duplication.

- Results: Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results, and results get measured.
- Mutual accountability: Donors and partners are accountable for development results.

Clearly, the scale of coordination work will depend largely on the volume of programming on the ground. However, even in those countries that see low levels of activity or have a single dominant programme, there was perceived value in introducing media development as a separate thematic strand in wider coordination efforts. The format and structure inherent in the selected coordination mechanism will also be shaped by the needs and priorities of local actors, but in general, a scheduled exchange of information combined with a platform for knowledge management was welcomed.

The recommended level of involvement of donor organisations is a moot point since few if any coordination mechanisms have succeeded in regularly bringing donors and implementing agencies to the table. In 2016, as part of the MedMedia project, EC officials attempted to organise a roundtable for EU donors and development agencies committed to supporting media in the MENA region. Despite the best efforts of those concerned, the event was attended by representatives from just two member states—Austria and Latvia—neither of which was active in this field.

Conversely, the donor coordination process that was set up in Ukraine in 2015 includes only limited representation from implementing agencies and exists in parallel to the coordination group assembled by GFMD in the wake of the Russian invasion. While GFMD invites donors to its meetings and shares information via email and online documents, the donors have yet to reciprocate.

Thus, in real terms, there is no silver bullet or single best-practice model. However, based on its findings and conclusions, this report recommends that a strong level of interagency engagement should become the default position for all media development projects. Donors should make sustained coordination and knowledge sharing a mandatory requirement that is reflected in project reporting and external evaluation. They should also encourage (and perhaps require) grantees to include an allocation for coordination work in their budgets. These funds could be used collectively to support related activities as well as the human resources and technical solutions needed to underpin these processes.

Furthermore, the authors of the study recommend that coordination processes consider all or some of the following elements when developing their approach.

Strong impartial leadership that ensures proper inclusion and full participation

The profile of the organisations or individuals who lead coordination processes are key. Participants need to feel that the oversight is impartial and that there are no conflicts of interest implicit in the convening and chairing of meetings. Ideally, this should be reflected in the guidelines or terms of reference that establish the scope and remit of coordination processes. The goal of such documents is to set a level playing field, ensuring that meetings or other types of exchange serve as an open forum for dialogue and as a safe conduit for information.

Leadership plays an essential role in keeping activities on track, motivating participants, and engaging effectively with external stakeholders. In the context of meetings, this extends to inclusive moderation that ensures all attendees can participate fully and that discussions are properly balanced between local and international actors, large and small organisations, and men and women. Any perception that meetings are dominated or hijacked by specific interest groups is likely to severely undermine the buy-in and commitment of other participants.

A stable and predictable source of funding

Understandably, coordination processes that have enjoyed sustained donor funding or support (Tunisia, Ukraine) have outlasted those that have led a hand-to-mouth existence or have relied on the goodwill of participants alone. As noted above, there is a strong argument for building funding streams into project budgets, but there are also several precedents for one or more locally based donors underwriting coordination efforts.

Stable funding ensures that groups can hire administrative staff as well as knowledge-management platforms. It can also cover the costs of events convened to address disparate themes or crisis situations. Just as important, funding reflects a long-term commitment on the part of the donor community and gives participants the confidence that the coordination work has solid, long-term prospects.

Sufficient resources to provide consistent service to members

By the same yardstick, effective coordination requires sustained support both on an administrative level (to organise meetings and share information) and in terms of subject-matter expertise. The ability to commission sectoral research on an ad hoc basis can be of significant benefit to all stakeholders, and expert advice on new thematic priorities can help inform and drive working group discussions.

Adequate information- and knowledge-sharing platforms

As demonstrated by the majority of coordination initiatives, members are reluctant to contribute insight and data unless they are confident that it will be stored in a secure environment that respects data-protection regulations and sharing protocols. As noted in the report, qualitative insights into the performance of partners, consultants, and trainers cannot be shared for legal reasons and confidentiality concerns, but there is an extensive body of quantitative data that is of value to all stakeholders. Furthermore, a centralised and searchable repository of studies, reports, and legislative documents is likely to enjoy a good level of take-up.

A quorum of local and international media development actors

Clearly, coordination processes that represent a small fraction of the media development sector or that are heavily weighted in favour of international agencies are unlikely to gain momentum or have a positive impact on local media development practices. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure proper representation from across the spectrum and to maintain a quorum for each meeting. Ultimately, this will involve selling the idea to the putative membership and demonstrating its value at an early stage. An independent mapping exercise can be a good way of building traction and creating a tool that is of general interest.

An effective interface with the donor community

The common approach has been to invite the representatives of donor organisations to meetings and to take the opportunity to present success stories or articulate pressing needs. Development agencies complain that donors generally send relatively junior staff to these meetings and that as a result, they have limited ability to engage with actual decision makers. Substantive discussions on national strategies or complementary funding efforts appear to be elusive. Nevertheless, such relationships are built only over time, so there is a need for perseverance. As highlighted in the report, donors may be attracted by the possibility of organising collective action around research, monitoring, and evaluation. Progress in these areas could act as an important entry point for more-sustained donor engagement.

A good level of visibility and an ability to engage

This quality is unlikely to be relevant to coordination work in countries with authoritarian regimes or in conflict-affected states, but the potential for such groups to lead advocacy efforts in transitional democracies should not be underestimated. This requires a joint strategy and consensus on the target issues, but a coordination process that unites key local media actors can play a significant role in identifying realistic objectives and mobilising the resources needed

to achieve them. A good level of visibility can assist such initiatives by raising awareness and garnering support in the sector and the wider society.

Sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities

Coordination processes should avoid developing complex bureaucracies or onerous operating procedures. They should act as catalysts for efficient and effective actions. One recommendation made by several respondents was to use coordination bodies as a platform for discussing thematic imperatives and finding solutions to sectoral challenges. Those that focus simply on sharing information and mapping the development sector are likely to have a limited shelf life, while dynamic groups that are committed to collective problem solving and can rally individuals and organisations around concrete initiatives will enjoy higher levels of interest and buy-in. Ultimately, successful coordination groups need to remain relevant, reactive, and engaged.

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A four page policy briefing summarising the findings and recommendations is available here: https://gfmd.info/briefings/coordinating-media-assistance-journalism-support

Annex 1

Terms of Reference Template for Coordination Groups

Overview

This template can be used by media development stakeholders as a general guide when planning a coordination group or project. The purpose of a terms of reference (ToR) is to define a scope of work and its objectives, outline the main roles and responsibilities in the project, and provide a description of the resources needed to undertake the project. It should begin with an overview of the project proposal including the background to its development. For example,

> Xx has been working in XX region for ten years to support freedom of expression and independent media. Unofficial networks have been established on a national level, and modes of collaboration have proven effective in maximising project outputs. networks, Xx proposes to formalise these networks by creating a non-hierarchical coordination process in XX.

The project will provide a network of support, bringing stakeholders together to share experience and ideas and equip them with the tools they need to do their jobs in an effective and impactful way. It will join donors, implementing agencies, and civil society organisations with national actors and professionals with a view to forging stronger partnerships between these groups. The project design is based on the premise that this networking cycle can help shape reform processes, design collaborative roadmaps, and establish useful indicators and points of reference.

This should be followed by the key objectives and results expected from the project. The proposed timeline and budget should complement each other and include a breakdown of spend according to the activities outlined in the timeline.

1. Objectives (examples)

- To promote the benefits of improved coordination and collaboration within the media development community
- To give beneficiaries of media development projects and local stakeholders who are active in the region a further platform to discuss the roles of both national and regional coordination
- To facilitate conversations about how the donor community can better support media development in the region with a focus on concrete actions to take this forward

2. Expected results (examples)

- Stakeholders will gain further insight into the needs and requirements of beneficiaries of media development projects and how these can be better served through enhanced coordination and communication mechanics.
- Local actors and beneficiaries will gain a greater voice in media development projects and defining priorities.
- The role of both national and regional coordination efforts will be more clearly defined.
- Concrete ideas will be developed to deal with the issue of better communication with the donor community in the region.
- A national action plan /strategy will be developed.

3. Activities (examples)
- Roundtables
- Conferences
- Regular meetings
- Establishing a coordination process
- White papers
- Capacity building

4. Implementation

- Who are the key stakeholders in the group?
- What are their different roles in facilitation of the group and its activities?
- Who are the main beneficiaries of the project?

5. Timeline

6. Budget