

# Global Strategy

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2024-2028



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## IMS Global Strategy 2024-2028

The executive management would like to thank all IMS staff and advisers for their contributions in this strategy process.

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IMS

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## Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	3
Global challenges	4
Media sector challenges	5
Responding with impact	7
IMS' theory of change	9
Strategic outcome 1: Public interest content and business viability	15
Strategic outcome 2: Safety of journalists, content producers and media	18
Strategic outcome 3: Policy, laws, regulations and public interest infrastructure	20
Institutional priorities	24
Conclusion	26
Key terms explained	27
Endnotes	31

## Foreword

The space for public interest journalists, content producers and media to operate freely is steadily narrowing. Around the globe, people live in societies polarised by extreme inequality, with marginalised groups bearing the brunt of the suffering. Bad governance, endemic corruption and unchecked greed are undermining social justice and economic rights, while torrents of divisive disinformation, supercharged by ever-evolving digital technologies, are sowing division and eroding public trust. At the same time, in the context of seismic changes in global power structures and widespread democratic backsliding, people are increasingly and rightfully questioning the ability of liberal democracies to deliver social justice. In the midst of it all, public interest journalists and other content producers continue to be routinely harassed, assaulted and killed.

### A critical antidote

Amid this state of affairs, the world desperately needs an antidote to the interlinked maladies of authoritarian rule, rampant inequality and society-wide discord. Such an antidote is what public interest journalism and other forms of truthful, relevant information inject into narratives infected by hate, lies and falsities. IMS' two decades' experience bear witness to the fact that comprehensive, locally led media development can and does help keep the lights on for free media, even in the most forbidding of circumstances.

In a global context marked by closing civic spaces and rapidly transforming media landscapes, innovation will be the key to success. Consequently, in the coming years we will focus sharply on exploring new ways of reinforcing our partners' resilience against the multiple pressures they face.

Among other things, we will pursue new, cross-sectoral partnerships that can help spur the political and financial commitment needed to ensure that public interest media can continue to distribute oxygen to suffocating civic debates and counter hateful, deception-riddled narratives with fact-based and constructive ones.

Simultaneously, we will focus on developing approaches to help ensure that public interest journalism and other content outperform destructive disinformation. In this respect, while aspects of **artificial intelligence (AI)** constitute a threat to good journalism, IMS partners are already taking steps to harness its potential to identify **disinformation**, and counter it as or even before it spreads widely.

In all that we do, equal rights and opportunities will remain a critical priority. This is based on the fundamental insight that without **equity** in all its forms, the notions of human rights and meaningful development are null and void. That is why we will reinforce our focus on supporting our organisation and our partners in exposing and addressing the systemic and structural barriers to **diversity** and **inclusion**.

Armed conflict and persecution of marginalised groups continue to forcibly displace **public interest media**. We will develop our approaches to supporting exiled media workers and organisations in their operations, enabling a continued flow of truthful information and balanced analyses to counter the deceitful and destructive narratives that flourish in the context of totalitarian rule.

Last but by no means least, as an organisation with rights, justice and **equality** at the core of our vision and mandate, we have a clear duty to help promote inclusive, grassroots-driven solutions to the ongoing climate and environment crises. In the coming years, we will reinforce our efforts to pave the way for good climate journalism by supporting our partners in developing new formats, venues and types of content that can help people speak up against destructive policies, corruption and other malicious practices inflaming an already raging global emergency.

## Public interest media: a public good

As we move into new and in many ways uncharted territory, it will be critical for us to keep in mind that dogmatic notions of liberal democracy will do little to help us progress. We will continue to pursue opportunities for incremental change with the potential to make a real, positive difference on the ground – an approach we have seen yield tangible results across diverse contexts over the course of the past 20 years.

An equally important strategic aim will be to strengthen existing partnerships and form novel ones that are relevant in the context of changing geopolitical realities with multiple actors and ideologies vying for influence. Staying alert and responsive to such changes will be key to our success in the years to come.

Essentially, value-driven public interest journalism and content that reach and cater to diverse populations and challenge entrenched power structures are the lifeblood of **democracy**. At the end of the day, we believe that public interest media should be viewed as a public good in the same way as health services, physical infrastructure and education.

There is never a guarantee that quality journalism and independent media will lead to democratic, just and inclusive societies. But there is certainty that they will not be achieved without them. With this strategy, we renew our commitment to playing our part in paving the way for people and communities around the world to claim their rights and pursue opportunities.

Eva Grambye, Acting Board Chair

Jesper Højberg, Executive Director

## Introduction

Good Journalism. Better Societies.

IMS' tagline captures the role public interest journalists, content producers and media play in transforming societies for the wellbeing of the public. IMS supports journalism and other content creation that can further accountability, human rights and people's rights and aspirations. We commit to supporting media that strive to provide the public with informed and critical coverage of the developmental and humanitarian challenges their societies face so that their audiences are properly informed about these issues and their leaders can be held accountable.

Since its inception, IMS has developed a value proposition based on core values and principles of engagement (see page 8). At the heart of this, we follow a **comprehensive approach** to media development strongly rooted in local contexts, experiences and innovation.

IMS remains focused on four pillars of added value (see page 12):

- We apply trust-based and long-term partnerships within a human rights-based approach, ensuring local-to-local and local-to-global connectedness with selected media outlets and **civil society actors** whose work is guided by visions and values that correspond to ours. IMS also partners with actors who are, or have the potential to become, significant agents of social change in a specific context.
- Our support for our partners is built on strategic funding and core support aimed at ensuring that media outlets reach and engage with audiences across segments and work towards functioning business models, despite the complex challenges they face.
- We provide solutions-oriented expertise and capacity development tailored to partners' needs, including in rapidly emerging and evolving fields such as strategic thinking, safety and protection mechanisms, diversity, equity and inclusion in media, AI and digital rights.
- We support **coalition** building, coordination and facilitation including peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, partnerships and alliances, as we believe these are key to moving the media sector forward in any given country.

Our theory of change illustrates what we envisage the role of public interest journalists, content producers and media to be in creating and sustaining democratic just, and inclusive societies (see page 9), and how we offer best practice knowledge and expertise in key mainstreamed areas. Through this strategy, we will sharpen our focus on enabling media partners to survive and thrive in their local contexts and serve local publics with relevant and constructive-oriented journalism and other content that addresses inequalities, as well as supporting the technological, human and strategic competitiveness of public interest journalism.

The strategic fundamentals of what we believe is required to build viable and safe local ecosystems remain intact. In this strategy, we will continue building on our strengths – not least our comprehensive and partner-led approach to media development – while also acknowledging key areas in which we need to consolidate, evolve, and invest (see our Institutional priorities on page 24).

Change does not happen on a linear path, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Contingencies are needed within global interconnected realities that often ambush well-crafted intentions. We recognise that change is often only possible during narrow windows of opportunity that can take many years to open. Our strategy must reflect this to varying degrees within different contexts and navigate between global trends and local political, economic and social realities (see also Local to global ambitions, page 22).

Unfolding at the nexus of peace, emergencies and conflict, this strategy will guide our readiness and our decision making, both in programme design and innovation. It will assist all levels of the organisation in making critical decisions through a clear, shared understanding of our vision for the future and our goal for the next four years. And it offers a roadmap for our collaboration with partners, funders and our broader community.

## Global challenges

### Shifting global realities

Certainly, the geopolitical landscape is changing fast. We are witnessing a host of rapidly developing and unpredictable emergencies, frequent attacks on democracy, a backlash against women's rights and gender justice, widespread and aggressive vilification of public interest media, popular uprisings and an increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters. These global changes have far-reaching implications for IMS' work.

As geopolitical tensions rise, political spaces shrink and media around the world face extinction and deep financial and political constraints, IMS' mandate is more relevant than ever. In recent years, new power centres, notably **BRICS**, and forms of self-organising that could potentially reshape global politics and financial parameters have emerged. Norms and values championed by the United Nations (UN) and former colonial, imperialist powers are being challenged by the rest of the world in view of what is perceived as those powers' hypocritical support to repressive regimes. International non-governmental organisations (INGOs), such as IMS, are not always identified as allies.

### Democracy under pressure

The notion of fundamental rights and freedoms is in decline globally, and the influence of the universal human rights regime is eroding. For the first time in more than two decades, the world has more autocracies than liberal democracies.<sup>1</sup> This leaves liberal democracies at a crossroads between inaction and proactively supporting and furthering their values at home and abroad. The latter is no easy task when confronted with the historical reality of colonialism and social and economic inequality. Simultaneously, authoritarian-leaning leaders are exploiting and sometimes creating popular grievances, often with the help of disinformation campaigns, to drum up support for their policies while vilifying media, rights activists and minorities. In this environment, IMS is committed to maintaining and promoting our mandate. Increasingly, the issues at hand are interconnected and call for a comprehensive approach. The need to push for, maintain and develop press freedom is also becoming increasingly relevant closer to IMS' headquarter in Copenhagen, as our work on countering news deserts within the EU reflects. IMS' mandate continues to be to defend press freedom and access to information in places where the stakes are high when it comes to defending and advancing democratic values and human rights.

### Disinformation and the war on truth

Disinformation, propaganda and information warfare are among the 21st century's biggest challenges. While these issues are not new, today's social media and digital platforms continually amplify the reach of harmful content and the speed with which it spreads. Meanwhile, the increasing sophistication of generative AI and other digital tools make tracking and debunking ever more challenging. Disinformation poses a significant public risk with antagonistic actors using it to distort public awareness and undermine peace and social cohesion. Over the last decade, governments, media and civil society have grappled with this evolving challenge, moving from a simplified understanding of "fake news" to a more nuanced comprehension of information threats. Among those threats are the weaponisation of manipulative discourses, the distortion of channels with falsehoods and doctored information, the occurrence of **gendered disinformation**, and myriad forms of hate speech, all of which pose grave threats to **freedom of expression (FoE)** and people's ability to participate in informed public debate.

## Climate crisis

Climate change is the defining crisis of our time. Its catastrophic fallouts – from more frequent and stronger natural disasters to falling biodiversity and increasing hunger – will fundamentally change the way humans live, interact and do business. Actions to counter the crisis are woefully insufficient, and its impacts are unevenly weighted against the world’s most vulnerable people, fuelling conflicts and destabilising nations.

The UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights the importance and potential of media to shape the public discourse about climate change and how to respond to it. Therefore, we will continue to expand our work with partners around the media’s role in relation to the climate crisis with a focus on the intersectional consequences of climate change, local resilience to it, mitigation efforts and increased **accountability**.

## Media sector challenges

### The risks of digital infrastructure

The present-day scale of disinformation is a direct consequence of the world’s current **digital infrastructure**. Social media platforms and their attention-maximising algorithms are a central culprit that allowed authoritarian regimes and other illegitimate actors to game these data-driven processes to strengthen their anti-democratic, misogynistic, racist and human rights-violating endeavours. Across countries that IMS is engaged in, the move from semi-public social networks to encrypted messaging apps -notably WhatsApp and Telegram- poses a fundamental problem for programmes’ and partners’ ability to monitor, track and intervene when disinformation circulates, both technically and with respect to privacy. However, it is near impossible to define the scale of the problem, not least because of a pronounced lack of available data and the availability of the knowledge and resources needed to process such data.

The challenge goes far beyond IMS programmes and is not limited to disinformation but is a general problem for all media that involve platform data. The fact that a few American and Chinese companies possess near monopolistic abilities and resources to understand and learn from our digitised lives, constitutes a defining challenge of our time.

### Generative AI

With the emergence of generative AI, the scale of synthetic media and machine-produced content is expanding exponentially. By 2026, 90 percent of online content could be machine generated.<sup>2</sup> AI presents opportunities in terms of resource efficiencies at every stage of sourcing, production and distribution of content. It also heralds new challenges to already-stressed media revenue models and further obstacles for equality worldwide thanks to its tendency to exacerbate racial and gender biases. Innovation around implementation and deployment of AI is required to ensure tools fully recognise the practices, languages and dialects of people in many of the places where IMS works. IMS’ decisions on the use of AI will be guided by what is in the **public interest**. Therefore, our efforts to define “public interest journalism” and “public interest technology” will also give us a framework for how we will approach AI.

### Media market failure and challenged business models

Market conditions are highly unfavourable for public interest media in many contexts. Market constraints are amplified by government actors, resulting in hostile financial conditions for the operation of media outlets, including how they spend government advertising, taxation, subsidies, budgetary support for selected media, the distribution of licences and unfair competition. In addition, media are losing their advertising revenue to

technology companies that have also withdrawn their innovation funding. Media are finding it hard to raise direct funds from audiences already impacted by diverse crises.

There is an urgent need to contribute to policy and regulatory frameworks for resilient operations, including bargaining codes, tax regimes, mobilising private investments or philanthropic support. Global initiatives are lobbying for more official development assistance (ODA), out of which support for media development has been consistently low.<sup>3</sup> For **media viability**, this existential financial challenge requires strong coordination, knowledge sharing and pushing state actors to take on responsibility for sustaining independent public interest media globally. IMS supports initiatives to exert pressure on technology platforms to return a larger proportion of their advertising revenue to the media that generate the content they use.

### **Journalism as a deadly and censored profession**

Journalists face what UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan has called a perfect storm of threats, attacks and restrictions.<sup>4</sup> While more men than women are killed, killings of women journalists are accelerating at an alarming pace, and women journalists are also disproportionately targeted with **gender-based** threats. Journalists are subjected to a host of intimidation tactics. Such risks are often escalated when journalists cover women's and **LGBTQIA+** people's rights, environmental issues and organised crime. Authorities around the world have applied restrictive laws in the digital arena. Furthermore, libel, defamation, tax and other financial investigations as well as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) are commonly used to intimidate journalists and drain their resources. Upholding press freedom and ensuring the safety of journalists in the digital age requires a committed, long-term developmental approach. The **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (UNPA)** has provided a common framework for states, international organisations and civil society to share experiences, identify good practices, improve coordination, increase awareness of the problems and inspire collaborative initiatives but has done little to deter those responsible for the escalation of attacks on the media.

## IMS' core values

**Trust:** IMS operates from a foundation of integrity, confidence and trust. We stay accountable through mutual respect and transparency, building trust-based relationships with our partners, colleagues and stakeholders.

**Inclusion:** IMS seeks to foster environments in which diverse identities and ideas are respected, valued and supported. We respect differences and will strive towards diversity, equity, inclusion and justice from an intersectional perspective, with a vision to transform prevailing power dynamics.

**Solidarity:** IMS fosters solidarity through coalitions, partnership and teamwork. We act in solidarity with the struggles of our partners, colleagues, those who are marginalised, disadvantaged and oppressed. We believe in community, collaboration, and know that we are stronger together.

**Responsiveness:** IMS listens and reflects on the world around us to craft timely responses that are not pre-conceived but contextually relevant. We strive to develop comprehensive understandings, act as a catalyst for change and local ownership, ensuring we learn from the past to find solutions that respond to the needs of the future.

**Ambition:** IMS strives to do its very best for those it serves. Humble, self-reflective, courageous and open to new ideas, we push for progressive change that is needed. We strive to be professional, creative, innovative, and make work rewarding for our colleagues.

## IMS' core principles of engagement

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

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

**Catalytic:** We strive to be flexible and to adapt our interventions to the changing needs and priorities of each context and the partners with whom we work. We deploy our resources and capacities strategically to ignite and enable new solutions that maximise windows of opportunity. Our resources develop global strategic partnerships and networks to catalyse other civil society, human rights and humanitarian actors.

**Accountable:** We are committed to working transparently, to working efficiently and effectively and ensuring value for money and long-term sustainability in what we do. We monitor and evaluate our work so that we know what effect it is having and, if necessary, we adjust what we do based on this evidence. We are accountable to all those with whom we work.

## IMS' context-specific approaches

IMS' strategic approach will vary depending on context and will always be driven by an ambition to increase localisation. With the funds we raise from public and private sector donors, we design and manage projects and programmes that support the role of public interest journalists, content producers and media in countries experiencing armed conflict, humanitarian crises, rapid political change and authoritarian rule. In these countries, **civic space** is usually restricted, and the institutions that hold those in power to account – including the media – tend to be under-resourced.

Our approach is firmly rooted in a profound belief in local leadership. We build on our regional and global networks, link up with our global community of partners, and base our work on our partners' and staff's contextual knowledge and experience. In accordance with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness,<sup>5</sup> we strive to align, coordinate and avoid duplicating efforts. Our country selection strategy and criteria are presented in our regional strategies. Intervention modalities vary from country to country, with specific results chains based on the IMS theory of change. It is at the core of our mandate to work in countries marred by conflict, under repression or in countries in transition – either transitioning towards more open and free societies or the opposite. In doing so, we endeavour to move beyond antiquated North-South and East-West dichotomies.

## IMS' theory of change

The key points of departure for IMS' theory of change (ToC) are the current global strategic and media sector challenges, as outlined in the preceding pages, and our added value. IMS believes that public interest journalists, content producers and media are vital for creating democratic, just, and inclusive societies in which people are free to express themselves.

With IMS' support, public interest journalists, content producers and media provide **targeted audiences** – including marginalised and underserved communities – with access to reliable information and inclusive public debate that allow them to act, participate in public life, and claim their rights by holding those with power to account. This also requires us and our partners to work towards creating an inclusive environment that guarantees the physical safety, legal protection and digital infrastructure that public interest journalists, content producers and media need in order to thrive.

IMS contributes to this change process through four ways of working: trust-based partnerships; strategic funding and core support; expert input and capacity development; and coalition building and coordination. These changes are further underpinned by our mainstreamed approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), our human rights-based approach (HRBA) and systematic awareness of digital infrastructure and technology.

The multiple crises public interest journalists, content producers and media are facing require us to be ambitious but also realistic about the impact we and our partners can have. Where democratic space is constrained, and human rights and freedom of expression are under pressure, our aim is to ensure that public interest journalists, content producers and media have the resilience they need to survive against the odds. In less restrictive contexts, our focus is on maintaining, sustaining and, where possible, advancing the gains our partners and we have already made.

IMS' comprehensive approach to media development addresses not only the quality of the journalism and other content produced, but also how producers can reach and engage with diverse audiences underpinned by viable operations, within an environment of enabling laws, policies, infrastructure and safety measures.

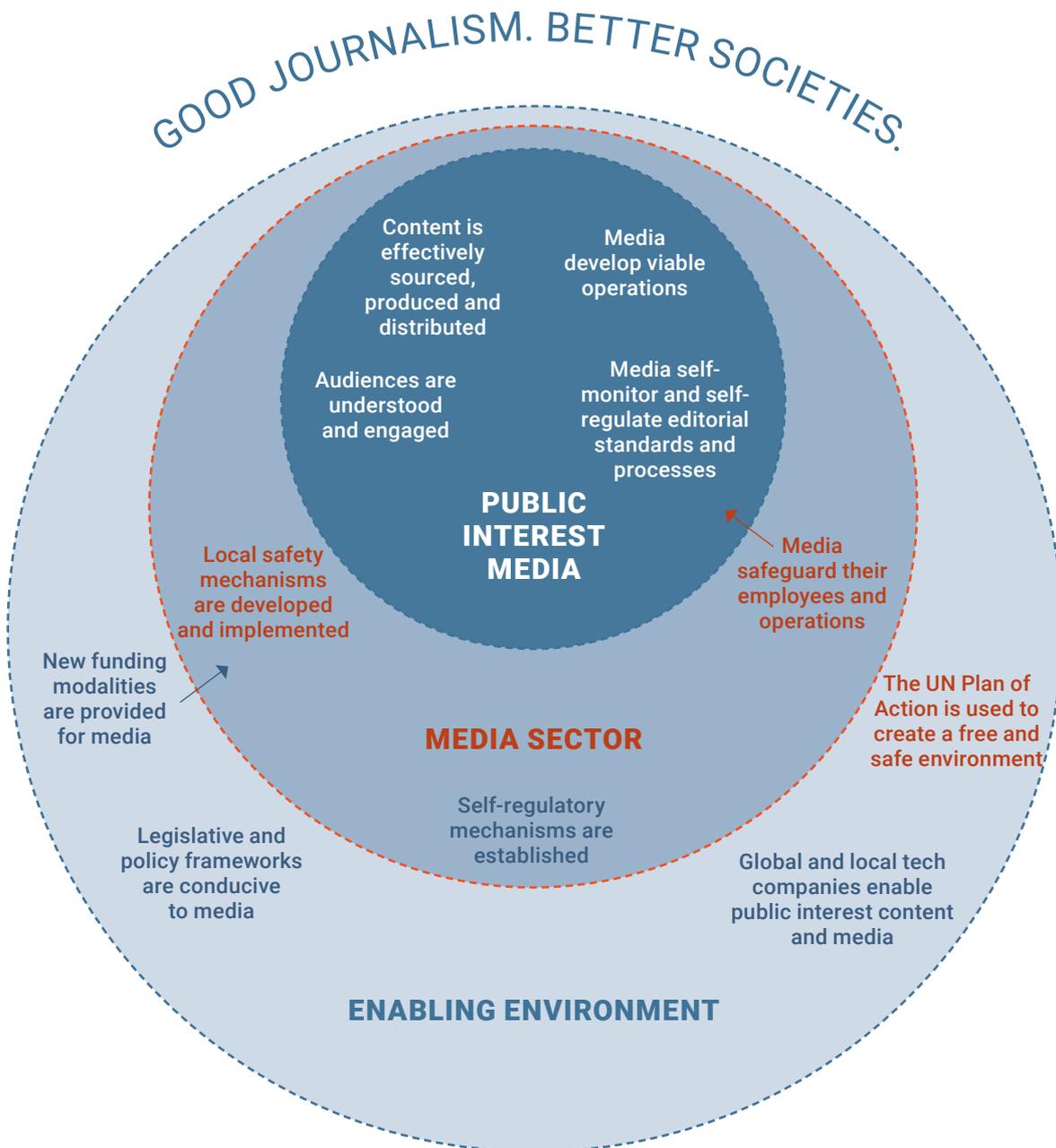
Based on IMS' approach we operate with three main outcome areas:

- **Public interest content** and **business viability** (strategic outcome area 1).
- The safety and protection of journalists, content producers and media (strategic outcome area 2).
- Policy, laws, regulations and **public interest infrastructure** (strategic outcome area 3).

We do not address all these components at the same time or in all our interventions. Rather, we focus on addressing the specific needs and priorities within each context's media ecosystem. We identify these needs and priorities together with our partners and a broader set of actors with a stake in achieving media development ambitions. We also strive to work in a catalytic way, using our resources, networks and knowledge to inspire new developments, new partnerships and to explore emerging opportunities.



# THEORY OF CHANGE



Strategic Outcome 1 Strategic Outcome 2 Strategic Outcome 3

## HOW WE WORK

Trust-based partnerships

Strategic funding and core support

Expert input and capacity development

Coalition building and coordination

Advancing DEI and HRBA in media development

Systematic awareness of digital infrastructures and technology



# THEORY OF CHANGE

## Our vision

IMS envisions societies that are peaceful, just, equitable and inclusive. In these societies, people have the freedom to express themselves and access information. They are empowered by effective public interest journalists, content producers and media who hold those in power accountable.

## Our impact

Public interest journalists, content producers and media provide targeted audiences – including marginalised and underserved communities – with access to reliable information and inclusive public debate that allow audiences to act, to participate in public life and to claim their rights by holding those with power to account.



**Strategic outcome two: Focus areas**

- Strategic media partners and media actors *safeguard their employees and operations*.
- Key stakeholders develop and implement multifaceted *local safety mechanisms* with local ownership for public interest journalists, content producers and media.
- Key international and national stakeholders use available instruments under the *UNPA to create a free and safe environment* for media and media workers.

**Strategic outcome one: Focus areas**

- Public interest journalists, content producers and media *source, produce and distribute* fact-based, ethical public interest content.
- Public interest journalists, content producers and media partners *understand and engage with their audiences*.
- Public interest media enhance their *viability*.
- Public interest journalists, content producers and media *self-monitor and self-regulate their editorial standards and processes*.

**Strategic outcome three: Focus areas**

- State, interstate actors and policy makers ensure that *legislative and policy frameworks* are conducive to free expression and media viability.
- Global and local technology companies *implement measures that enable* public interest media and content, including by being more accountable and transparent.
- Actors regulating the economic environment for media provide *new or improved funding modalities* for public interest media.
- Media stakeholders establish inclusive and independent *self-regulatory mechanisms* to set common standards for content production and organisational processes.

## HOW WE WORK

<p><b>Trust-based partnerships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term</li> <li>• Localisation</li> <li>• Context specific</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategic funding and core support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutually accountable</li> <li>• Responsive</li> <li>• Flexible</li> </ul>	<p><b>Expert input and capacity development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locally applied best practices</li> <li>• Convening and facilitating</li> <li>• Values based</li> </ul>	<p><b>Coalition building and coordination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective action</li> <li>• Peer-to-peer collaboration</li> <li>• Local-to-global connections</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advancing DEI and HRBA in media development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contesting prejudice, bias and stereotypes in content</li> <li>• PLANET+ principles</li> <li>• Transforming exclusionary practices in media</li> </ul>	<p><b>Systematic awareness of digital infrastructure and technology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damage control</li> <li>• Diagnostics</li> <li>• Proactive solutions for public interest infrastructure</li> </ul>		

## Our vision

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## Our value proposition

IMS' context-driven approach means that our partners' media development priorities are the point of departure for all that we do. Our added value is defined by our approach to partnerships and localisation. Overall, our value proposition lies in a combination of:

- Trust-based partnerships over the long term.
- Strategic funding and core support.
- The expert input and capacity development we facilitate and provide to our partners.
- Our facilitation of coalition building and coordination.
- Our mainstreamed advancing of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and human rights-based approach (HRBA) in media development.
- Our systematic awareness of digital infrastructures and technology.



### Trust-based partnerships

Partnership is at the heart of IMS' vision, mission, identity and operations. We are guided by the fundamental belief that real social change requires concerted efforts between like-minded actors at international and local levels, with those directly affected taking ownership of the agenda and strategic direction of development initiatives. We partner with like-minded media and civil society actors with potential to become significant agents of social change and construct our partner portfolio with the key aim of enabling context-sensitive interventions. IMS partners are either media content production partners, media ecosystem partners, civil society groups, other state and public agencies and institutions; or multistakeholder initiatives. We distinguish between three types of partnerships:

- Strategic partnerships aimed at creating a lasting impact on public interest journalists, content producers and media and the environments in which they operate. These are formed in pursuit of shared strategic objectives.
- Activity partnerships aimed at ensuring effective implementation of a specific activity or project.
- Associate partnerships with international organisations to undertake a joint activity, project, programme or grant.

IMS considers mutual trust an essential component of its partnerships. Trust must be developed over time through open, continuous and close interactions with partners. We will further develop our approach to trust-based partnerships with a focus on strategic partnerships. This entails further partner involvement in strategic decision making, more detailed and focused capacity and needs assessments and diversified compliance regimes depending on capacity.



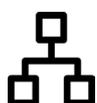
### Strategic funding and core support

IMS takes a holistic, long-term approach to media development focused on flexible core funding. We do not see core support merely as a financial transfer. Core support combined with expert input, capacity development and coalition building allows partners to innovate, adapt and be more resilient while staying true to their missions.



### Expert input and capacity development

IMS adds value through convening and facilitating knowledge development, and by sharing this knowledge with partners, the media development sector and in key international fora. The key areas of expertise are related to the strategic outcome areas: public interest content and business viability; the safety of journalists; and media laws, policy, regulation and public interest infrastructure. DEI is integrated across the three outcome areas to broaden the scope of how IMS, as an organisation and through its programmes, can address different grounds of discrimination. IMS is also developing new areas of expertise in response to global technological developments in the media sector, such as AI.



### Coalition building and coordination

To confront the massive and complex challenges facing media freedom across the world, we engage in global, regional and local strategic partnerships across sectors such as technology, academia and CSOs representing human rights and social justice. We build coalitions and alliances, both by facilitating peer-to-peer collaboration and by supporting the creation of resource hubs, local leadership and locally-owned processes. Moreover, we build advocacy coalitions around international agendas with a focus on involving partners in international networks, debates and policymaking, thus bringing context and local perspectives to international coalitions. By including partners in international networks, fora, debates and policies – notably the UNPA – we help ensure that global agendas are informed by and responsive to local needs

## Mainstreamed approaches



### Advancing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and human rights-based approach (HRBA) in media development

Public interest media promote inclusive societies and civic spaces by striving to challenge prejudice, stereotypes and other exclusionary phenomena that perpetuate bias and inequity. The systemic challenges affecting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in newsrooms and media workspaces are persistent and permeate across multitudes of identities, geographies, technologies and social groups. Barriers to DEI may be exacerbated by limited understanding of and commitments within newsrooms and media workspaces towards reflecting the diversity of their communities and audiences. This may manifest as the inability to retain diverse talent; foster equitable models of reporting; or to self-regulate and safeguard inclusive digital and physical media spaces. The limitations and/or challenges may reinforce hegemonic worldviews, limit coverage to heteronormative, patriarchal narratives and arguably undermine trust, heterogeneity of thought and free expression in the public debate.

With its 2021-2023 strategy on gender equality,<sup>6</sup> IMS amplified its programmatic efforts to advance DEI from a gendered perspective. The strategy articulated IMS' commitments to DEI beyond the gender binary with the primary aim of contributing to a transformation away from sexist, racist and exclusionary practices and cultures prevailing in the media. While gender equity and inclusion are often overlooked in efforts to advance media sectors, they will continue to be a cornerstone of IMS' work in advancing DEI in media development, and we will continue working in alliances looking to improve DEI in media sectors.

HRBA is integrated into IMS' programme cycle management practice. We strive to ensure alignment with the HRBA principles of PLANET+: Participation, link to human rights standards, accountability, non-discrimination and equal access, empowerment, transparency, plus a strong focus on gender equality at the highest possible level in the given context. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress and often result in groups of people being left behind. We link to international human rights standards via instruments related to media and FoE, including UNESCO, the UN Human Rights Council and regional stakeholders to accelerate HRBA and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, we will further study how HRBA corresponds with DEI.



### **Systematic awareness of digital infrastructures and technology**

The exponential pace of technological developments has made it clear that technology links global challenges together in new ways that need to be understood. No technology or choice around technology is neutral. IMS thus faces a negotiation between a systematic awareness of digital infrastructures as they exist currently, with all their inherent tensions, and an ambition to progress our work to create and promote digital infrastructures that are conducive for human rights. For example, a newsroom's choice of which AI tool to integrate (outcome area 1), how a channel to a technology company is used to raise a concrete digital threat against a journalist (outcome area 2) and the choice of which digital standards to promote locally or globally (outcome area 3) are all interrelated. They include the difficult trade-off between the short-term impact (e.g. unparalleled audience reach) of using existing technology companies and their harmful business models vis á vis using, igniting and scaling alternatives that serve public interest journalism and local communities better in the long run. Our public interest infrastructure approach ensures that our partners, programmes and strategies across all outcome areas make informed decisions anchored in local contexts when faced with such trade-offs. Public interest infrastructure will change along with the developments of society, and we will repeatedly have to redefine it in participatory and deliberative processes.

There are systemic risks that arise when a handful of companies own and govern dominant parts of our digital infrastructure: the search engines, social media platforms, app stores and undersea cables that define, enable and limit our digital realities, including the amount of attention we spend consuming disinformation versus quality journalism. Our approach to public interest infrastructure comprises three intervention areas that cut across strategic outcome areas 1 and 3, namely damage control, diagnostics and proactive solutions. Damage control and diagnostics focus on developing the capacities, knowledge and resilience of partners to make difficult and impactful decisions within existing digital infrastructures. Proactive solutions focus on local journalism's role in catalysing, using and scaling new digital infrastructures that serve the public interest.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to public interest infrastructure. In closing or closed spaces, a higher level of reliance on existing digital infrastructures and dominant companies might best serve short-term public interest goals, as local communities are assumed to be under immense pressure, if not direct repressive control. That leaves IMS and partners with difficult decisions about which existing infrastructure and companies to use. Concrete frameworks that can help media organisations and other stakeholders make difficult decisions by scoring a company and its tool's functionality in the local context against its (lack of) public interest value are a way to limit the damage done and prepare the ground for when greater openness arrives.

## Strategic outcome 1: Public interest content and business viability

### Overall outcome

*Public interest journalists, content producers and media produce and distribute fact-based public interest content, understand and engage with their audiences, are viable and are guided by ethical standards.*

Strategic outcome 1 is our core outcome, which is supported by strategic outcome areas 2 and 3. IMS' approach integrates audience understanding and engagement; the production of differentiated content and products valued by audiences and underpinned by viable values-driven business and revenue models; inclusive and safe media organisations; and the effective use of technology. We believe that these are the cornerstones of viable media outlets able to sustain the sourcing, production and distribution of quality public interest journalism and content.

### Focus areas:

- Public interest journalists, content producers and media outlets have the skills and tools to source and produce fact-based, ethical public interest content and to distribute this content to targeted audiences using a variety of effective strategies that make appropriate use of emergent technology.
- Public interest journalists, content producers and media partners engage with their audiences. They deploy effective strategies to understand and reflect the needs of their targeted audience segments, including marginalised and underserved communities. Where possible, our partners amplify the voices of marginalised and vulnerable groups and enhance the representation of these communities in public arenas by applying the principle “nothing about me without me”.
- Public interest media partners use audience and data insights to make content and business decisions. They are clear about their outlet's purpose, vision and mission, and what sets them apart. They apply robust management fundamentals, demonstrate sound leadership running inclusive teams, and seek diversified business and revenue models that reflect public interest values, so that they are viable operations that can sustain the sourcing, production and distribution of public interest content.
- To ensure that public interest content is fact-based and ethical, the public interest journalists, content producers and media with whom IMS partners develop codes of conduct by self-monitoring and **self-regulating** their editorial standards and organisational processes in ways that complement inclusive and independent regulatory mechanisms in the broader **enabling environment** (see outcome 3).

### Assumptions:

- IMS staff and our media partners find practical and ethical ways to apply public interest values in their approaches to sourcing, producing and distributing public interest content in order to remain responsive to audience needs and concerns by means of differentiated products and services.
- Media outlets can better harness the many-to-many online environment, providing and connecting audiences with content that is engaging and relevant to their lives.
- Public interest journalists, content producers and media have the necessary data and insights to understand, reach and engage with audiences in the environments they operate in.
- Audiences, including marginalised and underserved communities and civil society organisations, can be encouraged to trust and use partners' content, be inspired to participate in public life and, where possible, to hold those in power to account.
- Public interest journalists, content producers and media understand the need to continually review the audience, content and business aspects of work and professionalise their organisations by self-regulating policies and processes, developing management fundamentals, strategic and financial planning and measuring performance.
- IMS staff, media partners and like-minded civic groups can work together without compromising editorial independence to identify opportunities for collaboration. They gradually take responsibility for setting the agenda for and leadership of coalitions, networks and partnerships, contributing to regional and international

bodies advocating for changes that contribute to creating an enabling economic environment for media.

- Partners are open to critically evaluating digital infrastructures and technology and, where local contexts allow it, take strategic actions to move towards public interest infrastructures.
- Even in places where freedom of expression and other rights are constrained, pockets of public interest media actors continue to exist. When forced to operate from exile, public interest journalists, content producers and media continue to be relevant to their audiences.

## **IMS' value proposition in relation to strategic outcome 1**

### **Expert input and capacity development:**

IMS focuses on building capacity for quality public interest content. IMS' focus is also on specialist skills such as documentary filmmaking, constructive or investigative journalism. We also respond where new practices are needed such as in environment or climate journalism.

IMS also supports activities that combat mis- and disinformation or hate speech, spanning from grassroots factchecking to proactive measures to outperform disinformation. High-quality news and content that deconstruct harmful narratives should successfully compete with manipulative and emotional content.

IMS supports many forms of audience research as a key to developing effective content strategies that enables our media partners to grow existing and new audiences. The presence of staff in countries we operate in ensures that we have a comprehensive grasp of the contextual issues that impact on our partners and their audiences.

Alongside our partners – which span young, pioneering online media, digital natives, community radio and others – we support experiments with new business and revenue models of journalism, developing organisational capacities and management fundamentals, with considerations for DEI from the onset.

IMS adopts the methodological approach of action research as an umbrella to address future- and solutions-oriented work.<sup>7</sup> Together with partners, and through context-specific expert interventions, we seek to improve media services, develop new forms of journalism and scale innovations. IMS encourages partners to take risks and effect change in practices and to innovate through the use of design thinking and human-centred approaches.

The disruptive nature of AI and the urgent need for further research and experience relevant to the regions IMS operates in require us to take a learn-as-you-go approach that raises partners' awareness of both the opportunities and pitfalls of AI and algorithmic technologies in their respective contexts. IMS will work to urgently speed up our sectoral knowledge and close existing gaps in the operationalisation of automated tools owing to the lack of data, skills and the necessary management capabilities.

### **Coalition building and coordination:**

IMS facilitates peer-to-peer collaboration by bringing partners together in a global community of practice and connecting partners in global fora. We continue to support the creation of resource hubs, local leadership and locally owned processes, including regional, cross-border and cross-continental journalistic investigations and networks. Often, this is made possible by partners' collaboration with like-minded civic groups who have access to the audiences media partners want to reach, and who share the partners' values. Partners can forge these relationships and alliances because their stories and everything else they do are guided by values that demonstrate their commitment to serving the public interest rather than narrow political, economic and cultural interests.

**Gender journalism**

Gender journalism is about unearthing untold stories about power relations that, consciously or unconsciously, remain hidden in mainstream media. This style of journalism puts people and empathy at the centre of the story, empowers by giving a measure of control over the storytelling process, amplifies voices and uses non-sexist language. Gender journalism also emphasises the differentiated impacts the topic has on individuals and groups. Gender journalism respects ethical standards: it relies on investigation; it is based on the reporting of verified and reliable information; and it guarantees the audience's access to diverse information. It seeks to produce critical public interest content and may combine well with peace and human rights journalism.

**Climate and environment journalism**

IMS seeks to boost the role of media in encouraging audiences to take action to counter the climate crisis and catalysing the actions of transnational alliances, civil society and humanitarian actors. Shifting the coverage from consequences to adaptation includes constructive approaches, countering climate mis- and disinformation as well as using, interpreting and communicating big data. IMS supports partners to provide independent, fact-based and inclusive information about climate and ecological risks and to report on climate resilience and plans for sustainable livelihoods, businesses and economies and environmental systems. In response to the devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015, IMS developed a concept for post-disaster accountability journalism. Such modalities will only grow in importance as natural disasters become more frequent due to the human-induced climate crisis.

**Documentary film**

Documentary film has become one of the most influential ways of telling factual stories in a time of unprecedented disruption in the media. They have the power to evoke emotions and connection and to mobilise large audiences. As an audio-visual medium, documentary film possesses a remarkable capacity to engage large audiences via online platforms, social media, mobile phones and TV. Operating as a dynamic medium, documentaries foster awareness and, in certain cases, insightful suggestions and potential solutions. IMS' work with documentary film revolves around three strategic approaches:

- Direct support for film productions, including professional guidance in all facets of filmmaking.
- A core understanding of the importance of film institutions that can form an infrastructure underneath the production layer, while also possessing the potential to evolve into sustainable entities.
- Strong efforts supporting filmmakers to enhance the outreach and impact of their work through distribution locally, regionally and internationally.

**Constructive journalism**

Constructive journalism is a response to the increasing sensationalism and negative bias of news media that is resulting in a growing global news avoidance. Constructive journalism can counter audience fatigue by inspiring people, encouraging them to seek solutions and stand against division through reporting that is balanced, fair and non-sensational. Its mission is to re-instill trust in the idea that shared facts, knowledge and discussions are the pillars on which our communities rest – that journalism is a feedback mechanism that helps society self-correct. It covers responses to well-documented problems, changing the focal point of the story from the problem to efforts to solve it. Ultimately, the goal is to engage audiences and increase trust in the media by helping the public form an accurate and nuanced, rather than simplistic, picture of the world they live in, promoting democratic conversations and combatting political polarisation by fostering civil discourse.

## Strategic outcome 2: Safety of journalists, content producers and media

### Overall outcome

*Public interest journalists, content producers and media are safe to work freely.*

Public interest journalists, content producers and media can only thrive and fulfil their vital role in society when they are safe to work freely. This requires overcoming a plethora of physical, digital, economical, psychological and legal constraints.

IMS and our partners are working to reduce and remove the risks that public interest journalists, content producers and media face, and we support them to develop operational approaches suited to mitigating those risks. Our comprehensive approach involves the “the four Ps”:

- Prevent threats to, attacks and assaults on and the harassment of public interest journalists, content producers and media.
- Prepare them to effectively respond to and mitigate threats, emergencies and crises.
- Protect them from external threats, assaults, attacks and harassment.
- Prosecute crimes committed against them.

IMS uses the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (UNPA) as a roadmap towards enabling free and safe environments. IMS believes that only committed, sustained, coordinated and context-specific engagement between key stakeholders at local, national and international levels creates sustainable improvements in the safety of public interest journalists, content producers and media.

### Focus areas:

- Strategic media partners and media actors – including public interest media outlets, media organisations, and journalists’ associations – safeguard their employees and operations. IMS supports its strategic partners in developing institutional capacity to effectively prepare for and mitigate threats to their operations and to protect employees and operations from physical, digital, financial, political, psychological and legal harm.
- Key stakeholders develop and implement multifaceted, inclusive and gender-sensitive local **safety mechanisms** for public interest journalists, content producers and media with local ownership and international support. These mechanisms address physical, digital, financial, political, psychological and legal threats against public interest journalists, content producers and media in line with objectives set by those with a stake in ensuring they are safe to work freely: media representatives, formal and informal powerholders and authorities such as judicial bodies, law enforcement and military personnel.
- Key international and national stakeholders use available instruments under the UNPA to create a free and safe environment for public interest journalists, content producers and media. The UNPA guides concerted efforts by national and international stakeholders to strengthen national, regional, and international legal mechanisms that support free expression and access to information. IMS facilitates local media actors’ access to international discussions to ensure that those discussions produce sustainable and pertinent interventions with the involvement of those directly affected by the safety issues concerned.

### **Assumptions:**

- International frameworks, notably the UNPA, continue to be effective in advocating for journalists' safety and the prevention of **impunity**.
- Given the right level and type of support, our partners are able to protect their employees and contribute to building a culture of safety in the broader media sector based on shared interest through collective efforts, knowledge sharing and coalition building.
- Employee and operational safety are preconditions for public interest journalists, content producers and media providing targeted audiences – including marginalised and underserved communities – with access to reliable information and platforms for inclusive public debate that allow audience members to act, to participate in public life and to claim their rights by holding those with power to account.

### **IMS' value proposition in relation to outcome area 2**

#### **Expert input and capacity development**

IMS supports partners with strategic and operational guidance on safeguarding media workspaces, including protection against **tech-facilitated gender-based violence**, digital and physical safety, psychosocial and trauma support, risk management, contingency planning and emergency response.

#### **Coalition building and coordination**

Drawing on best practices and our extensive experience, IMS convenes and helps to facilitate dialogue between key stakeholders, including our partners, that results in the development of joint objectives for effective local safety mechanisms. IMS contributes both a strong partner network on the ground and our engagement in international fora, which means that we are uniquely positioned to ensure that our partners' experiences inform global discussions and strategic decision making. Furthermore, we take on a coordinating and leading role in aligning the efforts of the global media development community, both strategically and operationally.

## Strategic outcome 3: Policy, laws, regulations and public interest infrastructure

### Overall outcome

*Public interest journalists, content producers and media benefit from legislative policy frameworks and practices, algorithms and other digital measures that are conducive to media viability and free expression.*

Our strategy addressing law, policy, regulations, codes and the use of data contributes towards creating a conducive environment for public interest journalists, content producers and media. This includes political, technological and economic conditions that are increasingly challenged globally, owing to the spread of disinformation and propaganda, repressive legislation and weak market conditions for media.

Traditionally, states and interstate bodies have been the main actors related to legislative and policy frameworks. However, in recent decades, large and powerful technology companies have increasingly played a dominant and frequently disruptive role and are therefore a vitally important target in the context of interventions to create a media-friendly policy environment.

Diverse political contexts require diverse approaches. In repressive contexts, where we cannot engage directly with the state or policy makers, we might engage in strategic litigation in coalition with civil society groups, human rights activists and media lawyers. Where there is a political opening, we will make a larger effort to reintroduce, catalyse or develop legislation and digital infrastructure that better serve public interest journalists, content producers and media in line with international human rights standards.

Processes related to the reform and implementation of enabling policies, laws, regulations and digital infrastructure are long-term by nature. They strive for incremental change driven by coalitions of like-minded national and international organisations that require sustained support over long periods, in some cases decades.

### Focus areas:

- States, interstate actors and policymakers ensure that legislative and policy frameworks are conducive to free expression and viability. We seek to advance policy frameworks where possible and push back on restrictive laws and practices, engaging in lawsuits of strategic importance to our partners as a way of defending and maintaining spaces in which public interest journalists, content producers and media can operate. The experience of IMS and our partners shows that consistent, collaborative advocacy efforts and the mobilisation of coalitions of like-minded national and international actors can influence state legislative policy frameworks and practices related to the safety of public interest journalists, content producers and media, public interest infrastructure, media viability, access to information and free expression. Where direct engagement with governments is not possible, we engage with pro-democratic policymakers who can push back on restrictive laws and practices.
- Global and local technology companies implement measures that strengthen and enable public interest media and content. Given dominant tech companies' lack of plurality and understanding of local contexts, IMS and democratic actors at both local and global levels need to come together to push for digital infrastructure that serves local journalism and the public interest and allows diversity and inclusivity to thrive. This requires parallel and cross-cutting strategic interventions that address both public interest content and business viability (strategic outcome area 1), **digital security** (outcome area 2) and regulatory and policy frameworks (strategic outcome area 3). The experience of IMS and our partners shows that it is possible in local contexts to push for more active involvement by tech companies and to push back against disinformation. At the same time, investment is needed in innovative solutions that create alternative digital infrastructure at a local level.

- Actors that impact the economic environment for media – including states, corporations, funding mechanisms, foundations, technology companies – provide new funding modalities for public interest media. It is essential to address the viability of IMS’ media partners through systemic solutions, such as commercial digital markets, beneficial tax regimes, public subsidies and public-private partnerships.
- Those with a stake in the media – bodies representing public interest journalists, content producers and media, together with civil society organisations and, where possible, state actors and technology companies – establish or strengthen inclusive and independent, self-regulatory mechanisms that set and apply common standards for content production and organisational processes. These should complement the efforts of public interest journalists, content producers and media to ensure that their online and offline content is ethical and fact-based. Our experience shows that media actors can collectively set and advocate for common standards in ways that influences state actors, even where there is little space for engaging with them.

### **Assumptions:**

- Collaborative efforts by IMS, partners and like-minded organisations engage state and interstate actors and technology companies to contribute towards a more conducive environment for public interest journalists, content producers and media.
- The success and sustainability of policy changes are more likely if support is provided for broad, cross-sectoral civil society initiatives, coalitions and reform movements.

### **IMS’ value proposition in relation to outcome area 3**

#### **Expert input and capacity development**

IMS experts engage with partners working towards policy change to improve the legal, digital and economic environment for freedom of expression. IMS’ in-house experts have knowledge varying from international human rights law to technology to resilience building and media development research. These experts share experience with the partners in designing advocacy strategies, developing policy papers, drafting legislation and other documents for evidence-based advocacy for policy change.

IMS offers comparative analysis and best practice studies to partners and stakeholders. Hence, capacity sharing is not only between IMS and partners but also directly between partners from different countries and regions.

IMS will build on our existing research base to become even more relevant to our partners. In the coming years, we will shore up existing research efforts to focus on macro level economic solutions for media; (co-) regulation; and existing and upcoming legislative initiatives governing the use of AI and translation of these into the local context.

#### **Coalition building and coordination**

Through our networks, IMS is well placed to convene the variety of actors needed to make coalitions both inclusive and effective. We appreciate that we need to cast an increasingly wider net – in some contexts, responsible private sector actors could become important allies for the coalitions.

IMS’ strong presence in international fora, be it within the organisations that act as gatekeepers for international human rights standards or multi-stakeholder coalitions to govern technology, continues to be of great value to our partners and amplifies their perspectives and work for policy change.

Where gender and inclusiveness are overlooked in both state and multilateral efforts, as they often are, IMS provides input and works in alliances for improved diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in and through the media.

## Local to global ambitions

### Global strategic interventions

Geopolitical changes require IMS to take leadership in crises and develop responses to strategic opportunities and threats in key global contexts. We will therefore pay close attention to new and emerging power structures as they take shape over the coming years and decades. We will aim to scale our advocacy efforts in contexts we deem to be paramount to the global press freedom cause. Where the international community fails to respond to adverse global trends, we will mobilise and coordinate support to independent public interest media and seek to enhance our role as a global convener and catalyst among our partners. We are developing a watchlist of countries where opportunities present themselves, and we will assess, monitor and mobilise relevant actors while striving for cross-cutting global responses that will connect departments to relevant geopolitical issues.

### Renewed mandate for Rapid Response

We will take steps to recalibrate, renew and reinforce our Rapid Response mandate, which has always been a central part of our work. We will take on an assertive role in spotting situations where a strong backlash requires a robust global response. Interventions will be designed to respond to acute opportunities or challenges where change is possible, and where foreign support can be catalytic. Intervening early can help a media reform vision gain a solid footing that is likely to remain in some form, even if other human rights-based priorities are derailed. IMS' Rapid Response mechanism will respond with speed and focus, whether through stand-alone efforts that respond to short-term needs or through interventions that could spell the beginning of a longer-term engagement.

The success of our Rapid Response work depends on clarity on how to prioritise and determine where, when and how to intervene. The global needs of journalists, content producers and media caught in crises far exceed IMS' resources and capability, thus underlining the importance of having clear criteria for initiating as well as concluding interventions. Rapid Response will seek to have a catalytic effect and support initiatives where targeted input can have maximum impact. We will develop and fine-tune concepts and tools that can be applied and adapted to suit different contexts. Activities may range from expert advice on digital security, training and mentoring in specialised reporting, desk or on-ground assessments, coordination and advocacy, post-crisis accountability journalism, production grants, provision of equipment, strategy or business development or promotion of media literacy.

### Media in forced displacement

We recognise that exiled, hybrid and diaspora ways of working are growing as a modality. A number of countries have returned to oppressive and autocratic governments through violent takeovers, such as in the cases of Afghanistan as well as coups d'état in Myanmar, Sudan and Niger. IMS will continue to participate in coherent, coordinated global responses, including emergency response, legal support and long-term financial support. We will leverage our substantial institutional experience in tailored crisis management, relocation, audience understanding and strategic and operational strategies for exile media, including difficult challenges in terms of long-term financial sustainability and local safety among host states. As we will increasingly see societies in complete breakdown, we will provide support to relocate and develop new strategic approaches to ensuring that information still reach audiences in countries marked by extreme oppression, such as Syria,

Myanmar and Afghanistan. Support for exile media is becoming a larger part of our response, and we are deepening our understanding of the complex range of possible responses, from emergency support to developing viable financing models and safety responses.

### **Securing information in crisis situations**

While free media always play a critical role in promoting and safeguarding democracy, equality and human rights, this importance is amplified in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Fundamental freedoms are most constrained during crises, where mis- and disinformation and restrictions on humanitarian actors are typically amplified. In these contexts, independent public interest media play a crucial role in ensuring that communities have access to reliable, unbiased and locally relevant information that empowers people to make informed decisions with the potential to mitigate the effects of crisis or full-blown disaster.

In situations of fragility and crisis, it is partners who best understand the context and local needs and thus have the ability to effectively address emergent situations and provide timely and reliable information to vulnerable populations. Utilising and supporting their work and their ability to source, produce and distribute reliable information in times of crisis is an inherent part of IMS' mandate.

In line with recommendations by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), IMS' approach is aligned to the **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus**, and partners are supported in playing a vital role in the transitional phase between crisis and longer-term development. Key elements of working with a nexus approach are accountability journalism in the aftermath of crisis and the independent role of media in elections. IMS will continue to support partners in responding to emergencies when they arise.

## **Institutional priorities**

### **Strengthening DEI-driven leadership**

- Develop a DEI strategy and action plan by the end of 2024.
- Continue the leadership reform for less centralised decision making.
- Develop a DEI-guided leadership structure.
- Strengthen culture of belonging.
- Display responsible and transparent uses of power.
- Create shared goals and interpretations of values.

### **Developing a lean and cost-effective organisation**

- Continue with a committed and targeted focus on making all processes in the organisation lean, trust-based and effective.
- Evaluate and ensure the most cost-effective ways to produce good results.
- Continue to develop and enhance the notion of distributed leadership to ensure effective management.
- Regularly update partnership policies and strategies – with partners at the centre of our mandate.
- Work to adopt value for money and lean processes on financial and administrative procedures and ensure compliance efforts will not become a burden on our staff and partners.

### **Developing a localised global organisation**

- Take further strides towards developing local partnerships that are reciprocal and in keeping with the localisation agenda.
- Further the focus on local leadership and ownership.
- Decentralise when and where it can enhance proximity and effectiveness.
- Confront and unpack the different ways in which the sectors that IMS engages in perpetuate unequal power dynamics.
- Reflect on IMS' own role and engage in efforts to reform systems and practices towards de-colonising aid.

### **Applying media development in a new geopolitical reality**

- Act as a convener/connector of local partners and actors in addressing global issues.
- Scale impact and ensure local ownership to global issues.
- Engage selected partners in global actions from emerging power centres and with new global majority modes of collaboration.
- Forge regional and global cross-sectoral nexus partnerships and alliances to promote both reactive and proactive responses.
- Develop operational modalities for engaging in relevant geopolitical issues, i.e. climate, elections, inequality and tech, across IMS departmental structures.

### **Developing IMS as a contextual expert organisation**

- Help programmes and partners confront critical and often interconnected challenges.
- Professionalise our packaging and distribution of best practice knowledge and expertise in IMS outcome areas as part of the value proposition to partners.
- Continue the development of knowledge hubs across IMS' three outcome areas through: knowledge management and expertise, communities of practice and representing IMS as an expert organisation in global fora.
- Seek funding opportunities for advisers and expert development in our departments.

### **Searching for new financing and funding for media development**

- Ensure long-term sustainable funding by adding new funding streams, such as private funding and philanthropic foundations, while keeping public donors on board.
- Develop a strategy for the corporate sector and initiate experimentation.
- Pursue global consortia for larger scale institutional and global funding, including from the EU.
- Diversify public funding portfolio and address new potential ODA donors.
- Set clear targets years in advance to focus a more systematic approach across the organisation and programmes.
- Maintain an organisational and financial scale to enable IMS to create synergies and connect partners around the globe and continue to help set agendas internationally.

## Conclusion

This strategy steps up IMS' commitment to pushing back against the interlocking and mutually constitutive modes of power and oppression that drive many of the mounting challenges outlined within; challenges felt most acutely by public interest journalists, content producers and media and their audiences in the countries where IMS works. We will not shy away.

We must strive to turn those challenges into opportunities so that we can deliver on our long-term commitment to providing those audiences – marginalised and underserved communities included – with access to relevant and reliable information and inclusive public debate that enables people to act, participate in public life and claim their rights.

This requires us to address huge imbalances in technological development by harnessing the advantages that these technologies can contribute to our vision of peaceful, just, equitable and inclusive societies where people have the freedom to express themselves and to access information, thanks to the public interest journalists, content producers and media who remain at the centre of our strategy.

We are on a continuous journey of practice and reflection. To be successful, we must prepare for and embrace constant change and disruption. As an organisation with partners, offices and teams across diverse and challenging contexts, and having become a leading player in a burgeoning media development sector, IMS is well placed to implement this ambitious strategy in the fervent belief that good journalism promotes better societies.

## Key terms explained

### **Audience engagement**

Encouraging feedback from and dialogue with audience members as a way of creating content that resonates with an audiences' needs, interests, concerns and preferences.

### **Artificial intelligence (AI)**

Computer systems designed to perform tasks such as learning, reasoning, problem solving and decision making that typically require human intelligence.

### **BRICS**

An acronym for the powerful grouping of the world's leading emerging market economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS mechanism's stated aim is to promote peace, security, development and cooperation.

### **Business viability**

The capacity of a media organisation to sustain its operations and generate sufficient revenue to cover its expenses.

### **Civic space**

Physical, virtual and legal places where people exercise their rights to freedom of association, expression, and peaceful assembly to solve problems and improve lives.<sup>8</sup>

### **Civil society organisations (CSO)**

Formal and informal entity other than political parties that represent the interests of a group or groups of people (e.g., trade unions, employer federations, religious and issue-based pressure groups, charities, community self-help schemes, human rights defenders and other non-governmental organisations).

### **Coalition**

A formal or informal alliance of different actors with a variety of interests and affiliations looking to achieve a common goal through collective action and advocacy.<sup>9</sup>

### **Community engagement**

Efforts aimed at fostering active participation and interaction between media outlets and the community they serve.

### **Comprehensive approach**

Addressing multiple factors needed for public interest media to thrive.

### **Democracy**

Governance of the people by the people, with insurances of minority protection that requires public participation in decision making through free and fair elections, the rule of law and protection of human rights.

### **Digital infrastructure**

The tools and systems – cables, circuitry, software and institutions – required to make digital life function.

### **Digital security**

Measures and practices undertaken to protect a person's or organisation's online presence, communication, data and information from unauthorised access, surveillance and censorship.

**Disinformation**

All forms of false, inaccurate or misleading information designed, presented and promoted with the intention of causing public harm or for profit.

**Diversity**

The representation and acknowledgement of the multitude of identities, experiences and ways of moving through the world. This includes- but is not limited to- ability, age, citizenship status, educational attainment, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, language, nationality, religion, race, sexuality, socioeconomic status.<sup>10</sup>

**Equality**

Treating all people identically, without consideration for historical and systemic barriers and privileges.

**Equity**

Seeking to ensure respect and equal opportunity for all, using all resources and tools to elevate the voices of under-represented and/or disadvantaged groups.

**Enabling environments**

Surrounding conditions that support media outlets to fulfil their societal role.

**Freedom of expression**

The right to express oneself freely. The right includes, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19), freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

**Gender-based violence**

Online and offline violence that targets a person because of their gender, or that disproportionately affects women and non-binary people.

**Gendered disinformation**

Gendered disinformation uses false or misleading gender- or sex-based narratives, mainly against women, girls and non-binary people, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring them from participating in the public sphere. It combines three defining characteristics of online disinformation: falsity, malign intent and coordination.

**Global majority**

A collective term for ethnic groups which constitute approximately 85 percent of the global population who live in what is often referred to as the Global South.

**Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus**

An approach intended to ensure strong cooperation, collaboration and coordination between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts at the national level to ensure collective outcomes on the basis of joined-up, coherent, complementary and risk-informed analysis, planning and action.<sup>11</sup>

**Impunity**

The failure of duty bearers to hold the perpetrators of crimes against media workers to account.

**Inclusion**

Fostering an environment in which people of all identities are welcome, valued and supported. An inclusive organisation solicits, listens to, learns from and acts on the contributions of all its stakeholders.

**Interoperable digital standards**

The extent to which one digital platform's infrastructure can work with others.

**Intersectionality**

A term that has permeated international development discourse in recent years. It is an acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Intersectionality refers to overlapping social identities and the complexity of discrimination against a person based on their gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, physical ability, age, etc.

**Journalism**

The practice of gathering, analysing and presenting fact-based news and information to the public.

**LGBTQIA+**

Umbrella term for people with a non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation. Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or questioning), Intersex, Asexual and others.

**Media viability**

The systems at societal, sectoral and organisational levels that influence the ability of media outlets to produce public interest content in a sustainable way.

**Misinformation**

False or inaccurate information disseminated without the intention to harm or deceive.

**News deserts**

Geographical areas and/or communities with little to no access to local news and information.

**Press freedom**

Building on freedom of expression, press freedom is in its original form the right to publish newspapers, magazines and other printed publications without governmental interference or restrictions and subject only to existing laws and regulations. Today the term is used to describe freedom of the media more broadly, including broadcast media and digital media.

**Public interest**

Originally the term refers to the welfare and wellbeing of the public. In the context of information and media, the term is used when talking about people's rights to know the facts about a particular situation.

**Public interest content**

Ethical, fact-based journalism and other media content that inform members of the public about issues that shape their lives in ways that: serve the public's rather than any political, commercial or factional interest; encourage and informs public debate; hold those in power to account; and challenge discriminatory societal norms.

**Public interest infrastructure**

Digital infrastructure that intentionally serves the public interest. It is designed to be inclusive, diverse and non-discriminatory as well as open, transparent, accountable and user-centric in ways that give users full control over their personal data, their content and interactions and facilitate the production and dissemination of public interest content.

**Public interest media**

Editorially independent media outlets that strive to produce and distribute public interest content.

**Safety mechanism**

Organised collaboration between multiple stakeholders within a national context working to improve the safety of journalists through preventative and protective measures, as well as the judicial prosecution of those who commit crimes against journalists.

**Self-regulation**

A framework or mechanism independent from government control for holding media workers and media outlets (including digital platforms that disseminate news and information) accountable to the public in a way that relies entirely on members' voluntary compliance with a set of common values and ethics; laws play no role in enforcing these standards.<sup>12</sup>

**Targeted audience**

The specific demography or community of people that a media outlet aims to reach with their content. IMS is particularly concerned with media reaching marginalised communities that are underserved by news media.

**Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)**

An act of violence against a person on the basis of their gender perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media.<sup>13</sup>

**UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (UNPA)**

A global roadmap endorsed by the United Nations that aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers.<sup>14</sup>

## Endnotes

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- 9 See pg 4 in ‘Coalitions for Change: Collective action for better media systems’ (IMS, 2021)
- 10 The Pulitzer Center’s Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion | Pulitzer Center
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- 13 Brochure: What is technology-facilitated gender-based violence? ([unfpa.org](https://www.unfpa.org))
- 14 UNESCO. (2012). UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Unesco Digital Library. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384476>.