



PRIMED

PROTECTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA
FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

GLOBAL

Coalitions and coalition building to support media freedom

LEARNING BRIEF



2024



CONTENTS

About PRIMED	4
Executive summary	5
Background	6
Methodology	7
Findings	8
What media coalitions are and what coalition building entails	8
Impact	9
Key ingredients	11
Context – opening and closing windows of opportunity	11
Purpose, role and objectives	13
Architecture	13
Leadership	14
The evolution of coalitions	15
The role and influence of international partners	16
The sustainability of coalitions	17
Common challenges	18
Building trust with government stakeholders	18
Maintaining momentum	18
Steep learning curve	19



CONTENTS

Conclusions	20
Recommendations	21
To donors	21
To media development agencies	21
To media coalitions and other national stakeholders	21
Areas for further research and learning	22
Appendix 1: Coalition building: PRIMED's Model Theory of Change in light of the Ethiopian experience	23
Appendix 2: Coalition-building toolbox	26
Appendix 3: Case studies	29
Case study 1: Media Reform Coalition	29
Case study 2: Coalition on the Safety of Journalists	30

Abbreviations and acronyms

BJC	Broadcast Journalism Centre
CARD	Centre for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy
CSoJ	Coalition on the Safety of Journalists
CSO	civil society organisation
ENMS	Ethiopia National Media Support
FPU	Free Press Unlimited
IFPIM	International Fund for Public Interest Media

IMC	Independent Media Commission
IMS	International Media Support
MAZ	Media Alliance of Zimbabwe
MRC	Media Reform Coalition
MRCG	Media Reform Co-ordinating Group
MToC	Model Theory of Change
NAP	National Action Plan for the media



About PRIMED

The programme Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) was designed to support public interest media content provision in three very different media environments –Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone. It also aimed to create and share learning to contribute to a more targeted and impactful global approach to supporting media outlets.

A three-year programme that ran from late 2020, PRIMED was implemented by a consortium of media support organisations with expertise in different aspects of media and development. These were BBC Media Action (consortium lead), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Media Support (IMS) and Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), with further contributions from Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), and The Communication Initiative (CI).

PRIMED sought to address the challenges facing public interest media at both outlet and environment level. The programme involved working with selected media outlets to increase

resilience to political and economic pressures. At the same time, it supported the development of information ecosystems that enable a better flow of trusted public interest media content. Gender equality and inclusion were integrated across the programme.

To create and share learning about effective media support in different contexts, PRIMED used the insights and data gained during its implementation phase to prepare this series of learning briefs. These attempt to answer key questions in relation to independent media and media support:

- The financial viability of media organisations (led by MDIF)
- The effectiveness of public subsidies to public interest media (led by BBC Media Action)
- Improving gender equality in media workplaces, content and audiences (led by FPU)
- The role of local coalitions in strengthening media ecosystems (led by IMS)





Executive summary

For at least the past three decades, multi-stakeholder groupings, networks and alliances have advocated for improvements to media ecosystems the world over, and support for such “coalitions for change” was a strategic priority of the PRIMED programme. Yet there was little prior documentation about how media coalitions formed and operated, and what determined their successes or failures.

Between 2020 and 2023, members of the PRIMED consortium of implementing organisations¹ **documented and compared the experiences of media coalitions in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Middle East and North Africa, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Zambia and Zimbabwe**. This process identified the following factors that seem to influence the ability of locally driven coalitions to emerge and thrive through externally supported media development efforts:

- **The context** – all the coalitions examined formed and evolved in response to events that presented short-lived windows of opportunity to improve or protect the media ecosystem.
- The clarity and focus of coalitions’ **purpose, role and objectives** and how these resonate with the interests and priorities of their members.
- How coalitions’ **architecture** suit their context and purpose.
- While leadership approaches vary, the **willingness of members to make proactive contributions to a coalition** and stand up for its goals are key determinants of success.
- Coalitions **evolve** in different ways, but the **best results seem to come from taking an incremental approach towards a long-term objective** by setting short-to-medium-term goals that allow them to respond to opportunities and challenges as they arise, and to learn as they go.
- As funders and advisors, **international partners** such as media development agencies and donors **yield considerable and**

often unhealthy influence. Yet their ability to initiate and, if necessary, **drive** new coalitions **can be crucial**. From the outset they should ensure that **coalition members set the agenda and can gradually take over the reins** once they have the confidence and capacity to do so.

- A coalition’s **sustainability** is closely linked to its ability to **remain relevant to its cause, while keeping overheads low and relying on members contributions** as much as possible – whether in-kind, material and/or financial.
- **Including stakeholders representing diverse interests** is the guiding star of coalition building. A coalition needs to draw on different perspectives, approaches and expertise to achieve its objectives, but these diverse interests **need to coalesce around a shared objective**.

This learning journey also highlighted challenges faced by media coalitions, and common methods and tools that they use (see Appendix 2). It road-tested a model theory of change for coalition building (see Appendix 1) and compiled short case studies of some coalitions (see Appendix 3).

Findings suggest that media coalitions have an ambivalent relationship with governments and ruling elites, and often operate with one foot inside and one foot outside circles of power.

Background

Countries are pushed towards reforming their media systems either by political shocks, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or the end of apartheid in South Africa, and/or by “active, highly engaged multi-stakeholder coalitions”.²

In the case of South Africa, it was both, with broad coalitions of media and civil society organisations (CSOs) preparing the ground for progressive media reforms during the country’s transition to democracy in the 1990s.³ **Now the space for independent media and CSOs is shrinking in many parts of the world, “multi-stakeholder coalitions are emerging as a promising way to build strategies for [media] survival”.**⁴

Strengthening such coalitions was a strategic focus of the PRIMED programme⁵ in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone in 2020–2023. The programme’s Coalitions for Change workstream sought to create, strengthen and support “organisations and coalitions that support media freedom and the viability of independent media in different contexts”, with the expectation that they would either defend or enhance the enabling environment in which independent media organisations operated, helping them to “work around particularly restrictive environments”.⁶ This would bolster media outlets’ ability to “manage their organisations and deliver public interest content” and contribute towards healthier information ecosystems.⁷

PRIMED ended up supporting the following coalitions:

- **Bangladesh** – advocacy undertaken by the Broadcast Journalism Centre (BJC) to improve the standards and professionalism of broadcast journalism in relation to the Mass Media Employees Act and adopting a journalists’ code of conduct.
- **Ethiopia** – establishing coalitions to promote journalists’ safety (convened by the Centre for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy, CARD), and reforming and implementing key laws affecting the media (convened by Ethiopia National Media Support, ENMS)
- **Sierra Leone** – efforts to build consensus around, and then implement, a National Action Plan for the media (NAP), which are now led by the Media Reform Co-ordinating Group (MRCG).

Although media development agencies supported coalitions for many years before PRIMED existed, little had been documented about how these coalitions worked and their impact. Therefore, PRIMED set out to answer the following learning question:

“Which factors are most effective in enabling locally driven coalitions for change to emerge and thrive through externally supported media development efforts?”⁸





Methodology

International Media Support (IMS) – the consortium member that led PRIMED’s Coalitions for Change workstream, with a focus on Ethiopia – set out to answer the learning question in three phases, as outlined below. This learning brief reflects on findings from all three phases.

1. **2020:** IMS and Free Press Unlimited (FPU) reviewed existing reports and evaluations to identify approaches, results and lessons from their own support to coalitions. Their findings were outlined in a paper that aimed to “inform country level theories of change and programme planning”.⁹
2. **2021:** IMS convened an online programme design workshop from 31 August to 3 September 2021. Its 30–40 participants included partner¹⁰ representatives and implementing organisations’ staff involved in PRIMED’s planned coalition building work in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone as well as in coalitions that PRIMED implementing organisations had supported elsewhere.

Participants discussed examples of existing media coalitions in Pakistan, Somalia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and the findings of a study of media and civil society coalitions in sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ Workshop participants defined media support coalitions, and identified how they work, key factors

influencing their success and sustainability, the role of international actors and a model theory of change for coalition building. These were documented in a second learning brief,¹² along with follow-up interviews with some of the workshop presenters.

3. **2023:** IMS commissioned a study of how media coalitions that PRIMED supported in Ethiopia had evolved (the coalition building process), and the progress they made during the programme¹³. The researcher then compared these findings with those of the 2021 workshop.¹⁴ These findings were presented and discussed at an online workshop on 11 October 2023, attended by 15 representatives of PRIMED’s coalition partners in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone and their PRIMED counterparts. At this workshop, coalition partners also reflected on how their coalitions had evolved and made an impact during the PRIMED programme.¹⁵

Findings

This section analyses key findings from this learning journey, covering the following areas:

- What media coalitions are and what coalition building entails
- The impact of the coalitions examined
- What key ingredients seem to influence the effectiveness of media coalitions supported by media development initiatives like PRIMED
- Some of the challenges faced by media coalitions

What media coalitions are and what coalition building entails

PRIMED's initial working definition of a **media coalition** was "*a temporary alliance of different actors with a variety of interests and affiliations looking to achieve common goals through collective action and advocacy*".¹⁶ Participants of the 2021 workshop felt the temporary and often organic nature of coalitions was important. As Tabani Moyo, former Chair of Media Alliance Zimbabwe (MAZ), noted, "*It's not about forming an institution – but a platform upon which the collective good is advanced*".¹⁷

This 2021 analysis found that the composition of a media coalition largely depends on its mission, but most bring together media houses, journalists' unions, publishers' associations and, increasingly, CSOs. In some cases, coalitions are initiated by external actors, and they invariably receive donor funding and other forms of support

such as advice and training from international media development agencies.

Similarly, the various stakeholders involved in the **Ethiopian coalitions supported through PRIMED** gradually worked together towards shared goals, in response to opportunities and challenges arising from their volatile media environment. However, founding members of the Ethiopian Coalition on the Safety of Journalists (CSoJ) chose to formally register with the authorities, with a view to creating a more permanent entity. Ethiopian stakeholders interviewed for the 2023 study felt that the recognition that came from this registration process was essential for CSoJ's acceptability to the country's media sector, and its ability to serve as a safe platform for members to discuss and advocate for change. Registration also allowed the coalition to raise funds and engage with authorities.

Therefore, in Ethiopia and perhaps also in similarly volatile contexts where formal registration creates a degree of protection and legitimacy, a more appropriate definition of a coalition might be "*a collective alliance of different groups or individuals with a common interest, recognised by other stakeholders and registered under the law of the land to engage in various advocacy and capacity-building activities*".¹⁸ As one participant in the 2023 study explained:

"Our history taught us that the government's harassment against journalists' associations minimises when groups are legally registered. The moment authorities realise that the association is an informal collective, or when it fails to renew its registration license, they will have a ground to degrade us as groups supported by external forces."¹⁹

In Bangladesh, PRIMED supported advocacy to improve the standards and professionalism of broadcast journalism. This was aligned with the vision and mission of the BJC, an existing, government-registered charitable trust representing around 1,700 of the country's broadcast journalists that promotes its members' professional development. The BJC led a coalition of media actors that spontaneously formed following the arrest of journalist Rozina Islam in 2021.

4 The composition of a media coalition largely depends on its mission, but most bring together media houses, journalists' unions, publishers' associations and, increasingly, CSOs. 



Meanwhile, in Sierra Leone PRIMED supported the formation of a broad coalition of stakeholders to formulate and implement the NAP. Following the conference that approved the plan in April 2022, the MRCG became convener of, and secretariat for, the coalition. This reflects MRCG's mandate to coordinate efforts to address media development priorities, as highlighted in a 2014 study undertaken as part of the UN's peacebuilding initiative.

The following definition adjusts PRIMED's original working definition of a media coalition to reflect the various coalitions it subsequently supported:

"A temporary or formal alliance of a variety of actors united by common interest(s) that strives for a shared objective(s) through collective action and advocacy."

Meanwhile, “**coalition building**” is the process of initiating, establishing and nurturing a coalition in a way that enables it to work towards its stated objectives. While this might initially apply primarily to work undertaken by a convener or lead organisation with support from a media development agency, coalition building enables coalition members to set coalition objectives, direction and agenda from an early stage, and then increasingly take ownership of, and responsibility for, both the coalition and coalition building.

Impact

The media coalitions examined in 2021 generally aimed to foster an enabling environment for independent journalism and freedom of expression. Some had played an important role in promoting media literacy, bringing the issues affecting independent journalism into the public eye and pushing them higher up the political agenda.

Some coalitions had managed to remain relevant by adapting to changing circumstances and embracing new causes. Some had weathered funding and leadership crises to become important players on the media stage and a vital element of the local media ecosystem.

However, many coalitions turned out to have had little impact.

“Most media and civil society collaborations lack the vision to effect lasting societal change,” Dr Haron Mwangi, former CEO of the Media Council of Kenya and co-author of the Mapping Coalitions study told the 2021 workshop. *“They are... largely funded by donors that rarely provide for sustained transformative plans and activities. Thus, most coalitions have failed to see themselves as agents of enduring change.”*²⁰

Of the media coalitions examined in 2021, the more successful ones seemed to evolve organically, driven by the needs and priorities of coalition members and their constituents. International media development agencies may have initiated and nurtured these coalitions, but their members set the agenda and gradually took ownership of these successful coalitions. In almost all cases, it took many years to begin to see the kind of media ecosystem changes that these coalitions aimed to achieve.

So, it is not surprising that the coalitions supported through PRIMED have yet to bring about the structural changes that they are striving for, not least because of the scale and long-term nature of these changes. Nonetheless, they all made progress towards the kind of impact PRIMED envisaged, often against incredible odds.

While PRIMED initially saw Ethiopia as the country most conducive to media ecosystem

4 Coalition building enables coalition members to set coalition objectives, direction and agenda from an early stage, and then increasingly take ownership of, and responsibility for, both the coalition and coalition building.



change given the government's commitment to democratic reform at the beginning of the programme, the Covid-19 pandemic, ethnic conflict and then all-out civil war put paid to that. Instead, these events gave rise to a coalition to protect the increasingly precarious safety of journalists (CSoJ). Despite these challenges, the other PRIMED-supported coalition in Ethiopia – the MRC – managed to keep media policy and law reform on the agenda.

By the end of the programme in 2023, both PRIMED-supported media coalitions **in Ethiopia** had laid key foundations for longer-term change:

- They created safe spaces for media actors, including women, to discuss issues affecting them. The 2023 study found that women's participation in CSoJ and MRC activities was higher than women's general representation in the media. Both coalitions also brought together organisations from different parts of the divided country and helped to form stronger alliances between journalists' associations and CSOs.
- They built up their institutional strength, which enabled the CSoJ to start speaking out in defence of journalists and the MRC to restart dialogue with Ethiopian authorities about the country's stalled reform programme.

In principle, editors and media owners interviewed for the 2023 study saw a link between their profitability and their journalists' safety: "...media outlets are more interested in joining coalition initiatives if the agenda is related to their interests, leading to a tangible outcome and adding value to the media business".²¹ However, in interviews conducted later in 2023 by BBC Media Action,²² owners and

editors of media outlets supported by PRIMED said they had yet to see tangible business benefits from their involvement in the coalitions. This again points to the importance of media coalitions and their supporters having a long-term perspective while striving for shorter-term, incremental change.

Contrary to initial expectations, PRIMED partners in both **Bangladesh and Sierra Leone** built unprecedented consensus among their stakeholders around journalistic standards and a national media development plan, respectively. Both coalitions achieved initial, tangible successes in the process. In Bangladesh, this entailed drafting and submitting proposed amendments to a new law and securing approval by its members of the country's first code of conduct for journalists. Key achievements in Sierra Leone were the government's endorsement of the NAP and the establishment of the media investment fund.

How far the initiatives in all three PRIMED countries will shape the change processes they have initiated will be a test of the programme's coalition building. Based on experiences of media coalitions elsewhere, these initiatives likely have a long way to go and will continue to require support from media development agencies and international donors in the years ahead. But all PRIMED-supported coalitions are following roadmaps devised by their members, who have taken on responsibility for their coalitions.

4 ...media outlets are more interested in joining coalition initiatives if the agenda is related to their interests, leading to a tangible outcome and adding value to the media business. 

Key ingredients

The 2021 workshop identified factors that seem to determine the “rites of passage that coalitions may experience as they attempt to chart their way through what is often unknown territory”.²³

The experiences of coalitions supported by PRIMED in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone have largely confirmed the influence of these factors. This includes the need for media coalitions to be both focused and inclusive in terms of the diversity of interests represented by their members and how these diverse interests shape each coalition’s objectives and strategies. Having a diverse membership allows coalitions to see issues from different perspectives, enabling them to find solutions that address the needs of a variety of stakeholders.

Participants in the 2021 workshop recognised the need for coalitions to balance involving broad interests with developing a clearly focused agenda. They also saw this as a challenge given the risk of infighting when trying to accommodate potentially conflicting viewpoints. However, the experiences of the PRIMED-supported coalitions point to the opportunities afforded by inclusion and diversity.

The CSOJ and the MRC in Ethiopia sought to involve organisations representing a variety of media outlets (commercial, community, digital start-ups and state-owned media), including those from regions hit hardest by ethnic conflict. Both coalitions also attracted more women than the country’s existing media bodies. As a result, both coalitions managed to unify sections of an otherwise polarised media at a time of high tension by providing safe spaces for media stakeholders to discuss and identify solutions to issues of common interest.

Similarly, unusual unity among a range of media stakeholders contributed to the Bangladesh media coalition’s ability to shape news laws and then build consensus around the need for journalistic standards. And the breadth and diversity of stakeholders involved in consultations around the Independent Media Commission (IMC)’s code of conduct in Sierra Leone seemed to encourage the government’s subsequent support for the NAP and media investment fund (see Context section).

Context – opening and closing windows of opportunity

Media coalitions usually form and evolve in response to events that impact a media ecosystem, and the PRIMED-supported coalitions in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone were no exception. Ethiopia’s peaceful intra-party transition towards greater democracy in 2018 encouraged media actors to organise themselves with a view to influencing the overall media reform process. This was initially through the Media Law Reform Working Group established before PRIMED, and then through the MRC that PRIMED went on to support.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic, communal conflicts in south-west Ethiopia, the war in Tigray and controversies surrounding elections in 2021 all led to a regression in freedom of expression and the deterioration in the safety of journalists.²⁴ The country experienced repeated internet shutdowns, the closure of some media outlets and the mass arrest of journalists. This prompted IMS to commission CARD to assess the state of journalists’ safety in the country. Findings from that exercise provided the basis for CARD and other media actors to initiate the CSOJ, with PRIMED’s further support.

While journalists’ safety became the most pressing issue facing the Ethiopian media, experiences from elsewhere pointed to a need to continue a dialogue around media policy and law so that the sector would be ready to push for reforms when the opportunity arose. The 2021 PRIMED workshop heard how MAZ – formed in 2004 in the face of escalating repression in Zimbabwe – had successfully campaigned for stronger guarantees of media freedom during a constitutional reform process in 2009–2013

Having a diverse membership allows coalitions to see issues from different perspectives, enabling them to find solutions that address the needs of a variety of stakeholders.



because of the groundwork it had undertaken in preceding years when there was little prospect of reform. With this example in mind, the MRC in Ethiopia continued to engage with authorities around the government's media reforms.

In Bangladesh, the arrest of journalist Rozina Islam in April 2021 triggered a wave of solidarity within an otherwise divided media community. This paved the way for the BJC's initial efforts to lobby government to amend a new law governing who could practise as a journalist, and then convince its members to agree to the country's first code of conduct for journalists, a move towards self-regulation that the government applauded.

This code was in response to another piece of legislation that seriously curtailed what journalists could post on social media. Having sensitised its members about the effects of this law, the BJC lobbied for journalists and human rights defenders to be exempt from it. The Bangladeshi government subsequently replaced the law with a new bill that proposed fines rather than jail sentences for any defamation by journalists.

In Sierra Leone, the election of a new government in 2018 opened new opportunities for media reform, the repeal two years later of a criminal libel law signalling the government's commitment to change. Some international donors were already assisting the country's media regulator, the IMC, to become more professional and independent. PRIMED worked closely with the IMC and other media stakeholders, such as the Sierra Leone Association for Journalists and the MRCG, to hold public consultations that informed revisions to the IMC media code of conduct.

The government then expressed a wish to go further and proposed that PRIMED support an initiative to assess how the rest of the media sector could be strengthened, particularly through a mechanism that would encourage investment in media. Working closely with the journalists' association, MRCG, the IMC, the Ministry for Communications and CSOs across the country, PRIMED mobilised a large thematic coalition behind this initiative, which ultimately resulted in the NAP in April 2022. This followed

efforts to convene a steering committee representing various stakeholders, collect written and oral evidence, commission research, and organise a conference to discuss findings and agree on an NAP.

Having been set up by the UN Development Programme in 2014 to co-ordinate media reform activities, the MRCG was an obvious candidate to drive NAP implementation. It did so on behalf of a reconfigured steering committee and a new multi-stakeholder governing board, which prioritised the NAP recommendation to establish a media investment fund.

As a first step, MRCG secured a grant from the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM) based on a commitment from the Sierra Leonean government to match this funding. This was put on hold pending the outcome of elections in 2023, which had contested results but returned the ruling party to power. At the end of the PRIMED programme, the investment fund was still waiting for funds pledged by the government in 2022.

In all these cases, changes in the context provided short-lived windows of opportunity to improve aspects of the media ecosystem. The coalitions and PRIMED responded by involving or engaging with groups beyond the media to strengthen coalitions and to initiate various forms of dialogue with the authorities, to address short-to-medium term priorities identified by each coalition while keeping longer-term objectives in sight. The dynamic nature of each context meant that the opportunities for change came and went relatively quickly, but that arguably helped the media coalitions to develop a more resilient approach that enables them to respond to opportunities and challenges as they arise.



Purpose, role and objectives

Another key ingredient influencing media coalition building is the clarity of a coalition's purpose and role, the focus of its objectives and how these resonate with coalition members.

Participants in the 2021 workshop noted the ability of coalitions to help countries gradually move towards more open media ecosystems, as well as their role in frustrating attempts to further restrict the media. Crucially, coalitions play a vital role in securing consensus and driving collective action within the media community, helping diverse stakeholders to devise and execute a common strategy, and to define joint success criteria.

Coalitions are instrumental in building the confidence of media practitioners, and their resilience to external pressures. Media coalitions can facilitate capacity-building among their members, accessing and channelling experiences that can enrich the local media sector and promote best practice models. They may also offer inspiration and solidarity in countries where the media sector is particularly fragmented or subject to politically motivated attacks.

The 2023 study **in Ethiopia** found that the ability of media coalitions to play these roles was influenced by the acceptability and visibility of their members – particularly their lead organisations – to other stakeholders. Furthermore, the study found that coalitions seem to be more successful when their objectives are linked with those of the lead organisation. Therefore, coalition building requires careful analysis of coalition members' relevance, potential and credibility in relation to

coalition objectives. The 2023 study also found that coalition members were inspired by the examples of media coalitions from elsewhere.

The October 2023 workshop heard that the need to improve journalistic standards resonated with the role and purpose of the BJC **in Bangladesh**. Likewise, the MRCG's original mandate to co-ordinate media reform projects during the peace process that followed **Sierra Leone**'s civil war meant the organisation was well-placed to drive NAP implementation. For both the NAP coalition and the CSOJ in Ethiopia, involving groups representing interests that extended beyond the media ensured that their objectives appealed to a wider constituency, which seemed to give further legitimacy to the coalitions' roles and purposes.

Architecture

There is no one-size-fits-all structure for a media coalition. Instead, a coalition's architecture should suit its context and purpose. The 2021 workshop found that successful coalitions remain open to new and different members, giving them the ability to evolve organically and take advantage of fresh opportunities to achieve their objectives. No matter how spontaneous the growth of a coalition is, each coalition member's role and obligations should be clearly defined.

The 2023 study found that efforts to formalise the CSOJ **in Ethiopia** provided its members with this clarity, as well as some protection and legitimacy. Meanwhile, the MRC remained an informal network that engaged with the authorities through voluntary dialogue meetings convened by ENMS. Some loose, temporary Ethiopian coalitions also successfully advocated around a specific issue. For example, the Coalition of Civil Societies for Peace spearheaded civic groups' call for the cessation of hostilities in northern Ethiopia in 2022, and then disbanded when a truce was called.

The BJC **in Bangladesh** worked with individual journalist members from a wide variety of broadcasters – including high-level representatives of other media organisations such as trade unions – to advocate with other media bodies for changes to laws that threatened their members.

Another key ingredient influencing media coalition building is the clarity of a coalition's purpose and role, the focus of its objectives and how these resonate with coalition members.



The BJC leadership then drafted the broadcasters' code of conduct but will need to involve its wider membership and, through them, other media organisations in implementing it. The NAP coalition in Sierra Leone emerged from the consultative conference, the steering committee which was then remodelled to oversee the plan's implementation, with the MRCG acting as its secretariat.

All these varied architectures are vehicles suited to the terrain they have to cross and the passengers they need to carry to reach their respective destinations. An important part of coalition building is identifying the vehicle best suited to the journey and the organisations best placed to play roles required for each coalition.

Leadership

While leadership approaches also varied among the media coalitions studied, a coalition's success can be determined by what its members are willing to contribute, the benefits they derive from the coalition's work, and how far they are prepared to stand up for their coalition's aims.

The media coalitions examined in 2021 seemed to achieve momentum when all members made a proactive contribution of resources such as people's time, effort and expertise as well as infrastructure and funds because they had a stake in the issue the coalition was looking to address. This collective approach was underpinned by shared accountability and a commitment to embracing lessons learned.

Effective leadership was also described as beginning with devising and agreeing on a strategic plan that fully maps out the coalition's vision, goals and objectives. A galvanising vision can help to rally stakeholders and maintain cohesion, but it should be complemented by specific, short and mid-term goals, each with their own indicators of success and with the potential to make measurable progress towards targets.

Participants in the 2021 workshop felt that strong media coalition leadership also has the flexibility to respond to changes in the operating environment. This requires continuous learning, including a willingness to revisit leadership issues when they provide cause for concern. Leadership also needs to make sure that all members of a coalition – in particular those representing women and marginalised groups – are heard and can contribute.

A factor closely connected to effective leadership is the need for clear communication to help secure sustained commitment to a coalition. This can be underpinned by regular meetings and public engagement approaches that promote openness and transparency. Proactive communication and sharing results also serve to foster ownership of a coalition's outputs and outcomes among its members.

Furthermore, the 2023 study found that, **in Ethiopia**, what mattered was the aptitude and credibility of individuals who can build bridges between coalition members with different interests. The Ethiopian experience shows that the effectiveness and sustainability of media coalitions are influenced by the characteristics of individual leaders who are campaign strategists and can prioritise the coalition cause over self-interest. In the case of the CSoJ, CARD's experience in campaigning on human rights issues meant it was best placed to initiate the coalition, encourage journalism associations to play a role in advocacy, and act as a bridge between institutionally weak media associations and the international community.

In Bangladesh, the BJC adopted a shared leadership approach, in which members with relevant expertise take the lead in each project or initiative. Meanwhile, the organisations and

4 The Ethiopian experience shows that the effectiveness and sustainability of media coalitions are influenced by the characteristics of individual leaders who are campaign strategists and can prioritise the coalition cause over self-interest. 7



individuals driving the NAP **in Sierra Leone** came to the fore during the consultative processes that gave life to the plan.

Among all the media coalitions examined in 2021–2023, the most effective seemed to combine strong leadership with organisational capacity in the form of small secretariats that could convene and co-ordinate coalition activities. These tended to be headed by respected executives who could speak and act on behalf of the coalition and work well with other coalition members. At the same time, coalition members would keep operational costs as low as possible by supporting the secretariat with resources or in-kind contributions, and by shouldering some of the responsibility for hosting and organising coalition activities.

The evolution of coalitions

There is no predetermined developmental arc that a media support coalition should follow. Coalition leaders may prefer to start small and build their efforts gradually, basing strategic decisions on learning and experience.

“An effective strategy should probably incorporate an incremental approach, whereby you start with quick wins, tackling issues that you know can move in the right direction in a relatively short space of time,” one participant told the 2021 workshop. *“This would give you the momentum to build your coalition, to build its confidence and to enhance its understanding of what can be achieved.”*²⁵

The 2023 study found that coalition building supported by PRIMED **in Ethiopia** took such an incremental approach. Both the CSOJ and

MRC started from scratch, evolving from fora convened to discuss the findings of related research. The partner organisations who carried out the studies and hosted the discussions – CARD and ENMS, respectively – then took on responsibility for convening the coalitions.

Once participants had identified the challenges they wanted to address, the lead organisations hosted further discussions that built trust and consensus among key stakeholders. These stakeholders then identified their objectives before drawing up plans for working towards them and putting in place the structures needed to implement the plans.

It took time for these new coalitions to become visible, particularly in such a volatile environment. Recurring communal conflicts and the war in northern Ethiopia restricted what the lead organisations could do to mobilise coalition members, although they went to great lengths to involve organisations from conflict-affected areas.²⁶

The 2023 study further found that mobilising stakeholders and subsequent advocacy tended to be more effective when the lead organisation had the institutional capacity and credibility both to convene and lead other stakeholders in the early stages of coalition building. This capacity can be assessed by conducting a power analysis to understand lead organisations’ commitment, influence, networking capacity and relevance, as IMS did at the beginning of PRIMED’s involvement in Ethiopia²⁷.

The 2023 study in Ethiopia also found that distrust among stakeholders can arise when the objectives of new coalitions collide with those of existing ones. To a certain extent, IMS pre-empted this by mapping existing coalitions and potential local partners in its 2020 baseline study²⁸. However, given the breadth of its mission, some people perceived the MRC as overlapping with other reform-focused initiatives.

In Bangladesh and Sierra Leone, the BJC and NAP coalitions also took an incremental approach, focusing on initial, short-to-medium term goals and then building on them, responding to new opportunities and challenges while always steering towards their long-term objectives.

4 Mobilising stakeholders and subsequent advocacy tended to be more effective when the lead organisation had the institutional capacity and credibility both to convene and lead other stakeholders in the early stages of coalition building.

The role and influence of international partners

As funders and advisors, international media development agencies and donors yield considerable influence that is not always healthy for, nor suited to the iterative and long-term nature of coalition building. To use their influence constructively, these international partners require an ability to initiate (and, if necessary, drive) a new coalition in its early stages. At the same time, they need to ensure that coalition members set the agenda from the outset and can gradually take over the reins once they have the confidence and capacity to do so.

As with the coalitions examined in 2021, international partners were a catalyst for the formation and growth of the **Ethiopian coalitions** that PRIMED supported – perhaps even more so, given the context.

IMS initiated and nurtured both coalitions by:

- Commissioning the research that informed discussions that galvanised the coalitions
- Contracting partners identified in the 2020 analysis and stakeholder assessment to conduct research, host discussions and convene the coalitions
- Linking the coalitions with other coalitions and experts in other countries
- Providing ongoing advice and representing the coalitions' interests at national and international fora involving other media development agencies

This was the kind of role that Ethiopian stakeholders expected IMS to play:

"We expect international media development organisations to guide us through this challenging and unpredictable situation," one respondent told the 2023 study. *"We assume they are in a much better position than us to predict what will happen ahead and support us in that sense. It is absurd that some rely on us to analyse the situation. We cannot do that! I wish we could so we will survive on our own. This is why international media development organisations must understand the context, follow up on the trends and act accordingly."*²⁹

The 2023 study found that technical and financial support from international partners encouraged local institutions to build the capacity to initiate, own and lead media coalitions. Active support from international media development partners also encouraged alliances between journalists' associations and CSOs.

This role, the study pointed out, can be more productive when international partners understand the country context and coalition interests while applying international principles and channelling relevant experience and expertise to the coalitions. This approach enabled international partners to respond to the priorities and direction provided by the coalitions. For example, PRIMED respected the CSOJ decision to spend time, effort and funds on formal registration, even though this differed from its experiences of coalitions in other countries.

PRIMED consortium members played a similar role **in Bangladesh and Sierra Leone**. IMS and BBC Media Action identified and commissioned legal experts to advise the BJC about the restrictive laws it wanted to challenge, then put the BJC in touch with an Indonesian counterpart that provided inspiration for, and input into, the code of conduct. In Sierra Leone, BBC Media Action brokered the NAP and IFPIM's investment in the media investment fund. It did so by working directly with the government and other stakeholders, and identifying relevant international experts who could advise and support them.

Reflecting on the Ethiopian experience, the 2023 study suggests that international partners should introduce merit-based and competitive funding schemes to help advance transparent relationships and promote the inclusion and participation of appropriate actors. They should do so before granting funds, having identified and prioritised coalitions or conveners that enjoy broad acceptance among the local media community.

Meanwhile, participants in the 2021 workshop felt that coalition members should demand better coordination from international agencies and should be ready to push back to ensure that



funding is fit for purpose. The UNESCO-headed body set up to co-ordinate media development assistance in Ethiopia stopped meeting at the height of the civil war, when many expatriates left the country, but it was revived in October 2023.

Given their networks and their access to relevant knowledge and expertise, international partners can contribute much more to coalition building than just funding. This added value comes from being able to respond to coalitions' changing needs as opportunities and challenges arise. But this requires a flexibility and long-term perspective that development assistance does not always allow.

The sustainability of coalitions

A media coalition's sustainability is closely linked to its ability to remain relevant to its cause, while keeping overheads low and relying as much as possible on the in-kind, material and/or financial contributions of its members.

Participants in the 2021 workshop felt that theme-specific coalitions may struggle to remain relevant after achieving their primary goals. A coalition that has the resources and mandate to address the shortcomings of a media ecosystem on multiple levels is more likely to be seen as an enabling mechanism for members to address the wider challenges they face.

As such, it can be worth sustaining the institutions that lead or drive a media coalition, as they may be needed for another cause in future. That said, a coalition should be a means to an end, and coalition members should be ready to disengage if their efforts are frustrated by deliberate political blocking or stakeholder indifference.

The Ethiopian CSoJ and MRC were both theme specific (journalists' safety and media reform). Both provided a platform and a safe space for media stakeholders to discuss these themes and figure out how to approach them. As a plethora of Ethiopian laws need reforming, and the application of others needs to be monitored, it is likely to take a long time for the MRC to achieve its objectives. Similarly, there appears to be no let-up in threats faced by the country's journalists.

According to researcher and former head of the Media Council of Kenya, Dr Haron Mwangi, *"the most resilient and sustainable coalitions are organic as opposed to mechanical, more informal than formal... They change their structure, governance and management systems over time in response to the changing media environment... They renew their intervention mechanism, models and strategy, keep their networks alive, and invite and forge close alliances with other actors and human rights defenders to change their circumstances."*³⁰ He adds that coalitions with minimal overhead costs and that rely on members providing voluntary services tend to deal with constant funding challenges better than those with high overheads.³¹

The work of the media coalitions supported by PRIMED has only just begun, and all remained dependent on donor funding at the end of the programme. Their ability to survive and remain relevant in the coming years will be the ultimate test of PRIMED's coalition building efforts. It also remains to be seen whether these coalitions will continue to navigate the "short-termism" of donor funding and policies highlighted by participants in the 2021 workshop. That said, the organisations leading these coalitions have their own momentum and did not necessarily depend on PRIMED for institutional funding.

4 A coalition should be a means to an end, and coalition members should be ready to disengage if their efforts are frustrated by deliberate political blocking or stakeholder indifference.



Common challenges

Building trust with government stakeholders

Many of the challenges to coalition building identified by workshop participants in 2021 stem from the volatility and fragility of the environments in which coalitions operate, and the complicated politics that coalition building demands. The latter notably includes the need to engage with political systems that, at best, keep journalists and human rights defenders at arm's length, and often see them as hostile opponents.

If media coalitions are to succeed, at some stage they will need to enter a sustained dialogue with government policymakers and legislators. All the PRIMED-supported coalitions managed to do this to varying degrees, with the NAP coalition in Sierra Leone taking advantage of government willingness to engage with – and actively support – the coalition's agenda. Coalitions must find ways of persuading government to cede political ground and to adopt recommendations that politicians and civil servants may see as a challenge to their authority. Building trust with such political actors is closely linked to openness, transparency and continuous engagement.

“We want to take more of an awareness-raising approach to advocacy,” Programme Manager for the Media Institute of Southern Africa Zambia, Jane Chirwa, said when presenting to

the 2021 workshop. *“Because, here in Zambia, when you bombard someone with big words and embarrass them, they call that ‘advocacy’. But they don’t know that advocacy can involve taking an educational approach and providing alternatives. That way, you can get a lot of things moving.”*

While **Ethiopia** proved to be both a volatile and fragile environment for coalition building, both Ethiopian coalitions supported by PRIMED initiated dialogue with authorities at various levels. The country's media regulator, the Ethiopian Media Authority, the Federal Ombudsman Office and the National Election Board all participated in meetings organised by the CSOJ and MRC. This paved the way for the Editors' Guild of Ethiopia – a member of the CSOJ – to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the media authority on areas of cooperation including monitoring journalists' safety and media policy reforms.

Bringing together stakeholders from media and civil society was another challenge identified by participants in the 2021 workshop. This was complicated by the fact that these two sectors – and even groups within them – tend to operate according to different philosophies. Donor funding can further intensify competition and friction between coalition stakeholders.

The 2023 Ethiopian study found that stiff competition between the country's various media coalitions emanates from the fragmentation of issues, and the poorly defined and conflicting roles of journalists' associations, media-focused non-governmental organisations, think-tanks and media outlets. Journalism and media professionals attend numerous meetings, sometimes on the same topic and with a plan to form identical coalitions, which leads to division and discontent. That is why the CSOJ and MRC have endeavoured to involve a range of stakeholders in their activities, and to define their objectives and roles as clearly as possible.

Maintaining momentum

The 2021 workshop discovered that, by their nature, advocacy-based initiatives are prone to setbacks and political capture. Where progress is slow, stakeholders' interest may wane, while a lack of reliable evidence for what is and is not

Coalitions must find ways of persuading government to cede political ground and to adopt recommendations that politicians and civil servants may see as a challenge to their authority. Building trust with such political actors is closely linked to openness, transparency and continuous engagement.

working can make it difficult to justify coalition decisions and motivate members.

One of the limiting factors affecting coalitions' ability to maintain momentum in Ethiopia was the lack of problem-solving approaches designed in response to the country's context, the 2023 study found. Understanding the context in which coalitions operate, and identifying who is affected by the situation, helps to determine an effective strategy to solve the problem and maintain momentum. A limited capacity to coordinate, document and communicate a coalition's objectives and results, both internally and externally, hinders coalitions' ability to continue focusing on their goals and being visible in the sector. Because many media coalitions are donor-dependent, delayed funding affected their sustainability. However, the Ethiopian experience shows that members' contributions of small resources, knowledge, networking and reputation are essential to coalitions' ongoing success.

Steep learning curve

Pre-empting these kinds of challenges, the 2021 workshop participants felt that time and effort should be spent on equipping media coalition members with skills to implement core activities and deliver measurable results. This ensures that a coalition can fully mobilise the resources at its disposal and start gaining traction from an early stage.

The 2023 study found that Ethiopia's fast-changing political conditions and the subsequent deterioration in journalists' safety required

PRIMED and its partners to go back to the drawing board half-way through the programme.

While the volatile environment presented a new advocacy opportunity, the harsh conditions experienced by journalists and media outlets created high expectations that media coalitions would act swiftly, before they had been able to carry out essential consensus building and strategic planning. This sometimes distracted the coalitions from their objectives and exposed them to a loss of trust. The study found that coalitions faced tremendous pressure to act each time a journalist was harassed. Yet the volatile environment also jeopardised the coalitions' own survival.

In the circumstances, the CSOJ used the capacity of its lead agency, CARD, to amplify its members' voices. PRIMED's 2023 study concluded that media coalitions will be challenged to live their values and meet expectations by engaging with relevant stakeholders, including the government, through policy advocacy activities. This often requires a lead organisation with the relevant credibility and relative stability to be able to act on behalf of coalition members.



4 By their nature, advocacy-based initiatives are prone to setbacks and political capture. Where progress is slow, stakeholders' interest may wane, while a lack of reliable evidence for what is and is not working can make it difficult to justify coalition decisions and motivate members. 7

Conclusions

As the PRIMED consortium pointed out in 2020:

“Coalitions need to be nurtured and require a lot of diplomacy and tact to bring people together around a common agenda, not least because collaboration doesn’t come naturally to media [organisations] in volatile and often highly competitive environments.”³²

Media coalitions also need time and long-term, flexible funding – two things that relatively short-term, overly planned and often inflexible, project-based development aid tends not to provide. Despite receiving cuts to its funding just as it was getting going, PRIMED at least provided some flexibility to consortium partners and programme teams in all three programme countries. This enabled them to nurture and drive coalitions, and to respond and adjust to rapidly changing priorities and needs.

The PRIMED-supported media coalitions are now up and running but they still have a long way to go to achieve their objectives, proving once again that coalition building is a marathon rather than a sprint. Until media development agencies and donors develop the stamina and techniques needed to go the distance, media support organisations should probably be more up-front about their limited capacity to support coalition building in the long-run and focus on putting in place the essential foundations identified in this brief.

“Respond to the short-term but remain focused on the long-term” seems to be the main mantra emanating from the media coalitions examined during PRIMED. These examples indicate that coalition building should be seen both in terms of the issues coalitions seek to address and the structures put in place to do this, whether a loose-knit, informal alliance or a formally registered legal entity with its own identity, policies, systems and procedures. Addressing core issues require a long-term vision and objectives, while a media coalition’s structure should reflect the most efficient way to move the coalition incrementally towards its objectives and vision.

The media coalitions examined in this brief appear to be a hybrid of conventional advocacy coalitions and social movements.³³ While their position on this spectrum is unlikely to alter coalitions’ vision and objectives, it will likely affect their structures, strategies and tactics. The coalitions supported by PRIMED have all managed to engage with their governments at some level, and therefore are probably more akin to conventional advocacy coalitions than to social movements.

The media coalitions examined in 2021 tended to operate outside the policy-making spheres dominated by ruling elites who, at least initially, perceived public interest media and coalitions advocating in their interest as a threat. Members of MAZ, for example, were initially shunned and hounded by a hostile regime. It was only after the unexpected formation of a national unity government that ushered in constitutional reform that MAZ began advising politicians and holding them accountable.

MAZ seemed to derive this trust and credibility from its quiet lobbying of sympathetic ruling party politicians and its members’ success in mobilising public support for a change in the constitution to secure media freedom and access to information.³⁴

Of the coalitions examined here, only the CSOJ in Ethiopia and the NAP in Sierra Leone have involved organisations outside the media. Other coalitions have tended to comprise media stakeholders, and perhaps lack some of the invention and creativity that comes with looking at a problem from a variety of perspectives. This inclusion and diversity is particularly important as journalism becomes more diffuse and increasingly involves a rich mix of people from different backgrounds.

Recommendations

This section contains recommendations based on the findings of PRIMED's learning journey.

To donors

It can take years, if not decades, to bring about the kind of lasting, structural improvements to media ecosystems that will ultimately impact international development objectives. The findings indicate that media coalitions can make a significant contribution to these improvements. But enabling them to do so requires patience and long-term funding to allow coalitions and their backers the flexibility to respond to the inevitable twists and turns along the way.

While donors are not expected to sign blank cheques to media coalitions, they should invest in an incremental change process that measures progress in short-and-medium-term steps taken towards long-term goals set by the coalitions themselves, which ultimately contribute to a shared vision based on common values.

To media development agencies

Media development organisations have a responsibility to make donors aware that change is likely to take a long time. Long-term support is needed to build flexibility and pragmatism into programmes in a way that enable media coalitions to set their agenda, and to respond to often unexpected opportunities and challenges.

Media development organisations should also recognise that their main contribution to media coalition building may not necessarily be

money, but rather the ability and means to spot opportunities, to initiate, convene and facilitate coalitions where necessary, and to provide coalitions with knowledge, advice, expertise and solidarity via their networks.

Media support organisations also have a responsibility to co-ordinate their interventions in accordance with objectives and plans set by the coalitions they support, and to encourage other media development agencies to do likewise.

To media coalitions and other national stakeholders

Media coalitions should have the confidence to push back if they feel donors and media development agencies are not buying into their agenda and enabling them to lead coalition activities. They should also take inspiration from the coalitions documented during PRIMED's learning journey, as well as many others that have forged meaningful and lasting change.

4 Media support organisations also have a responsibility to co-ordinate their interventions in accordance with objectives and plans set by the coalitions they support, and to encourage other media development agencies to do likewise.



Areas for further research and learning

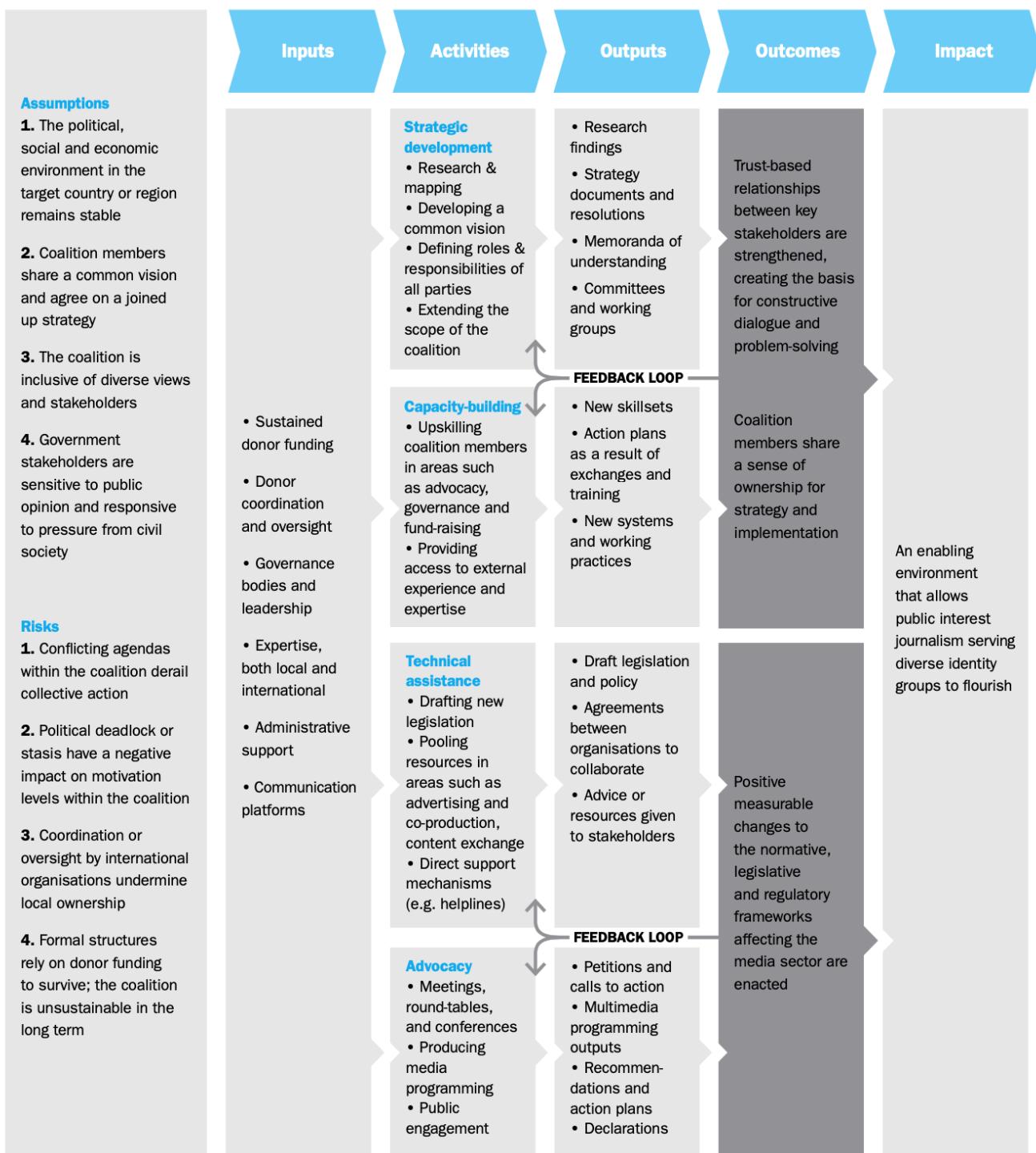
The following topics may be worth further exploration as understanding of coalitions and coalition building continues to deepen:

- Testing and refining the model theory of change (see Appendix 1) by applying it to other coalition-building initiatives.
- Examining how coalition leadership can best be nurtured and developed, given how important it seems to be in determining coalitions' success or failure.
- Examining how to encourage inclusion and diversity, both within coalitions and through coalition building. How do coalitions involve women and under-represented groups in a way that enables them to make a meaningful contribution and influence the coalition agenda?
- Looking at how to involve relevant stakeholders from beyond the media sector – such as CSOs and the private sector – in media coalitions without diluting their focus and cohesion.
- Developing a pool of expertise from existing coalitions and PRIMED consortium members to assist with future coalition building.



Appendix 1: Coalition building: PRIMED's Model Theory of Change in light of the Ethiopian experience

The 2021 learning brief included a model theory of change (MToC) based on the findings of the first workshop for PRIMED consortium members and partners (see diagramme)³⁵. IMS tested the MToC against the findings of the 2023 study in Ethiopia and found that the model generally reflects the coalition building process in Ethiopia³⁶.





This appendix assesses each component of the MToC to see if these work in Ethiopia, considering the findings of the 2023 study.

The MToC brings together key inputs by sets of activities that produce outputs and contribute to outcomes, and all feed into the impact a coalition has on the media ecosystem. In this case, the outcomes also produce further outputs via “feedback loops” that reflect the iterative approach to coalition building that workshop participants spoke about in 2021. This hypothetical change process is based on some assumptions.

Assumptions

Unlike the assumptions made in the 2021 learning brief, the political, social and economic environment in Ethiopia is volatile. The government is also less sensitive to public opinion and less responsive to the advocacy efforts of civil society than anticipated. This required additional inputs and activities: more time and effort and greater flexibility from everyone involved, for example, and additional research and dialogue events to keep track of and respond to the changing situation. The deteriorating situation also increased some of the risks, although it also created opportunities such as the need for the CSOJ and arguably motivated coalition members to act (see ‘Risks’ below).

Although the external factors are less conducive for media coalitions to operate, collective action undertaken by coalitions still ensured the inclusion of diverse views and stakeholders in coalition initiatives, which in turn helped with the development of shared visions and agreed-on strategies to address common challenges in the media landscape.

Risks

Similar to the 2021 learning brief findings, competing agendas within media coalitions in Ethiopia disrupted collective action. The 2023 Ethiopian study further highlighted duplication of effort and competition for donor funding as risk factors among coalitions.

Political stasis either negatively or positively affects coalition efforts. The 2023 study

captured cases where the political situation inspired coalition initiatives to respond to emerging challenges in the media landscape. Media coalitions have sometimes been discouraged from advocating for specific causes as governments becomes non-responsive or actively hostile to their demands.

As identified in 2021, oversight by international partners can hinder ownership of a coalition by stakeholders in the Ethiopian media sector. The assertion that formal structures rely on donor funding to survive is true in Ethiopia. However, in the case of Ethiopia, formal structures give coalitions a level of legitimacy and acceptance that may help to sustain them in the long-term.

Inputs

The inputs indicated in the MToC reflect the Ethiopian media coalitions’ needs and interests. One thing that must be considered as part of media coalition governance bodies and leadership is the presence of individual leaders who are perceived as able to prioritise the coalition’s cause and confront the challenges emanating from a fragile political environment. Particularly attention may need to be given to nurturing coalition leaders.

Activities

The major activities under the MToC are suitable for the Ethiopian context. However, strategic engagement with the government is an important activity that must be considered for the MToC to be effective in Ethiopia. That will help to ensure that the government, as the duty bearer with legal obligations, plays its role in upholding and reinforcing freedom of expression and media independence through evidence-based policy recommendations, capacity building and advocacy.

Outputs

Keeping the context-specific assumptions, risks and inputs discussed above in mind, the outputs in the MToC reflect the Ethiopian experience during PRIMED. This includes the strategic engagement with government that was made possible by committed individual leaders, which is likely to result in the kind of outputs envisaged

in the MToC (e.g. draft legislation, declarations, petitions and calls to action etc.).

Outcomes

The PRIMED-supported media coalitions in Ethiopia contributed to several of the outcomes in the MToC, notably the strengthening of trust-based relationships between key stakeholders. Coalition members have also shown ownership for the advocacy strategies they have started to implement. This in turn produced further outputs such as new research and additional capacity building, as envisaged by the MToC's "feedback loops". However, these outcomes and additional outputs have yet to result in the kind of changes to legislative and regulatory frameworks envisaged in the MToC. Furthermore, the case of the CSOJ points to media coalitions contributing to other kinds of outcomes such as the

development and implementation of measures that protect journalists and enable them to go about their work with a higher degree of safety.

Impact

While the PRIMED-supported coalitions in Ethiopia have yet to have the kind of impact envisaged in the MToC, there are some initial signs that they are heading in this direction. For example, by creating safe spaces for media workers from different backgrounds to work together towards common aims at a time of extreme ethnic and political conflict, the Ethiopian coalitions became enabling microenvironments which, in the long run, should contribute towards a healthier media ecosystem if these safe spaces and the mutual trust they have started to generate can be sustained and expanded.





Appendix 2: Coalition-building toolbox

In 2021, workshop participants highlighted an array of methods, tools and techniques for building the capacity of coalition members,

facilitating dialogue between key stakeholders and advocating for positive change. What follows is a comparison of the coalition-building methods and tools identified in 2021 and those the 2023 study identified as being used in Ethiopia, along with some of the methods used in Bangladesh and Sierra Leone that were identified during the October 2023 workshop.

Method	2021	2023
Research and monitoring	It is vital to have an in-depth understanding of the issues a coalition is looking to address, and to use these insights to determine appropriate interventions.	In Ethiopia, studies into issues such as the safety of journalists, the post-election media environment, and conflict-sensitive media informed the design and tactics of both PRIMED-supported coalitions. In Sierra Leone, PRIMED commissioned a set of studies looking at various aspects of media viability for the national stakeholder conference that approved the NAP
Stakeholder consultation	Regular consultation with those most directly affected by a coalition's work secures consensus around immediate priorities and effective approaches.	Stakeholder consultations were a key feature of coalition building efforts in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Bangladesh during PRIMED. They created platforms for media actors to discuss their challenges and identify issues that needed joint action.
Direct advocacy	A coalition's success is closely linked to coalition members' ability to find common ground where their individual agendas overlap, and to act collectively to address these issues.	In Bangladesh and Ethiopia, the BJC, CSOJ and MRC coalitions showed that engaging the authorities in policy advocacy is possible and can have an impact in challenging political contexts. In Sierra Leone, the authorities were more supportive of and responsive to the NAP coalition. But their commitment began to wane towards the end of PRIMED, requiring the the coalition to step up its direct advocacy.

continued...



Method	2021	2023
Exchanging experience	<p>Coalitions can be a conduit for bringing outside experience into local media environments through consultancies, training and peer-to-peer exchanges that provide members with an immersive learning experience in equivalent organisations.</p> <p>Media development agencies are well-placed to facilitate these exchanges by involving partners from other countries in their networks.</p>	<p>In Ethiopia, coalition members participated in online and in-person experience-sharing and capacity-building sessions involving coalitions from other countries. Participants said they learned new ways to organise a media coalition, gain members' trust and engage in advocacy work^{37, 38}.</p> <p>In Sierra Leone, the NAP leveraged international best practices and ideas from international partners. And the BJC in Bangladesh was inspired by the Indonesian Press Council model as it advocated for self-regulation of the broadcast media.</p> <p>In all cases, PRIMED consortium members identified resource people from other regions and facilitated these exchanges.</p>
Legal analysis and drafting	<p>Coalitions' efforts to improve media legislation and regulatory frameworks are often driven by the collaborative drafting of legal texts, drawing on both external and internal expertise.</p>	<p>Although PRIMED-supported coalitions in Ethiopia had a minimal role in the media reforms initiated before the programme started, they took part in subsequent efforts to continue the reform process.</p> <p>In Bangladesh, the BJC drafted amendments to a new law with the help of a media lawyer identified and paid for by PRIMED.</p>
Media coverage	<p>Media coverage can help coalitions to hold decision-makers accountable for their actions or inaction. It is also essential in shaping public opinion and mobilising support.</p>	<p>Media outlets in Ethiopia reported on coalition activities and called for action from diverse stakeholders, particularly with regards attacks on journalists. Media outlets receiving content production and business support from PRIMED were particularly active, suggesting that coalition building can create synergies within a media development initiative. However, there was a tendency for media outlets simply to report on coalition activities rather than actively participate in coalition campaigns, although media outlets were more involved in the CSoJ because this directly addressed threats they faced.</p>

continued...

Method	2021	2023
Public engagement	<p>Public support can be crucial to the success of a media coalition. Various methods have been used to achieve this, including public meetings, petitions and –increasingly – the use of social media.</p>	<p>The Ethiopian study found that media coalitions in general lack credibility needed to garner public support because of a lack of professionalism in the media sector and weak institutional capacity of journalists' associations. PRIMED-supported coalitions tried to address this by working with CSOs that have a strong public acceptance that then spearheaded calls for action and petitions. CARD, for example, brought credibility to the CSoJ because of its track record in defending human rights.</p> <p>In Sierra Leone, widespread public consultations around the IMC's code of conduct, which PRIMED initially supported, gave some impetus to the subsequent NAP coalition.</p>
Support mechanisms	<p>Coalitions can be a source of sustained moral support to beleaguered media outlets and practitioners. Meetings and discussions can be a way of addressing the sense of isolation experienced by many journalists, but formal mechanisms such as helplines have also been used with a high degree of success.</p>	<p>In Ethiopia, the CSoJ and MRC provided a safe space for media stakeholders to discuss and address issues of common interest under extremely difficult circumstances. This in turn helped build trust and a common purpose within the sector. The CSoJ is now well placed to establish formal safety mechanisms.</p> <p>In Bangladesh, journalists' solidarity with detained colleague Rozina Islam was a catalyst for the BJC's subsequent advocacy, which produced unprecedented consensus among broadcasters and other stakeholders in a fragmented and divided media sector.</p>





Appendix 3 – Case studies

The 2021 learning brief includes case studies of six media coalitions³⁹. Here, using a similar format, are case studies of the two Ethiopian coalitions supported through the PRIMED programme.⁴⁰

Case study 1: Media Reform Coalition

Objectives

In August 2021, IMS partnered with ENMS, a media research and capacity-building CSO, to assess the role of media in national elections, to identify future possible media ecosystem scenarios

and to convene a forum to bring media actors in Ethiopia together to:

- Identify priorities and potential collaborative actions related to ongoing media reform
- Establish a national coalition on media reform – the Ethiopian Media Key Stakeholders’ Coalition
- Initiate coalition dialogue on the role of the media in peacebuilding

Local partners

The resulting MRC created a multi-stakeholder partnership between:

- Journalism associations
- State- and privately-owned media organisations
- Media think-tanks
- Media regulatory bodies
- Academics
- Human rights defenders

The project benefited from

- Local actors’ interest in discussing topical issues to influence through advocacy the ongoing reform of policies and laws affecting Ethiopia’s media ecosystem.
- Co-ordinated international media development support through the PRIMED programme.

Activities

As part of the project, ENMS conducted research and organised a media network, post-election dialogue and coalition conferences on issues relating to the role of the media in peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive media. These activities enabled media stakeholders to discuss topics that matter to their day-to-day work.

Key achievements

- A rapid assessment of the post-election media environment in Ethiopia.⁴¹
- Four dialogue meetings attended by 198 participants from four regions of the country. Women made up 20–36% of participants and were increasingly represented as presenters and panellists over time.
- Increased media coverage of media reform issues.
- Formation of the MRC working group.
- Research into media roles, challenges and opportunities in peacebuilding in Ethiopia.⁴²

Outcomes

- Activities organised by ENMS helped promote co-operation for continued media reform, identify common challenges faced by Ethiopian media actors and suggest possible solutions.
- The rapid assessment of the post-election media environment helped facilitate evidence-based discussion in the coalition. It also helped coalition members and international partners to identify media needs in times of crisis and political change.
- Active participation of the National Election Board in a coalition meeting on media performance during the elections resulted



in an open discussion about the challenges media faced in reporting elections and media underperformance due to a lack of ethics and professionalism.

- Higher participation of women over time, and improved representation of women in coalition meetings as speakers and panellists.
- The initiative attracted media coverage by state and private media outlets that created awareness about the media reform process in the country and the coalition's activities.
- The MRC working group led on identifying shared objectives that the coalition should advance, and crafting bylaws that determined the coalition structure, and the roles and responsibilities of member organisations.
- Regional stakeholders' perspectives on media reform were heard and represented by the coalition.
- Research helped guide evidence-based dialogue on the role of the media in peacebuilding. As a result, the chief ombudsman called on the government to allow media access to official information and to transform state-owned media into public media to ensure journalists' independence in their reporting.

Lessons learned

- Media reform **priorities must be identified and clearly defined**, rather than the coalition trying to deal with every emerging issue in the sector.
- Media development agencies should identify key **stakeholders' positions on relevant issues** before a coalition is formed so as to understand stakeholders' potential interest in and contribution to the coalition, and how the coalition might need to manage relationships between members and other stakeholders.
- Coalition-building initiatives must **ensure the continuous participation and representation of key actors in media reform dialogue**, including those in regional states and those with limited institutional capacity. **The active participation of government authorities** led to successful advocacy that could have a direct

impact on ongoing media reform.

- The coalition lead agency should **develop a culture of defending coalition objectives and interests** through public statements and media engagement, to influence policies and other steps towards improving the media environment.

Case study 2: Coalition on the Safety of Journalists

Objectives

In December 2021, IMS initiated a partnership with CARD, a CSO that seeks to empower individual and groups of citizens to promote and defend human rights and build democratic governance in Ethiopia, to facilitate media dialogue on the safety of journalists.⁴³ Journalism associations who participated in this dissemination workshop decided to form a coalition led by CARD to advance journalists' safety. In a changing media environment, CARD's role has been to help promote a response to this issue that is driven by media stakeholders.

The consultative meeting that laid the foundation for establishing the CSoJ garnered the support of 12 journalists' associations from five regional states and Addis Ababa. Then 17 journalists' associations signed the coalition's code of conduct and memorandum of understanding, indicating that the coalition should have a formal registered and licensed structure to operate and raise funds to sustain itself. Consequently, five journalism associations were elected as steering committee members with decision-making power to lead this registration process.

Founding members/steering committee members

- Editors' Guild of Ethiopia
- Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals' Association
- Mizan Journalism Graduates' Association
- Ethiopian Sports Journalists' Association
- Ethiopian Volunteer Journalists and Artists for Human Rights Association



Activities

The December 2021 workshop to disseminate findings of the survey on the safety of journalists in Ethiopia attracted 37 participants (17 female and 22 male) from journalism associations and media organisations. This group expanded over time and reached an agreement to establish a coalition for the safety of journalists. The discussion also resulted in identifying potential mitigating measures and coalition activities.

Members agreed the code of conduct and memorandum of understanding that defines the role and responsibilities of members, the steering committee and the lead agency (CARD).

Key achievements

- Voicing the concerns of journalism associations on the safety of journalists and revocations of associations' licences to operate.
- Defending freedom of expression, association and assembly through public statements and media briefings.
- Promoting collaboration between associations with shared interests and objectives to protect the safety of journalists.
- Developing a national solidarity framework to prevent attacks against journalists, regardless of their ethnicity, employment and regional affiliations.
- Securing the support of other media coalitions and organisations on the issue of journalists' safety.

Outcomes

- High participation of journalists' associations in the coalition.
- Member associations contributed their time, expertise and other resources to the coalition effort.
- An inclusive coalition where members had a sense of ownership and influence.
- Building trust among members in a historically divided and undemocratic environment.

Lessons learned

- The collaboration between CSOs and journalism associations led to successful coalition building. CARD's technical assistance and support to journalists' associations in forming the coalition helped to:
 - articulate the need for the coalition and address negative historical experiences.
 - create a shared vision and understanding of how the coalition will operate in a context where coalition members are institutionally weak, and the media environment is highly affected by political, economic, legal and technological factors.
 - provide legal, financial and managerial support in establishing the coalition.
- Representing key journalism associations, even when they are small and institutionally weak, is important to develop a sense of ownership among coalition members.
- Sufficient meeting time and open discussion is needed to cultivate trust and understanding between participants.
- Clearly defined coalition objectives and activities appeal to the interest of each member.
- Frequent and clear communication between coalition members and those interested in the coalition increases trust and acceptance of the coalition in the media sector.

References

- 1 BBC Media Action, the Communications Initiative, Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Global Forum for Media Development, International Media Support (IMS) and the Media Development Investment Fund.
- 2 Nelson, M (2019) 'Redefining Media Development – A Demand-driven Approach', p35. In Benequista N, Abbott S, Rothman P and Mano W, eds. *International Media Development – Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers*. New York, Peter Lang.
- 3 Fokane, T (2008) 'The fight for broadcasting independence under apartheid: a history of COM and CIB', pp1–16 in *The Broadcasting Independence Handbook: Lessons From The South African Experience* (Johannesburg, FXI)
- 4 Benequista, N (2019) *Confronting the Crisis in Independent Media: The Role of International Assistance*. Research report for Center for International Media Assistance/NED, p2. Available at: <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/confronting-the-crisis-in-independent-media/>
- 5 See <https://projects-primed.gfmd.info/> for more information about the PRIMED programme.
- 6 PRIMED (2019) 'Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development – Doing media development differently', p1. Programme proposal submitted to the UK's Department for International Development by the PRIMED consortium of implementing organisations.
- 7 PRIMED (2021a) 'Revised programme approach', p17. Submitted to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office by the PRIMED consortium, following cuts to the programme's funding.
- 8 PRIMED (2021b) 'PRIMED Learning Questions – Revised May 2021', p3. Revised PRIMED learning strategy, approved by the programme board in May 2021.
- 9 PRIMED (2020) *Coalitions for Change*. Learning brief compiled by IMS and FPU that reflected the consortium's understanding and experiences of coalitions and coalition building before the programme.
- 10 Organisations based in programme countries, which media development agencies support through funding and technical assistance such as advice, training and information.
- 11 Mwangi, H and Njiiri, M (2021) *Mapping Coalitions: Mapping out coalitions, collaborations, partnerships and networks for media and civil society in sub-Saharan Africa*. A report by CHARM, A Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development in Africa. Available from: <https://www.communit.com/media-development/content/mapping-coalitions-mapping-out-coalitions-collaborations-partnerships-and-networks-media>
- 12 Randall, M (2021) *Coalitions for Change – Collective action, better ecosystems*. PRIMED learning brief. Available from: <https://projects-primed.gfmd.info/policy-learning/workshops/coalitions-change>
- 13 Elsabet, ST (2023a) 'Media Coalition Building Process and Progress – A Study Analysing The PRIMED's Programme's Support to Media Coalitions in Ethiopia'. Report of study commissioned by IMS.
- 14 Elsabet, ST (2023b) *Coalitions for Change: The Ethiopian Experience*. PRIMED learning brief commissioned by IMS.
- 15 IMS (2023) Summary of PRIMED Coalitions for Change online workshop held on 11 October 2023.
- 16 PRIMED 2020; Randall 2021; Lush, D and Randall, M (2022) 'Coalitions for change: 'Collective action for stronger media ecosystems', online conference paper accepted by the IAMCR annual conference in July 2022.
- 17 In Randall 2021, p 4
- 18 Elsabet 2023b, p 7
- 19 Ibid., p 8
- 20 In Randall 2021, p10
- 21 Elsabet 2023b, p17-18. .
- 22 BBC Media Action (2023) *Stakeholder evaluations – summary of outcomes*. Analysis of interviews conducted with editors and owners of media outlets supported by PRIMED in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone.
- 23 Randall 2021, p13
- 24 In 2020, Ethiopia ranked 99 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), but slipped to 114th place in 2022 and 130th in 2023. See: <https://rsf.org/en/ethiopia>
- 25 Randall 2021, p7.

26 Despite the war in the north, CARD and ENMS ensured the presence of the Tigray Journalists' Association in their activities by inviting its displaced members who had relocated to Addis Ababa. Similarly, they continued to involve the Amhara Journalists' Association in spite of the conflict there.

27 For details of the power analysis used see Oesterlund P, and Elsabet ST (2020) 'Building Media Alliances in Ethiopia', Media Sector Stakeholder Assessment conducted by Danicon for IMS.

28 Ibid.

29 in Elsabet 2023b, p15

30 Mwangi, H (2023) 'Lessons on Media and Civil Society Coalitions in Media Reforms: Case of Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa', p59 in Elsabet, ST, Lush, D and Tewodros, NB (eds) *Compilation of Briefing Papers on Media Sector Development in Ethiopia*. IMS and PRIMED. Available from: <https://www.mediasupport.org/publication/compilation-of-briefing-papers-on-the-media-sector-development-in-ethiopia>

31 Ibid, p64

32 PRIMED 2020.

33 Lush and Randall 2022

34 IMS (2015) *Supporting Zimbabwe's Media – Contributing to Change*, pp13–16. IMS impact study report. Available at: www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/zimba'bwe-contributing-change-ims-impact-feb2015-lowres-final.pdf

35 Randall 2021, p14

36 Elsabet 2023, p21-22

37 Elsabet (2023a), p50.

38 Elsabet (2023b), p17.

39 Randall 2021, p15-27

40 Taken from Elsabet 2023, p23-26.

41 [A Rapid Assessment on Post-Election Media Environment in Ethiopia: Media Information and Research Hub](#) (mirh-et.org)

42 [The Role of Conflict-Sensitive Media in Peacebuilding: Policy briefing paperwork: Media Information and Research Hub](#) (mirh-et.org)

43 IMS (2022) *Ethiopia Safety of Journalists Assessment Report*.



PRIMED

PROTECTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA
FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT



Public interest media are vital to open, just societies – they provide trusted news and information, hold the powerful to account and create a platform for debate. Yet truly public interest media are in crisis.

PRIMED (Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development) is a three-year programme to support public interest media in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone – addressing critical challenges, building resilience, and sharing research and insight about what works.

Led by BBC Media Action, PRIMED partners include Free Press Unlimited, International Media Support and Media Development Investment Fund, with additional support from Global Forum for Media Development and The Communication Initiative.

PRIMED is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



To learn more about PRIMED please see bbcmediaaction.org or email media.action@bbc.co.uk.

 [@bbcmediaaction](https://twitter.com/bbcmediaaction)  [@bbcmediaaction](https://facebook.com/bbcmediaaction)  [bbcmediaaction](https://instagram.com/bbcmediaaction)

BBC Media Action is a registered charity in England and Wales (no 1076235) and a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (no 3521587) at Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA, United Kingdom.

Authors: David Lush, Dr Elisabet Samuel Tadesse and Michael Randall, with partners and members of the PRIMED consortium.

Front cover photo: Activists in London wear chains on their wrists as they protest to highlight the plight of a jailed photojournalist.

CARL COURT / GETTY IMAGES