GLOBAL

Strategies to support public interest media in low- and middle-income countries

What works and what doesn't

LEARNING BRIEF

2024

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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)

- Strategies to support public interest media in low- and middle-income countries: What works and what doesn't (led by BBC Media Action)
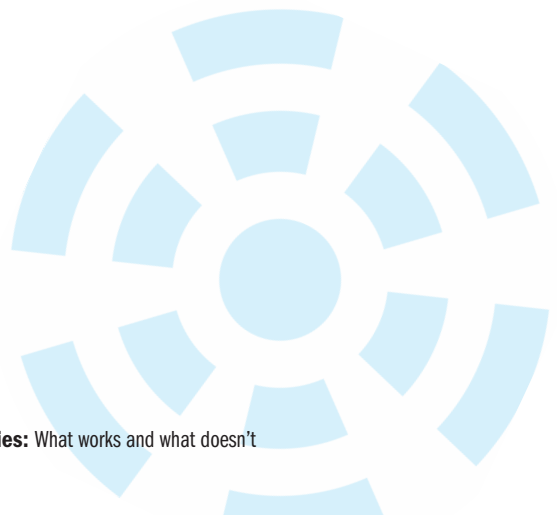
Executive summary

This brief is the fifth and final in a series of learning briefs generated as part of Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED), a large media development programme funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and implemented by a consortium of media support organisations.

From 2020–2023 the programme supported public interest media content in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, working with selected outlets. The programme faced major external challenges during its implementation, from the COVID-19 global pandemic and subsequent financial uncertainty and budget cuts, to the eruption of fighting in Ethiopia.

Following a 10-month co-creation phase, PRIMED implementation approach principles were determined as:

- **Context-driven:** Analysing the wider political context, the economy and market dynamics, and designing a methodology to identify obstacles and opportunities

- **Content-driven:** Encouraging public interest content where media outlets' institutional independence has become impossible

- **Locally-led:** Reform initiatives were locally owned and led, with PRIMED providing technical assistance and facilitation

- **Delivered through a consortium of expertise:** Consortium members collaborated to provide supplementary skills and expertise and adopt a consistent application across the programme

- **Agile:** Acknowledging that changes and agility would be needed as the programme progressed to allow PRIMED to take advantage of opportunities and to step back early where progress was not being made – especially when financial allocations were subjected to cuts each year

PRIMED used several delivery strategies. It worked with a range of media outlets and content producers, in line with strategic, locally-led engagement plans that were developed with each partner. The programme:

- Provided capital investment
- Supported institution building
- Enabled media outlets to reconfigure their business and organisational set-up
- Supported editorial and production revamps
- Helped with digital migration and digital skills development

- Invested in business development and audience engagement functions
- Supported technical rebuilds to improve production and reduce costs

PRIMED also worked with a range of advocacy groups, trade unions and civil society organisations, supporting local coalitions to improve the safety of journalists, advocate for greater media freedom and better representation of women in the media. This element of the programme's work also helped to instigate national conversations about the role of the media as a public good, and how public subsidies could support content creation.

This brief examines how these strategies worked in practice and concludes that:

- Working closely with local content producers and using a customised programme of support proved to be effective. However, it only worked well where there was a shared vision in the holistic approach, which helped to build trust between the owners/senior managers and the PRIMED support team.

- Providing timely and intensive technical expertise and facilitation to locally-led coalitions and initiatives allowed PRIMED to accelerate opportunities for reform, but significant improvements in the media environment take a long time. Political will can be short-lived.

- PRIMED successfully deployed market and non-market solutions to enhance the financial viability of media outlets but longer support programmes are needed.

- Improved financial resilience of media outlets may not lead to improved independence in highly politicised and co-opted media markets.

· In current market and political conditions, media development impact cannot easily be achieved with small-scale efforts and investments in small outlets with limited reach. Media support packages should be based on clear value for money criteria.

· Embedding gender targets in overall reform programmes to secure greater representation in the workplace worked well, but supporting external monitoring to improve the portrayal of women in the media has not proved to be effective.

· Working with a state broadcaster is necessary where it has significant and unparalleled reach

This brief outlines practical recommendations for designing future media development programmes, as part of PRIMED's objective to create and share learning to contribute to a more targeted and impactful global approach to supporting media outlets.

1. Spending time to understand how media content is consumed, who produces it and why, is essential to achieving lasting change. Media support programmes should allow sufficient time to understand the context before designing their interventions.

2. Adopting a holistic business analysis approach is likely to work better than the traditional needs assessment approach. It is also an effective way of ensuring that reform programmes are locally led and context led.

3. Not all media organisations can be supported. Tough choices have to be made and defended, and media development experts need to be ready to walk away from failing partnerships.

4. Local coalitions should lead the media environment reform agenda but the organisations behind those coalitions also need support.

5. Embed gender targets in the media outlets' reform programmes. The commitment shown by media outlets' leaders is fundamental to progress in this area.

6. Design agile programmes that can respond to changing opportunities and be ready to terminate workstreams that fail to show results.

7. Use expertise from across the media development sector by bringing in the right skills at the right time. Simplifying programme governance structures and contracting in specific skills will reduce overheads and speed up delivery.

8. Acknowledge and address the mismatch between the reality of short-term funding cycles and the lengthy process of improving media ecosystems.

The overall conclusion is that while the PRIMED approach works, it is insufficient to avoid democratic backsliding in the face of actors intent on undermining, co-opting and neutralising independent media. These actors' strategies to control narratives, spread disinformation, or avoid scrutiny and accountability tend to be well (and predictably) resourced, implemented over long time periods and embedded in existing power structures. They are further enabled by broader media environments that facilitate the spread of disinformation and stoke polarisation, particularly those created by technology platforms.

To achieve lasting change, organisations that seek to defend independent media need to respond to and reflect the staying power and resourcing of those who want to undermine independent media.

About this brief

This learning brief describes the design and implementation strategies of the PRIMED programme, and what has and has not worked in delivering effective media development support programmes. It draws on the experience of PRIMED consortium members, and evidence and data gathered as part of the programme's progress and impact reporting. It also reflects conclusions from two interim external reviews as well as early insights from a final external programme review[1].

This brief builds on the more detailed lessons and conclusions contained in four previous PRIMED learning briefs and the programme's other learning materials. It aims to identify concrete and actionable recommendations that may be useful when designing similar media development initiatives.

How PRIMED was created, rolled out and adapted

PRIMED was first developed in response to a call for proposals from the UK's Department for International Development as part of the government's overall strategy to support media freedom around the world. PRIMED was the largest of three programmes announced at the Global Media Freedom Conference in London in 2019.

The PRIMED programme was designed to work in three countries – Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone:

· **Ethiopia** was undergoing a near-unprecedented political opening, its Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had received the Nobel Peace Prize and the Ethiopian government had recently been selected to host World Press Freedom Day. The potential for building effective and collaborative media support strategies in Ethiopia appeared substantial, not least because its economic situation was significantly improving.

· **Bangladesh** was considered to be a far more challenging media environment, with a single dominant party political system and increased attacks on journalists and bloggers. However, the country's economy and potential media advertising base were burgeoning.

· **Sierra Leone** had an extremely small economy and pool of media advertisers but there were significant potential political opportunities and an increasingly well-organised media sector in the country.

PRIMED brought together some leading international media support organisations to explore how a collaborative approach and deploying diverse media support strategies might work in these very different political and economic environments.

A nine-month inception phase allowed for a detailed design of the programme's overall conceptual framework, its approach, identifying local partners and developing specific strands of work.

Almost as soon as the inception phase was launched in early 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic prevented planned face-to-face meetings with consortium members and potential local partners. In the same year, a merger between the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office resulted in media freedom and media development strategies being reframed.

PRIMED's implementation phase started in November 2020. In May 2021 the available budget was reduced significantly because of reductions in overall UK AID spending. This necessitated a programme redesign and a reduction in the consortium size (omitting one planned main partner and two technical partners).

PRIMED's activities on the ground were largely concluded in September 2023. Final reporting and dissemination of learning continued until March 2024. While external factors were challenging, PRIMED's agile design allowed the programme to adapt and realign in response to the significant changes it faced.

The PRIMED approach

PRIMED's intervention logic, approach and areas of work were developed during the inception phase. This process was based on tracing the production of media content and its consumption by local communities in the implementation countries, before identifying suitable local media partners. This resulted in a programme that aimed to be:

- **Context-driven:** Analysing the wider political context, the economy and market dynamics, and designing a methodology to identify obstacles and opportunities for public interest media

- **Content-driven:** Encouraging public interest media content where the institutional independence of media outlets had become impossible

- **Locally-led:** Media reform initiatives were locally owned and led, with PRIMED providing technical assistance and facilitation

- **Delivered through a consortium of expertise:** With consortium members working alongside each other to provide supplementary skills and expertise to local media partners, and apply a consistent approach across the programme

- **Agile:** Acknowledging that changes and agility would be needed as the programme progressed to allow PRIMED to take advantage of opportunities and to step back early where progress was not being made – especially when financial allocations were subjected to cuts each year

Context-driven

While PRIMED consortium members had previous experience in the media landscape of Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Sierra Leone, at its outset the programme took time to gain a deeper understanding of the wider media context in each country before designing specific workstreams.

PRIMED commissioned political economy analyses, and conducted audience research, content analysis and expert reviews of legal and regulatory conditions in each country. It also mapped out existing media content providers, and sectoral actors such as ministries, regulatory bodies, advocacy groups, trade unions and civil society organisations, and conducted detailed interviews with stakeholders.

Using these sources, PRIMED developed a snapshot of the media landscape for each country and identified where there were opportunities to improve on the status quo using five categories:

- The extent to which there was political will to support greater media freedom

- The appetite for, and likelihood of achieving, a reform of media-related laws and regulations

- The extent to which the economy can generate sources of income for media outlets

- The levels of trust in the media expressed by consumers

- The professional skills of media workers

A sixth category, the representation of women in the media, was summarised from baseline gender analysis conducted in all three countries by FPU, the consortium's gender lead[2].

The country summaries are in Appendix 1. This snapshot approach enabled PRIMED to sense-check its country-specific theories of change, set out a baseline and determine the scope for progress. See Appendix 2 for the country-specific theories of change. The country summaries were revisited in early 2024 to provide an endline score against the baseline and the targets for improvement set out by PRIMED. See Appendix 3

PRIMED activities were designed to address the challenges to public interest media at both **outlet** and **environment** level. PRIMED sought to build media outlets' resilience to political and economic pressures that undermine their financial viability, while also supporting the development of information ecosystems that enable a better flow of trusted public interest media content in the three diverse country contexts.

Content-led

The initial business case objective for PRIMED was to *"strengthen the ability of independent media in developing countries to produce free, independent public interest journalism by helping them to become more financially viable".*

The early assumption underpinning that objective was that the biggest challenge to the financial survival of independent media outlets was the loss of advertising income to social media platforms. However, this was only one aspect of a more complex picture.

In addition to consultations with partners and other in-country experts and organisations, PRIMED commissioned political economy analyses to understand the financial and political challenges confronting independent media in its focus countries. In doing so, it aimed to identify the most politically and economically feasible media support strategies.

These analyses highlighted how far commercial markets were undermined by increasing levels of political capture. Advertising markets were often dominated by media owners with close ties to government or other interests, and the allocation of government advertising budgets played an increasingly influential role in determining which media outlets were financially resilient.[3] For example, the political economy analysis of Bangladesh concluded that "all except a handful of newspapers in Bangladesh depend on government advertising to survive". In these political and economic conditions, it was almost impossible to identify the existence of **"independent media"** (as defined by the programme[4]) in the PRIMED countries.

This raised a critical question: are independent media outlets the only or most effective way to improve the flow of public interest content to large and diverse segments of the public? The public's right to information is undoubtedly best served by media institutions that are entirely independent of political and other influences. But where such institutions do not exist, the public's right to information could be served through pockets of public interest content that reflects good professional and ethical standards, even when the organisations producing this content cannot be described as independent.

PRIMED was therefore significantly reconfigured to focus on **"public interest content"**, which includes news, current affairs and any other programming formats that act as conduits to meet the public's right to information. This content can come from a variety of institutions, including media outlets that may have emerged from personal or group agendas/interests, or from partisan and/or ethnic narratives.

The initial reliance on the concept of **"media viability"** was supplemented by two new definitions developed for PRIMED: the first describes the resilience of media institutions to withstand shocks and stresses, and the second describes the resilience of the media sector as a whole.

PRIMED's overall objective was then redefined as: *"Healthier information ecosystems where a steady flow of trusted public interest media content is more freely and widely available."*

And **PRIMED's approach** was refocused on identifying:

- Where content that works in the public interest was already being produced, amplifying it and strengthening the organisations providing it

- Which organisations had extensive reach and working out how the content they provide can be improved in terms of its public interest value

This meant that **PRIMED worked with a range of partners**, including:

- A privately-owned small video production company that was producing valuable public interest content for broadcast on large Ethiopian TV channels but was struggling to balance its books

- A newspaper in a Bangladeshi region under-served by the media. The owner was attempting to maintain a degree of independence in a highly politicised media landscape but was finding it difficult to maintain consistent professional standards and adapt to the digital age

- A young and privately-owned mainstream TV channel in Ethiopia that was on the verge of giving up on its news operation due to financial pressures and a challenging political context

- The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), which is affiliated with the government yet remains the only media outlet in the country with national reach
- A quality Ethiopian digital media outlet in exile struggling to relocate when it had the opportunity to operate from inside Ethiopia and increase its reach

Locally-led

As the PRIMED approach was embedded in the local context and seeking lasting change, the programme's starting point was to understand the specific circumstances of media outlets, content producers and sectoral actors to whom support would be offered at the outlet level and at the environment level.

BBC Media Action and MDIF led work **at the outlet level**. There was no pre-agreed list of local partners – the programme set out to identify how and with whom it would work to achieve its objective.

PRIMED used a mix of open calls and direct approaches to media outlets who expressed interest in the programme. After drawing up an initial shortlist, a detailed consultation process involved coaches spending time assessing the media outlets' business models, organisational structures, governance models, legal status and daily operations, working closely with them to understand their strengths and vulnerabilities.

BBC Media Action developed a resilience framework to assist with classifications of strengths and vulnerabilities as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRIMED resilience framework

1. Institution building

1.1 Legal registrations and licences	1.2 Governance	1.3 Mission/ vision, purpose, strategy, editorial proposition	1.4 Consistency of professional output and oversight	1.5 Leadership	1.6 Workforce

2. Operating model

2.1 Business model optimisation, flexibility and adaptability	2.2 Security and stability of sources of income	2.3 Innovation, efficiency and cost-effectiveness	2.4 Operating procedures and business systems	2.5 Assets, technology and equipment	

3. Financial security

3.1 Existence of multi-year income and expenditure plans	3.2 Existence of operating reserves	3.3 Liquidity

4. Environmental/external factors

4.1 Influence of power holders	4.2 Understanding the market, consumers and competition	4.3 Support networks – in-country and internationally (sectoral bodies, community forums, civil society organisations, educational institutions, watchdogs)

This analysis was followed by the development of detailed engagement plans, reflecting the agreed priorities of the media partners' leadership while remaining focused on the ultimate public interest content goal. These **engagement plans** specified the milestones and targets for each area of support to be provided through PRIMED. It allowed the leaders of each local media partner to work with their assigned coaches and other technical advisors to adapt the programme along the way.

MDIF used its own functional indicators system[5], a broadly similar overall approach that tracked progress against specific indicators while enabling the support to be highly customised and adaptive.

No pre-prepared training modules or generic support packages were rolled out across the PRIMED programme. Instead, a range of tools were deployed to achieve the specific objectives set out in the engagement plans. These included: funding legal advice on local registration; grants to purchase equipment; embedding editorial support to relaunch a television news programme; supporting technical studio rebuilds to reduce staffing levels and reduce overheads; and providing seed funding for new roles to increase audience engagement and commercial income.

At the environment level, PRIMED aimed to work with local NGOs, individually or in coalitions, to pursue specific opportunities to achieve change during the programme's lifetime. This approach also aimed to leave the local partners in a stronger position to continue after the end of the PRIMED programme.

Budget cuts reduced the programme's focus on organisational support and increased the reliance on the coalition building initiatives led by IMS in Ethiopia. PRIMED then applied this approach consistently across all three countries.[6]

Delivered through a consortium of expertise

The PRIMED Consortium was unusual in bringing together so many international media support organisations with different approaches, organisational philosophies and skillsets. Not all consortium partners' approaches were relevant in all three countries, so different combinations of partners worked in each country to provide the most appropriate support. This enabled PRIMED to apply a wide range of interventions, both well-established and innovative, in different contexts.

In Ethiopia, BBC Media Action and MDIF worked closely together, mostly focusing on different media partners. In three cases both organisations came together to provide integrated support, with BBC Media Action focusing on editorial and programme-making needs, complementing the business development support provided by MDIF.

IMS led the consortium work on coalitions for change. Most of its efforts were invested in Ethiopia, where these priorities were very high. However, when an unexpected opportunity opened in Bangladesh, IMS guided this intervention with practical support supplied by BBC Media Action's team on the ground. This approach allowed for efficient use of coalition partners' expertise while making use of existing resources.

While BBC Media Action worked alone with coalitions for change in Sierra Leone, it ensured regular consultation with IMS, so that lessons could be learned consistently.

FPU led the consortium's work on gender across all three countries, providing a consistent baseline and methodology, and working with other consortium members to embed gender targets in the specific workplans for each country and each partner. FPU also ran a limited exercise in Bangladesh to support a local NGO to lead successful advocacy to improve women's representation in the media and in the workplace.

No pre-prepared training modules or generic support packages were rolled out across the PRIMED programme.

Agile

The PRIMED programme recognised that there would be continuous shifts in the overall context of each implementing country and that despite the thoroughness of its due diligence process, partnerships do not always work out well. The programme design included mid-term evaluations, allowing it to change course where needed as long as the overall objectives were still met. This agile approach was applied to both media and sectoral partners, including media freedom NGOs and trade unions.

Two additional factors necessitated agility as a key programme feature. Firstly, movement restrictions arising from the global COVID-19 pandemic increased the programme's error margins as remote evaluations and online conversations could not be as insightful as face-to-face engagement. Secondly, a significant budget reduction in the middle of the programme required a scaling back of the support for local partners. This also led to greater scrutiny of progress against the engagement plans – partners had to be dropped more swiftly than originally anticipated where progress seemed less promising.

What worked and what did not work in practice

As outlined above, PRIMED evolved extensively from when it was first conceived and throughout its implementation. This section reflects on where the programme approach worked well, where it did not and where modifications were needed.

Customised support

Working closely with local content producers and using a customised programme of support proved to be effective. However, this only worked well where there was a shared vision in the holistic strategic approach, which helped to build trust between media partner owners/senior managers and the PRIMED support team.

In line with its approach, PRIMED provided a range of support programmes detailed in the individual engagement plans and support programmes developed to address the jointly identified vulnerabilities. These included, for example, capital investment, supporting small organisations to restructure, and reprioritising and enhancing an outlet's news content.

Capital investment: Several partners received small grants to help them buy equipment. One of them was **Mensh Productions**, a small production company creating high-value public interest content for mass-reach TV channels in Ethiopia. Mensh's production costs were unsustainably high. A grant from PRIMED was used to purchase production equipment, which dramatically reduced expenditure and enabled Mensh to expand its production business. Mensh's income increased eleven-fold, allowing it to expand its staff and production capacity. This relatively small investment has secured the flow of Mensh's original public interest content and ensured that additional similar content will continue to flow organically in years to come.

Prioritising institution building and supporting small organisations to reconfigure: **Wazema Radio** was an Ethiopian diaspora initiative that was an important source of independent information and analysis for Ethiopians. The outlet was struggling to relocate to Ethiopia after the country reduced media restrictions. PRIMED facilitated its in-country registration as a business entity and a media organisation. It now employs full-time and freelance staff in Ethiopia, has a business strategy to generate advertising revenue, a solid editorial proposition and policy, a redesigned website and a much greater digital reach.

Embedding professional news content in commercial media outlets: African Renaissance Television Services (**ARTS TV**) was new to the Ethiopian media sector. It was focused on entertainment content and did not prioritise its news production. It relied heavily on news alerts from government and non-governmental agencies, instead of offering original, independent news content. When the economic conditions deteriorated and the pressures on independent media increased following the war in Tigray, ARTS management was considering axing news altogether.

PRIMED provided a range of technical, production and editorial support, and capital investment, at ARTS TV. This has resulted in the organisation launching a new news programme, which was of high value yet not costly. The change has been transformative for this wide-reaching media outlet. The new programme with its clear commitment to public interest content has paid dividends with ARTS TV audience, attracting positive feedback from participants in focus groups conducted by BBC Media Action, as shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Audience feedback on ARTS TV's revised news content

"When you look at the contents of ARTS TV, they're always reporting facts based on what is happening on the ground. And they're fairly reporting what is happening when it comes to internal conflicts between regions and other sensitive matters."
Woman aged 35+, rural, Hawassa

"When [ARTS TV] first started, it sided... with the government, just like other TV channels. However, it has since improved and has begun to speak out bravely on local issues. For instance, it boldly reported on the recent war in the north, the economy and other issues. So they soon began to speak for the masses."
Man aged 18–34, Hawassa

"ARTS TV's segment on politics news is excellent. If you take other media like WALTA or ETV, they are sided with the government. However, ARTS TV is producing more political content than others are. It provides us with bold information as opposed to other media."
Man aged 35+, Addis Ababa

"ARTS TV is different from government media. The information is trustworthy. They have evidence for the information they release."
Male community leader, key informant interview, Addis Ababa

A key contributing factor to the success of the three cases listed above was the **buy-in from local media owners and senior managers, and the high level of trust between them and the PRIMED support teams** working closely with them.

Mensh's senior management was clear about what the business needed and PRIMED's role was to help it achieve that.

Wazema's co-founder and managing editor explained why he thought PRIMED worked well:

"I've known several media projects... This one is... unique... because of its flexibility. It is demand based, which is better for the media houses... In most projects, the project is predefined, the whole A to Z. PRIMED has broad objectives and based on those broad objectives you can come up with a customised plan, you can adjust your plan, and you can propose what you think is timely and important."

The ARTS TV senior managers wanted to pursue ethical editorial standards but admitted that they were not getting it right: *"We thought we were delivering nightly news but we never were"*, the chief executive officer said. *"PRIMED came at a time where we would have... shut down the [news] business... [PRIMED] has been a life-saver."* PRIMED not only prevented this but also helped it become one of the most important news establishments in Ethiopia.

In Bangladesh, such buy-in was clear in the case of one partner but lacking in two others. Gramer Kagoj, a regional newspaper, worked closely with PRIMED trainers to improve its digital offer and editorial standards. The owner's commitment was evident as he raised money from his personal resources to support investment in digital expansion.

In contrast, Bangla Tribune, a website with a national audience, had to be dropped as a PRIMED partner due to a lack of detectable progress. While PRIMED trainers were making some progress with individual journalists, the editor and senior managers were disengaged and perhaps not entirely convinced in the programme that PRIMED was offering.

PRIMED terminated its support for Jamuna TV, a national TV channel, even sooner as PRIMED could not align its offer with Jamuna's expectations. In both cases, this lack of partner management buy-in may have been due to insufficient time, expertise and effort being put into the development of initial engagement plan

by the PRIMED team and the partner management.

PRIMED carried out consultations with media organisations in Bangladesh at the beginning of the programme, resulting in an assumption that there were both opportunities and demands for improved professional skills among Bangladeshi media partners. While calls for this support seemed genuine, they may not have reflected some other considerations among the media outlets' owners, especially those with an established national reach.

Locally-led coalitions

Providing timely and intensive technical expertise and facilitation to locally-led coalitions and initiatives allowed PRIMED to accelerate opportunities for media reform. But significant improvements in the media environment take a long time, and political will can be short-lived.

In all three countries, the initial plan was to roll out a PRIMED-led reform programme managed by Article 19, a fifth member of the initial coalition. This workstream was dropped due to funding cuts and PRIMED turned its attention to identifying organically emerging opportunities. While it is impossible to judge the chances of success of the initial approach, supporting local coalitions to facilitate reform opportunities that they had identified was more in line with PRIMED's approach of being locally-led and agile. It proved to be one of the programme's successes.

In **Ethiopia**, the war in the Tigray region broke out as PRIMED began its work. In addition to a media reform agenda that IMS was already supporting local coalitions to promote, PRIMED swiftly responded to increasing hostility towards journalists. IMS supported the Centre for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), a civil society organisation, to bring together five Ethiopian founding members and 17 journalists' associations from five regions to support a co-ordinated journalism safety initiative. PRIMED provided technical expertise to develop a toolkit to help the coalition achieve its objectives. The coalition has requested official registration with the Agency for Civil Society Organisations.

In **Bangladesh**, there were already concerns about the suitability of the initial PRIMED approach as the political economy analysis did not identify any potential for improvement in the heavily restricted media environment, meaning the chances of making progress were extremely limited.

Figure 2: Bangladesh media viability baseline and March 2021 opportunity

Using the PRIMED assessment snapshot, ratings were scored 1–5 (low–high performance/opportunity) based on source materials including political economy analysis, content analysis, audience research, and stakeholder and expert interviews.

Status of Media Content	Constraints to Positive Change		Opportunities for Positive Change	
Key issues	**Factor**	**1-5**	**Factor**	**1-5**
• Crowded market • Low levels of public trust as media fails to play watchdog role • Poor representation of women and minorities • Limited inclusion and poor understanding of audience needs • Content does not reflect people's interests and concerns • Poor ethical standards due to weak professional skills	**Political:** Ruling party seeks to suppress dissent and critical voices	1.0	**Political:** Engagement with government could build political will	1.2
	Legal: Legislation used to clamp down on freedom of expression	1.5	**Legal:** Government commitments to SDGs could offer entry point	1.5
	Economic: Dwindling revenues, increasing competition	2.0	**Economic:** Media could do more to unlock benefits of digital economy	3.0
	Public trust: Trust damaged by perception that media serve political backers	1.0	**Public trust:** Content could be enhanced to better reflect audience needs	3.0
	Professional skills: Few training opportunities; little practice-based education	2.0	**Professional skills:** High level of buy-in for training in skills and ethics	3.5
	Gender: Very low proportion of women journalists; social barriers	1.0	**Gender:** Strong civil society support for gender equality and empowerment	2.0

Legend: ■ Current status ■ Potential for change
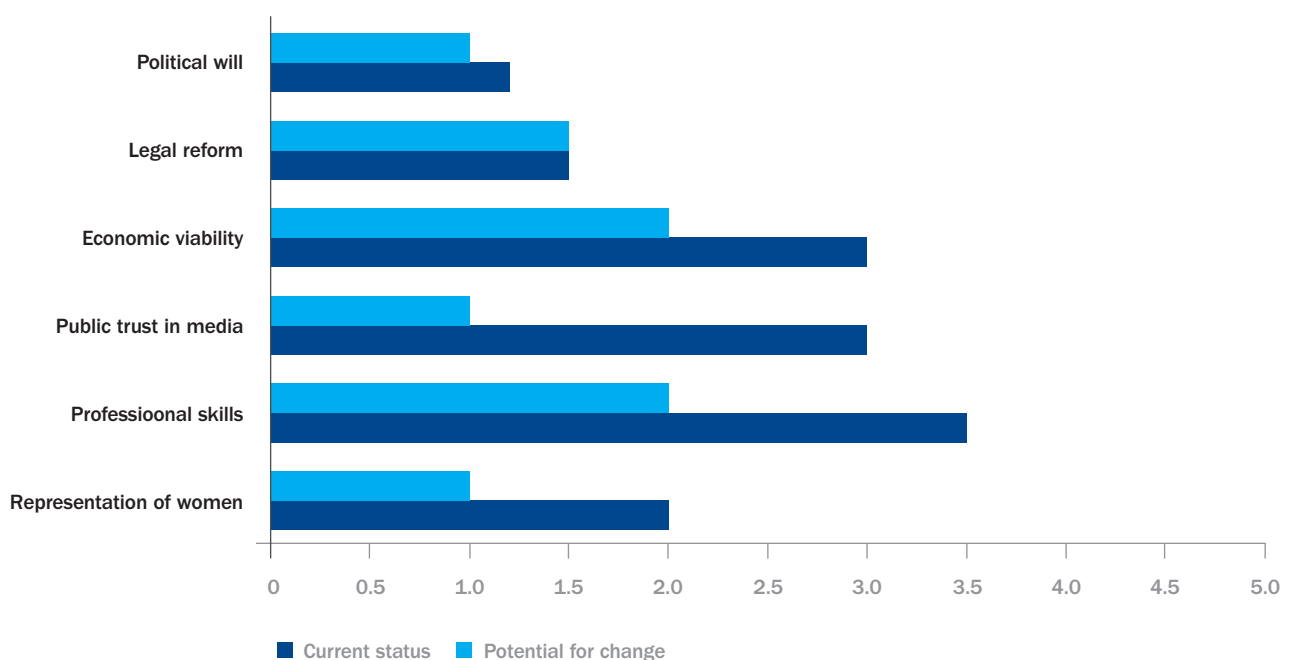
By changing its approach, PRIMED could respond to a request for support from the Broadcast Journalist Centre (BJC) of Bangladesh, following the arrest of a prominent journalist in 2021 and growing concerns about its ability to support its members to defend public interest journalism.

Calling on the BBC Media Action team in Dhaka and bringing in technical expertise from IMS regional experts in legal reform and coalition building, PRIMED provided technical support to help the BJC to build a more resilient organisation that can defend its members more effectively. As a result, the BJC submitted detailed feedback on contentious legislation seeking to regulate working conditions in the broadcasting industry. It also sought PRIMED support to improve its members' understanding of what public interest content is, and to better defend themselves from accusations of libel. This important trade union and its 1,700 members have adopted a new code of conduct.

In **Sierra Leone**, great progress was secured through PRIMED's support to locally-led initiatives. PRIMED had identified a significant opportunity and tangible political will to reform the media sector and responded to a direct approach from the government to facilitate a consultation and a conference to agree a national action plan for the media. This required ongoing technical expert advice as well as funding and facilitation. The national action plan is a long-term strategy, but PRIMED supported the Media Reform Coordination Group (MRCG), the local organisation leading the implementation, to progress the recommendation to provide a public subsidy for public interest media. PRIMED continued to support the development of a framework for the public subsidy and helped MRCG to secure matched funding.[7]

These examples demonstrate how **remaining open to opportunities that emerge from locally-led initiatives can achieve important progress** at key moments. However, the PRIMED learning brief on coalition building[8] emphasises that changes in the media environment are long-term objectives. Supporting coalitions for change at the right time can support key steps but not the whole journey. For example, elections in Sierra Leone have slowed further media reform and the

government has yet to deliver on its promises to provide a public subsidy. In Bangladesh, it is not yet clear whether the BJC's comments on the media worker law will be reflected in the next legal draft. In Ethiopia, it remains to be seen if the Safety of Journalists initiative will be granted the registration that it seeks and whether other pressing media reform will continue.

Media viability

PRIMED successfully deployed both market and non-market solutions to enhancing media outlets' financial viability but there are no shortcuts and longer support programmes are needed.

One innovative feature of the PRIMED programme was applying different approaches to enhancing media viability in very low-income and poorly developed advertising markets. Despite substantial political and economic challenges, PRIMED sought to explore how both market-based and non-market solutions could improve the institutional viability of partner media entities.[9]

Media viability has proven to be difficult to achieve even in some of the world's most mature and richest advertising markets. Applying market-based approaches in very weak markets has rarely been successful. Nevertheless, where PRIMED used these approaches (principally in Ethiopia), relatively dramatic revenue increases proved possible, albeit often from a very low base. While these revenue increases did not translate into a sustainable business model, they did suggest that good progress could be made even in weak advertising markets.

Key factors in this include: designing tailor-made business development solutions; productive and collaborative business coaching or mentoring; providing small grants and a long-term approach to building in-house business development, audience engagement and digital marketing capabilities.

Such approaches improved media outlets' financial viability but also illustrated some limits to what the market can provide in these settings, including from digital revenues. As long as actors

supporting or implementing media development programmes understand that complete or even substantial media viability is extremely difficult to achieve in low-income markets, some impact can still be achieved through market-based approaches.

Non market-based solutions to media financial viability, rooted in an expectation of a financial partnership with government, have similarly rarely been successful. In addition, as autocratisation continues to advance around the world, there are diminishing opportunities to engage productively with democratic, reform-minded governments. But the PRIMED programme demonstrated that **opportunities for public subsidy approaches to media viability do exist.** And, where opportunities can be grasped, they can be transformational.

More fundamentally, the PRIMED experience – in common with many other media development experiences – suggests that **the current media development challenges are structural and systemic.** Some success can be achieved in improving media outlets' financial resilience through determined, creative and diverse strategies but they rarely provide a pathway to true media sustainability and genuine editorial freedom. Ultimately, programmes like PRIMED need to be accompanied by very long-term strategies capable of improving the enabling economic and political environments for independent media.

Financial resilience and editorial independence

A key tenet underpinning the PRIMED theory of change was that a lack of financial resilience makes media outlets vulnerable to editorial pressure from governments, for example if a media institution depends on government advertising or is propped up by political patronage. The PRIMED experience is that this assumption needs careful examination. Improved financial resilience among media outlets may not always lead to improved media independence in highly politicised and captured media markets.

At the heart of the PRIMED theory of change for **Bangladesh** was the cautious assumption that

rapid economic growth in the country provided the potential to generate market-led revenue streams that can decrease media co-option and improve public interest content.

While budget cuts meant that the level of investment required to test this theory properly was not available, PRIMED coalition partners also became less confident that meaningful improvements in editorial independence would be feasible in the country or that they had the tools to guide Bangladeshi partners on how to capitalise on improving economic conditions.

Even if there was sufficient revenue from market sources to cover operating costs, it was incorrect to assume that other media owners would forego income from government sources. PRIMED's initial political economy analysis showed that media outlets are operated by businessmen with wider interests, who may not care much about professional standards, ethics and public interest content. They may welcome another revenue stream from online advertising, if they can get it, but it may not lead to a change in their business model.

While financial resilience is a precondition for editorial independence, editorial independence needs institutional leadership and commitment. In turn, these need a business model that enables that independence to be exercised – especially in the face of intense political pressure. In highly politicised and captured media markets, even in broadly vibrant economic environments, media support faces formidable challenges in achieving sufficient technical and financial resources to achieve real impact.

Value for money considerations

PRIMED achieved a degree of success with Gramer Kagoj in Bangladesh. Both external content analysis and structured research with Gramer Kagoj's print and/or online, and audience research demonstrated improved public interest content. Progress was made with viability, too, as there was a tangible increase in income from the digital expansion.

However, Gramer Kagoj is a regional publication (in print and online) and PRIMED's investment has ultimately benefitted only a small segment of

the population of Bangladesh. It did address the needs of the underserved community in the Jessore region, and the needs of Jassorians working abroad (who often work in countries with poor treatment of foreign workers). However, the costs of this support package were significant compared with the share of the population reached.

A key assumption for PRIMED was that the experience with Gramer Kagoj would provide strong results, which would inspire others triggering a ripple effect among similar independent-leaning smaller media outlets. However, the increased income from digital development was still too small to break even, let alone generate sufficient income to offer a compelling example for others to shift their business models away from guaranteed government advertising revenue and subsidies, despite the political and editorial price of that.

Small-scale, incremental improvements, such as the progress made with Gramer Kagoj, are not necessarily impactful. Future support packages should be based on clear value for money criteria.

In current market and political conditions, media development impact cannot easily be achieved with small-scale efforts and investments, unless responding to specific unexpected opportunities, as with the BJC comments on proposed new media legislation in Bangladesh.

Gender targets

Including gender targets in media support programmes to secure greater representation of women in the workplace worked well, but supporting external monitoring to improve the portrayal of women in the media was not effective.

Most of PRIMED's media partners were supported to develop and implement gender-sensitive policies, with positive incentives to attract and retain women workers, and clear procedures to deal with workplace sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. PRIMED worked with media partners' management to promote the appointment of "gender champions", create internships specifically for women, hire women candidates and encourage women's participation in all workplace training opportunities. This approach worked well and improved women's participation in the workplace.

Figure 3: Proportion of women staff at local media partners (Full-time staff only)

Partner	Baseline (April 2021)	Endline (July 2023)
Gramer Kagoj, Bangladesh	6%	16%
Voice of Kono, Sierra Leone	25%	31%
Classic Radio, Sierra Leone	33%	53%
SLBC*, Sierra Leone	N/A	N/A
Addis Maleda, Ethiopia	36%	44%
ARTS TV, Ethiopia	23%	32%
Mensh Productions, Ethiopia	60%	70%
Wazema**, Ethiopia	N/A	71%

* No specific work was envisaged in this area because SLBC staff are in effect part of the civil service so management has little ability to make profound personnel changes.
** Wazema's data refers only to the Addis Ababa bureau set up with PRIMED support.

Women representation in senior roles also improved following PRIMED support. At Classic Radio in Sierra Leone, four of the seven senior positions are now held by women and half of the outlet's full-time reporters are women. At ARTS TV in Ethiopia, the percentage of women in senior management positions now stands at 44%. The news department is led by a woman and many of the reporters are women.

The main success factor was a clear commitment from the media outlet's leadership, which was reflected in the gender targets set out in the PRIMED engagement plans.

Another pillar of PRIMED's work in this area was to support South Asia Center for Media in Development (SACMID), a small NGO in Bangladesh, to monitor the outputs of six media outlets to encourage better gender balance in media content. Ultimately, this initiative did not manage to secure an attributable change in media outlets' behaviour. The disadvantage of any external media monitoring system is that it cannot offer daily or weekly insights and is relatively resource-intensive in terms of time and cost. How the external monitor is perceived can also limit the impact of its findings, with media outlets often being defensive in the face of perceived external criticism.

The BBC's 50:50 Project self-monitoring methodology,[10] applied by PRIMED in Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, proved to be more effective in understanding and addressing gender balance challenges. Several factors probably explain this. Firstly, the consistency and timeliness of the 50:50 Project data collection provided media outlets with insights that could quickly inform editorial decisions. Secondly, by having control of the process, the outlets had no reason to doubt the quality of the data. Finally, setting up and

implementing the system was relatively straightforward and easy to adapt, requiring minimal financial and human resources.

However, FPU points to an opposite experience in Nepal and Mali where pressure from monitoring results from an external party achieved significant change, as no media outlet wanted to continue to score low on publicly published gender results. External monitoring may well work in some contexts. A possible alternative explanation for the PRIMED experience in Bangladesh is the perceived lack of experience and credibility of SACMID, and the particularly low gender baseline in Bangladesh.

Working with state broadcasters

As noted above, PRIMED identified the need to work with a range of media outlets, not just "independent" media outlets.

In **Sierra Leone**, the only media outlet with a national reach was the state broadcaster, SLBC, which is still largely controlled by the government. All other radio services are local, TV consumption is low and internet penetration limited, lacking credibility and associated with rumours and misinformation. Finding ways to work with this state broadcaster was necessary and ultimately delivered results during the critical election period, but the sustainability of the change remains doubtful.

PRIMED's political economy analysis and other assessments highlighted the difficulties of achieving change at SLBC even with a significant improvement in constructive dialogue between the government and the rest of the Sierra Leone media sector. While expectations of transformational change or SLBC becoming a public service broadcaster were extremely low, there were clear opportunities to support the broadcaster to become more independent, more publicly focused and less government-oriented.

PRIMED opted to work with the SLBC on two fronts. Firstly, to support a discussion over its governance model and editorial reform. And secondly, to pinpoint specific areas of content where the public interest value could be improved, in line with the theory that small

> ❝ **At Classic Radio in Sierra Leone, four of the seven senior positions are now held by women and half of the outlet's full-time reporters are women.** ❞

pockets of good content – even on imperfect media outlets – contribute to an overall improvement in media content.

PRIMED achieved progress in terms of SLBC's content, although not easily. SLBC's main national programme, Morning Coffee, was revamped before the national elections to report from the regions and reduce the airtime given to government candidates to ensure that listeners were better served at a particularly important time. Listeners' responses highlighted incremental impact. While listeners still detected and criticised government allegiance, they noted that SLBC still had a role to play in combatting online misinformation and disinformation (see box).

Box 2: Audience perspectives in Sierra Leone

"There has been a lot of improvement because now, they don't only talk to politicians, they also talk to ordinary people. Sometimes they call them to interview them. In the past, they were only talking to politicians."
Woman aged 35+, urban

"Sometimes, if it is a political issue, I think that the information is 40% true. Therefore, I doubt the remaining 60%. Beside politics, I trust [all SLBC] information provided."
Man aged 35+, rural

"When I am listening to Morning Coffee, [I know] no one will tell me fake news. If I didn't get the information from the radio, I will not repeat it to other people."
Woman, aged 18–34, rural

"If there is a rumour making the rounds, I don't trust it until I listen to the programme in the morning hours to confirm if the rumours are true. I am sometimes called a journalist in the community because I give them correct information, all because I listen to SLBC."
Man aged 18–34, urban

In line with its expectations, **the PRIMED team failed to get traction with the SLBC's senior management to propose a change in its governance and funding model.** But this aim is included in the recommendations of the national action plan supported by PRIMED, which will hopefully guide wider media reform in Sierra Leone in future.

Support programmes designed to help state broadcasters reform have a long history and this experience in Sierra Leone echoes many previous experiences. Significant governance changes require substantial commitment from reform-minded governments as well as from the internal, often legacy leaderships of these institutions – conditions that are very rarely available.

It is possible that wider trends may improve these prospects. Some democratising governments find that the growing threats of disinformation and increasingly toxic polarisation fuelled by social media to their wider objectives, political stability and peace are forcing them to consider new approaches to improving their country's information environment. Unreformed state broadcasters still have the highest reach in many fragile contexts and have unrivalled capacity to engage all sections of society. Attempts to support state broadcast reform continue to be extremely difficult to achieve but when they succeed, as in Ukraine recently, they can be transformational.

Recommendations for future media development support programmes

PRIMED was designed to share ongoing insights and learning with the media development sector. Since 2020, several reports have been disseminated, and various consultation events have been held. These included regular contributions to the GFMD-led initiative to revise the principles for effective media development to be adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC). As a PRIMED technical partner, GFMD is actively disseminating programme learning at the policy level and sharing learning with the wider media development community.

This section offers practical recommendations that can be incorporated into future media development support programmes.

Recommendation 1:

Spending time to understand how media content is consumed, who produces it and why, is essential to achieving lasting change.

Media support programmes should allow sufficient time to understand the context and design interventions accordingly.

Recognising specific market and political contexts has been a more frequent feature of media development initiatives in recent years. The PRIMED experience suggests that investing in understanding these contexts – through market and political economy analysis – is indispensable before developing programme activities and helps to understand successes and failures along the way.

Market and political conditions are increasingly complex, opaque and are the principal determinant of the success or failure of media support initiatives. Where this context was well understood and interventions designed accordingly, significant impact could be achieved. Where it was not, impact was far less likely.

Recommendation 2:

Adopting a holistic business analysis approach is likely to work better than the traditional needs assessment approach.

It is also an effective way of ensuring that reform programmes are locally led and context led.

The PRIMED experience shows that media organisations have different vulnerabilities and that addressing them requires a highly customised approach. Investing time and effort in working closely with media partners, understanding their governance and financial models, organisational structures, operating procedures, power dynamics, workforce and gender norms is necessary at the start of any support programme. Doing so may delay the start of implementation but will provide a much better understanding of the different vulnerabilities of individual media outlets and sectoral partners.

Detailed conversations between the media outlets leadership and their media development coaches are essential to understanding media leadership's priorities and assessing firstly whether support is needed and secondly what it should include. This process ensures that the support provided is tailored to a shared vision between the local media outlet, which ultimately owns the reform programme, and the team media development support team.

It is also a useful due diligence process, allowing programmes to step away from supporting media organisations that are not fully aligned with the wider objectives of media development. When rolling out generic training and support programmes, there is a risk of inadvertently supporting media organisations with poor ethics, and enhancing the reach of unchecked, or even harmful content.

To be effective, a high degree of trust and personality match must exist between the media outlet and its assigned coach and support teams. Coaches must be highly skilled individuals selected to suit the needs of the

media outlets they are partnered with. Where relationships do not work well, changes may be necessary.

Media support programmes that include an element of self-investment from media outlets are more likely to work and be sustained. Media owners investing their time and money into the reform process invariably demonstrate greater buy-in and ownership in the process, which in turn are good indicators of success.

Recommendation 3:

Not all media organisations can be supported.

Tough choices have to be made and defended, and media development experts need to be ready to walk away from failing partnerships.

In some countries, the number of media outlets can outstrip the country's economic capacity to sustain the sector. For example, in 2021 there were over 400 registered media institutions in Sierra Leone, including newspapers and magazines, radio, TV and direct to home (DTH) services. Overall, half of these outlets were either not operational, or only published/broadcast occasionally.

This vast number of media outlets in a tiny advertising market demonstrates how much media is politically, rather than commercially, supported but also illustrates that a strategy seeking to sustain that number of actors is highly unlikely to succeed. Media consolidation is often a necessary component of a more sustainable media system.

Recommendation 4:

Local coalitions should lead the media environment reform agenda but the organisations behind those coalitions also need support.

In PRIMED's experience, it is useful for a combination of local and external experts to evaluate a national media environment. When it comes to setting out the most pressing and achievable media reform, local stakeholders must take the lead.

It is essential to work on a two-pronged approach. Firstly, to provide some core funding,

where needed, to keep media freedom NGOs operating in particularly difficult environments. And secondly, to be ready to provide specific technical expertise and facilitation funding when opportunities for media reform arise.

Recommendation 5:

Embed gender targets in media reform programmes.

PRIMED embedded specific gender objectives in the engagement plans for each media partner. This was done by setting targets for both including women contributors in content (using approaches such as the BBC 50:50 Project), and for increasing the number of women in senior editorial and management roles.

This ensured buy-in from media partners' owners and senior managers, leading to better outcomes. It offered a quicker and more visible route to addressing gender imbalance than external monitoring of the gender balance of content outputs.

Recommendation 6:

Design agile programmes that can respond to changing opportunities and be ready to terminate workstreams that fail to show results. programmes.

There is often a temptation to invest additional resources when progress is difficult, to compensate for a lack of engagement and avoid admitting that some efforts are failing. Allowing a degree of flexibility within a media support programme to acknowledge failures and grasp new opportunities, will improve chances of progress towards impact. Programme management tools, such as logframes and budgets, should be reflect this approach.

Recommendation 7:

Use expertise from across the media development sector by bringing in the right skills at the right time.

PRIMED has shown that organisations in the media development sector can work well together and contribute their unique methodologies and expertise to deliver holistic joint programmes.

Such partnerships are hugely valuable when media support programmes are rolled out. But they do not all have to be involved in the programme management. Simplifying programme governance structures and contracting in specific skills will reduce overheads and speed up delivery.

Recommendation 8:

Acknowledge and address the mismatch between the reality of short-term funding cycles and the lengthy process of improving media ecosystems.

Nearly all local partners interviewed at the end of PRIMED noted that media support programmes are long-term enterprises. Only two PRIMED media partners achieved their long-term goals during the PRIMED timeframe. In line with their engagement/support plans, most of the others made progress that was a milestone along the way to a final destination. This was echoed by the conclusions of the first four PRIMED learning briefs.

In practice, PRIMED only had two years to work with local media partners. In line with its theory of change, the programme tried to capture not just improvements within these media outlets, but also to evaluate how far these cumulative improvements have led to an improved flow of public interest media content in each environment.

While the media development sector needs to continue to seek mechanisms for longer-term support, in the meantime it may be possible to overcome this by setting programmatic targets that reflect incremental steps towards an ultimate goal.

For example, programmes can set out the baseline and milestone targets over several years, but include only some milestones rather than the final goals in their implementation plans. It should still be possible to devise mechanisms to check that a programme is on track without demanding that this target is achieved in an unrealistically short timeframe. This would encourage media development organisations to be more ambitious in the long term and not settle for easy-to-demonstrate targets such as "number of media outlets trained" or "number of NGOs supported".

PRIMED set itself a fairly ambitious target in its impact statement: *"Healthier information ecosystems where a steady flow of trusted public interest media content is more freely and widely available."*

This had two associated indicators of success:

- Extent to which women and men consuming public interest content supported by PRIMED feel that it gives them a voice, is relevant, trustworthy, engaging, and inclusive

- Extent to which media partners supported by PRIMED become more resilient to environmental shocks and stresses

PRIMED provided evidence of progress against both indicators, though this progress is tentative and needs to be boosted to be sustained.

Using the same method to evaluate media environments and setting incremental milestones towards the same impact statement may offer a way forward while funding cycles remain short.
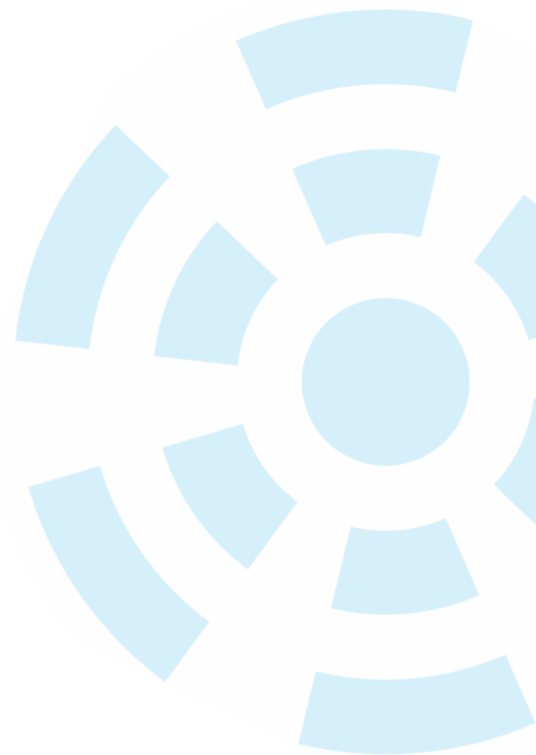
Conclusion

This brief has sought to summarise what worked and what did not in supporting independent media through the PRIMED programme. Even in the context of a global pandemic and substantial and unpredictable budget cuts, much of what the programme delivered did achieve programme objectives.

However, much more effective strategies are being implemented to *undermine* independent media and public interest content. These strategies are intent on co-opting and neutralising independent media in order to control narratives, spread disinformation or avoid scrutiny and accountability. These strategies differ from PRIMED not only in their objective but also in their approach. They tend to be well and predictably resourced, highly strategic, implemented over long periods and embedded in existing power structures. They are further enabled by broader media environments, particularly those created by technology platforms, which facilitate the spread of disinformation and polarisation.

During PRIMED's lifetime these negative strategies tended to be more successful than positive ones to support public interest media. The Ethiopian Government found it relatively easily to reassert centralised control of the media and squeeze out independent voices as the war in Tigray intensified and government interests began to feel threatened by the country's brief political opening up. Similarly, the political dominance of the government and other political actors over the media in Bangladesh continued during the PRIMED programme. And in Sierra Leone, following a highly controversial 2023 election, the government's appetite for media reform was questionable. There are points of light in each of these countries as a result of the PRIMED programme, but the cards are stacked very heavily against support for public interest media.

What works best in supporting independent media and public interest content are well-planned, long-term, highly strategic and well-resourced programmes tailored to the political and economic conditions in which they are being implemented. Currently, these conditions are difficult to achieve. Those intent on undermining independent media generally operate in an environment where it is relatively simple to achieve their goals, as they have money and they have staying power.

References

1   The reviews are property of the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

2   https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/evidence/gender-analysis-sierra-leone/ https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/evidence/ethiopia-gender-analysis/

3   See PRIMED (2024) *Public subsidy to independent media (What works and what doesn't)*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-public-subsidies-learning-brief.pdf

4   *"Independent media is not owned or directly operated by the state, or by a political party, a religious order, an ethnic entity, a lobby group or by anyone promoting a particular ideology or a particular narrative".*

5   For more information, see *PRIMED (2024) Media Viability. Learning brief*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-media-viability-learning-brief.pdf

6   *PRIMED (2024) Coalitions and coalition building to support media freedom. Learning brief.* Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-coalitions-learning-brief.pdf

7   See PRIMED (2024) *Public subsidy to independent media (What works and what doesn't)*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-public-subsidies-learning-brief.pdf

8   *PRIMED (2024) Coalitions and coalition building to support media freedom. Learning brief.* Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-coalitions-learning-brief.pdf

9   For more information on these lessons, see *PRIMED (2024) Media Viability* https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-media-viability-learning-brief.pdf and *PRIMED (2024) Public subsidy to independent media: what works and doesn't*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-public-subsidies-learning-brief.pdf

10 The BBC 50:50 Project is a voluntary system where editorial and production teams self-monitor the numbers of contributors in their content to set benchmarks for their chosen diversity measures. The monitoring is focused on contributors that can be freely chosen, such as reporters, analysts, academics and experts rather than on the characters that are integral to the stories being covered). The monitoring data is used to set benchmarks for improved gender balance and for track progress.

11 For more information, see *PRIMED (2024) Gender Learning Brief.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-gender-learning-brief-final.pdf

PRIMED

PROTECTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Front cover photo: Members of the public being interviewed in Sierra Leone.
BBC MEDIA ACTION