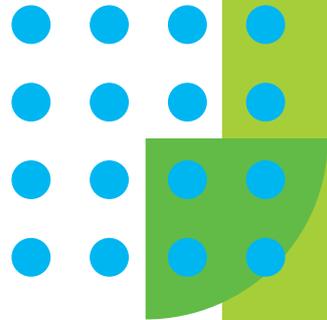


The Media Viability Manifesto

A common framework for joint action

Authors: Laura Moore, Elena Köhler, Clare Cook

The Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) provides an urgently needed common framework for joint action from the global media development community. Its aim is three-pronged: To foster conceptual clarity, to strengthen strategic collaboration between multiple stakeholders, and to align practical implementation in the field of Media Viability. The MVM is the culmination of input from 152 individuals from 55 countries and 86 organizations. It paves the way for more systematic exchange and learning, and for more strategic and coordinated action. To solve the multi-faceted journalism crisis, we need to work together. The time is now.



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Contributors

The Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) was developed in an open and participatory process with input from a core group of 13 organizations.

It also builds on the input and expertise from 152 individuals from 55 countries, representing 86 organizations.

The MVM core group consists of:



Contents

- Foreword** **6**
- The Media Viability Manifesto at a glance** **7**
- Chapter 1** **8**
 - 1.1 Introduction:**
What is the Media Viability Manifesto — and why is it needed? 9
 - 1.2 How the Media Viability Manifesto was developed:**
A collaborative approach 11
- Chapter 2** **13**
 - 2.1 Fostering conceptual clarity:**
A common understanding of key terms and definitions around Media Viability 14
 - 2.2 Strengthening strategic collaboration:**
A Theory of Change for Media Viability 17
 - 2.3 Aligning practical implementation:**
Typology of existing Media Viability tools and approaches 22
- Chapter 3** **28**
 - 3.1 Next steps:**
Implementing the Media Viability Manifesto 29
- References** **32**

Foreword

When war, climate change, and disinformation destabilize communities across the globe, independent and economically viable media are vital. Today, media of all shapes and sizes have seen their traditional revenue models eroded. They are fighting for survival: Innovating where possible, exploring alternative business strategies and diversified revenues, and pushing for international regulatory, legal, and market-based reform. This situation has made Media Viability the most pressing field of action within international media development.

The Media Viability Manifesto comes at a time when different stakeholders invested in Media Viability are looking to unite their efforts to confront the multifaceted journalism crisis. It comes at a time when the discussion about the survival of independent media is omnipresent, while systematic, coordinated approaches to tackle the problem are omni-absent. The 188 member organizations of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)—the largest global community for media development, media freedom, and journalism support—all work to improve Media Viability, in one way or the other. Repeatedly they have voiced the necessity for a deeper, more informed exchange of concepts, experiences, and learnings, alongside the need for more cohesive strategies and approaches. However, opportunities and resources to unite and advance toward enhanced clarity and stronger collaboration in the field of Media Viability have been scarce. The Media Viability Manifesto addresses this very gap.

“ I firmly believe that the Media Viability Manifesto offers media development organizations like ours, working at the grassroots level, a comprehensive global framework.

As Chair of GFMD, I represent our members in conversations with donors and policy makers to make media development funding more effective and to support the development of good media policy. The Media Viability Manifesto will be an important resource in this endeavor as it helps us as a sector to formulate strong, well-grounded messages on how and why our work is crucial for healthier information ecosystems worldwide. It will further help to apply the new Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information

Environment, calling for improved coordination of support as well as investment in knowledge, research, and learning, among other aspects. As the Director of the Namibia Media Trust, I firmly believe that the Media Viability Manifesto offers media development organizations like ours, working at the grassroots level, a comprehensive global framework. This framework will underpin more structured dialogues with our partners, leading to the formulation of strategies and interventions that are more impactful and specifically adapted to our unique contexts.

“ Let’s see the Manifesto as a catalyst for joint debate, exchange, and, most importantly, action.

GFMD promotes better collaboration, coordination, and joint action between different media development actors. This is why we have been involved in and supported the Media Viability Manifesto initiative from the beginning. Our vast community of members and other related stakeholders across the globe have been consulted at different stages of the process, for example as respondents of the global survey about the concepts and terminologies around Media Viability or as participants of the validation workshop of the Theory of Change.

Addressing the Media Viability crisis requires collective action. The Media Viability Manifesto, whilst not a panacea for such a multifaceted challenge, is a crucial first step toward fostering more structured exchange and learning, as well as more cohesive and impactful efforts. Let’s use it strategically, leveraging its insights where applicable and setting it aside where it falls short. Let’s see the Manifesto as a catalyst for joint debate, exchange, and, most importantly, action. Let’s critique it and develop it further to harness its full potential. Media Viability is not merely about protecting independent media outlets as businesses. It is about safeguarding democracy and human rights on a global scale.

Zoé Titus

Namibia Media Trust
Global Forum for Media Development

The Media Viability Manifesto at a glance

The **primary goal** of the Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) is to provide a common framework for joint action from the global media development community. It seeks to pave the way for more systematic exchange and learning, and to foster strategic and coordinated action across multiple stakeholders.

The MVM addresses actors engaged in supporting the fundamental right to freedom of expression and access to information around the world. Particularly, this includes:

- Media development organizations and their media and civil society partners across all regions
- Government and non-governmental donors
- Policy and decision makers
- Think tanks
- Academics
- Media organizations of all sizes.

The MVM was collectively developed in an open and inclusive process across five stages from 2022 to 2024. It is the culmination of input and expertise gathered from 152 individuals from 55 countries, representing 86 organizations.

The MVM consists of three main components:

1. **Concept:** A joint understanding of Media Viability for more conceptual clarity.
2. **Strategy:** An overarching Theory of Change for Media Viability as a roadmap to guide strategic, collaborative action.
3. **Implementation:** A comprehensive typology of existing Media Viability tools and approaches to align practical implementation.

The MVM has identified four **terrains of work** around which interventions in the field of Media Viability, and thus exchange and collaboration, can be clustered and coordinated:

1. Business and technical support
2. Coalitions and partnerships
3. Evidence-based advocacy
4. Research and insights

The MVM is based on the following key principles:

- Media Viability challenges require tailor-made solutions based on specific contexts, rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.
- Ensuring local ownership and integrating actors in partner countries are essential.
- Information landscapes comprise media organizations, journalists, and content producers of all shapes, sizes and maturity levels.
- Media Viability is situated within broad and multifaceted challenges facing journalism.

Chapter 1



1.1 Introduction

What is the Media Viability Manifesto — and why is it needed?

Around the world, democracy and human rights are under pressure, autocracies are on the rise. Geopolitical conflicts are escalating. Disinformation and propaganda campaigns are used deliberately to fuel the fire, and free media are systematically attacked. At a time when societies desperately need reliable facts to be able to constructively discuss and respond to the enormous challenges of the coming decades, independent media worldwide are fighting for survival. They are facing a common and urgent problem: The need to reinvent business models in an era of diminishing opportunities for income generation and loss of public trust and support. This situation has made Media Viability the most pressing challenge within international media development. It transcends borders, affecting media outlets in all world regions — and with that, all of us. **To solve this complex and systemic crisis, stakeholders engaged in the support of the fundamental right to freedom of expression and access to information need to work together.**

Why the Media Viability Manifesto is urgently needed

The global media development community's efforts to address the challenge of Media Viability have been fragmented. Terms like "viability" and "sustainability" are frequently used interchangeably without precise or shared definitions. The strategies employed to confront the problem can lack collaboration and coherence. Too often, interventions are stand-alone, reactive, and short-term. Practical approaches and project implementation tools are rarely coordinated or synchronized, leading to frequent reinvention of the wheel or overlapping efforts. **The need for more systematic, cross-institutional exchange and learning, a joint research and advocacy agenda, and common strategic goals has been identified by many** (e.g. Deane and Taki, 2021; OECD, 2024). To date, these needs have not been tackled sufficiently. All these factors limit the potential for meaningful impact and systemic change through policy and investment support efforts.

The Media Viability Manifesto (MVM) is designed to address precisely this problem. It was born out of the various challenges that hinder the effectiveness of Media Viability strategies and projects. Building more common

ground — conceptually, strategically, and practically — at the nexus of donors, international organizations, and local stakeholders is crucial to:

1. Better respond to local needs by making use of lessons learned and synergies, avoiding overlap and repetition to improve efficiency and impact in the field of Media Viability;
2. Enhance collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, particularly by implementing more inclusive practices that promote local ownership and contextually relevant actions;
3. Be able to make the case to donors in a more systematic and convincing way, as a sector, for (increased) support for Media Viability;
4. Have a common, global framework guiding the direction for Media Viability work in the coming years, including joint goals between local, regional, and international stakeholders.

This groundwork is urgently needed as an overarching basis for tailor-made, context-specific individual strategies and between stakeholders across world regions, ideally all contributing to solving the systemic Media Viability crisis.

What is the Media Viability Manifesto? Goals, purpose, approach

The primary goal of the MVM is to support the viability of independent media by providing a common, yet flexible and pragmatic, framework for joint action from the global media development community. The MVM aims to pave the way for more systematic exchange and learning as well as for more strategic and coordinated action across multiple stakeholders. The intent is three-pronged:

1. to foster conceptual clarity;
2. to strengthen strategic collaboration;
3. to align practical implementation.

By doing so, the MVM strives to minimize confusion amongst media development practitioners, advocates, and donors, while nurturing a shared, well-grounded vision for strengthening engagement and collaboration in the field of Media

The Media Viability Manifesto

A common framework for joint action

Concept

Fostering conceptual clarity

Strategy

Strengthening strategic collaboration

Implementation

Aligning practical implementation

Viability. This not only means laying the groundwork for more strategic and better coordinated practical interventions, but also for a common advocacy and research agenda as well as for systematic, sector-wide learning. This intent also supports the implementation of the Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment (see [OECD, 2024](#)), recently adopted by the OECD, aimed at increasing support to public interest media, deploying a systemic perspective, and investing in knowledge, research and learning, among other things.

The MVM is a collaborative starting point for constructive discussions and further professional development of the

sector. It is an overarching framework serving as a common basis upon which **tailor-made, context-specific interventions** can be developed, rather than a concrete strategy for individual projects applicable worldwide.

How should the Media Viability Manifesto be used?

The MVM should be used as a reference for well-grounded messages, discussions, strategies, and interventions in the field of Media Viability—between media development practitioners and as intermediaries between donors and media organizations. It can be used to identify areas for collaboration as well as with coordination and prioritization. The framework helps to make the complex field of Media Viability more understandable, engaging new donors. The MVM can be used as a common, overarching basis to develop tailor-made, context-specific interventions and projects. Its application should be flexible, and only where it suits the purpose. Overall, it should be understood as a starting point for further development of relevant aspects of global Media Viability work, e.g. advocacy or research and learning agendas (for more detailed information on how the MVM should be used, see chapter 3.1).

The structure of the Media Viability Manifesto

The MVM outlines the need for collective action to address the multifaceted, systemic crisis facing journalism and threatening our societies, democracies, and fundamental rights. It consists of three parts: Chapter 1 explains what the MVM is and provides a brief overview of the collaborative process through which it was developed. Chapter 2 represents the three core components of the MVM: Concept, Strategy, and Implementation. Chapter 2.1 presents a joint understanding of key terms and definitions related to Media Viability. In chapter 2.2, an overarching Theory of Change for Media Viability is introduced as a roadmap to guide strategic action. Chapter 2.3 outlines a typology of existing Media Viability tools and approaches to align practical implementation. Chapter 3 discusses steps for implementation and limitations of the MVM.

What is the Media Viability Manifesto?

- A common framework for joint action of all actors that see the need to strengthen free media ecosystems.
- A collaborative starting point for discussion, constructive debate, and further development.
- A common framework for more strategic and systematic learning, collaboration, and implementation.
- A clarifying overview of the complex field of Media Viability, recognizing the importance of the topic and the role of media development work within that.

What is the Media Viability Manifesto not?

- It is not a conceptual, strategic, or practical framework that is being prescribed to all media development organizations, nor a donor-centric initiative. The MVM is not intended as a manual by which all initiatives or programming should be led, nor does it promote a homogeneous approach to Media Viability.
- It is not a concrete strategy for individual interventions or projects. And it cannot offer definitions that fully account for nuances in different linguistic or cultural contexts.

1.2 How the Media Viability Manifesto was developed

A collaborative approach

The development of the Media Viability Manifesto was driven by the joint need of stakeholders committed to supporting Media Viability. It has grown from a collaborative effort by 13 international media development organizations into a **global consultative effort covering 55 countries and 86 organizations**, who gathered a diverse range of perspectives, expertise, and stakeholders from various regions and sectors.

The spirit of developing the Media Viability Manifesto

Rather than being a predetermined, planned-out project from any of the organizations involved, the initiative developed flexibly and organically, progressing step-by-step in direct response to the demands and capacities of the actors engaged. Developing the MVM has been a turning point in collegial and constructive efforts, rooted in the principles of equity and horizontal decision making. From the start, it was clear that producing a joint framework across so many organizations would mean having to compromise and set aside individual institutional thinking. However, it was also clear that the MVM could provide a foundational basis to reinforce, connect, and build upon individual strategies and approaches rather than replace them. The MVM was **developed** in the spirit of support, as a flexible resource for the media development community's work, where helpful and sensible.

The five stages of developing the Media Viability Manifesto

The development of the MVM unfolded in five key milestone events:

1. **Mapping exercise and co-creation of conceptual understandings:** In 2022, DW Akademie and IMS conducted a comprehensive mapping exercise involving desk research and interviews to explore existing Media Viability concepts, tools, and approaches (results in chapter 2.3). This groundwork was followed by an in-person, co-creation workshop where participants developed a preliminary draft of a joint conceptual framework for Media Viability.
2. **Global Media Viability survey:** In summer 2023, a survey was distributed to a wide range of media development professionals around the world. It explored the understandings of commonly used terminology related to Media Viability across various contexts and gathered perspectives on the draft conceptual framework (results in chapter 2.1).
3. **IAMCR pre-conference on Media Viability:** To broaden the discussions around a common understanding of Media Viability and gather additional input on the evolving Media Viability Manifesto, the MVM initiative convened an interactive session at the IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research) pre-conference on Media Viability in 2023. The insights highlighted the need for a common strategic foundation, leading participating organizations to commit to developing a joint Theory of Change for Media Viability.
4. **Theory of Change development:** During a facilitated, in-person workshop in late 2023, the MVM core group jointly developed a draft Theory of Change for Media Viability. The main intention behind creating this shared framework for the media development sector was to enhance the impact and effectiveness of Media Viability programs.
5. **Theory of Change validation workshop:** Prior to finalizing the MVM, the draft Theory of Change underwent validation with external stakeholders in an interactive online workshop in February 2024 (details in chapter 2.2).

The Media Viability Manifesto's many contributors

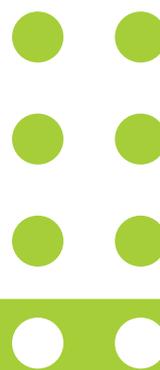
The MVM was developed in a collaborative process, incorporating a diverse range of stakeholders and perspectives from various regions and sectors.

The core group consists of 13 international media development and support organizations: DW Akademie, International Media Support, Free Press Unlimited, SembraMedia, BBC Media Action, FT Strategies, the Global Forum for Media Development, the Center for International Media Assistance, UNESCO, Fondation Hironnelle, IREX, Internews, and the International Center for Journalists. They were actively engaged throughout the development process and convened numerous times, both virtually and in-person.

In a global consultative effort, further inputs were gathered through GFMD, the largest global network of media support organizations with 188 members, as well as through the core group's local and regional partner networks. These efforts included:

- A Media Viability survey, with 64 respondents from 29 countries and 45 organizations.
- A conference session, facilitating discussions with 41 participants from 25 countries and 34 organizations.
- A validation workshop, attended by 64 participants from 28 countries and 44 organizations.

Taking into account repeated consultations, the Media Viability Manifesto benefited from the perspectives, inputs, and expertise from 152 individuals from 55 countries and 86 organizations.



Chapter 2



2.1 Fostering conceptual clarity

A common understanding of key terms and definitions around Media Viability

The challenges and causes of the Media Viability crisis are complex but well-known, and there is consensus that the problem needs urgent attention: The UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Global Report 2021/2022 highlights the peril facing independent journalism, with the erosion of business models and the fracturing of the advertising market. Notably, half of the total global advertising spending goes to just two companies: Google and Meta, alongside a sharp decline in global newspaper advertising revenue (UNESCO 2022). Underlining the relevance of Media Viability, the Windhoek+30 declaration includes it as a core principle of information as a public good (UNESCO 2021). Additionally, the UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Freedom of Opinion and Expression stresses the importance of ensuring a sustainable and enabling environment for media organizations (UN Human Rights Council 2022). Furthermore, the International Declaration on Information and Democracy states that “the social function of journalism justifies an effort by societies to ensure journalism’s financial sustainability” (Forum on Information and Democracy 2018). Within this context, the New Deal for Journalism provides a list of recommendations for policymakers and key stakeholders (Forum on Information and Democracy 2021). As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has emphasized, “ensuring sufficient funding and support is crucial to securing the long-term future of independent media organizations” (UN Web TV, 2021).

“Finding a common language on Media Viability is not a matter of convenience for the media development sector. It is a strategic imperative and the very first step in laying the groundwork for joint action on Media Viability.”

Despite these priorities, there remains a persistent lack of clarity regarding the concept of Media Viability. How viability or sustainability is defined and measured is described as “the million dollar question we’re all trying to figure out” (GFMD IMPACT 2022a) by Patricia Torres-Burd of the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF). In his comprehensive unpacking of the term, Leroy (2021) highlights the ambiguity connected to the emergence of terms such as viability, resilience, and attainability, which contribute to a general sense of

vagueness. Referring to a PRIMED (Protecting Independent Media For Effective Development) viability learning brief, Mira Milosevic of GFMD concludes that “there is no common understanding about the definition of ‘viability’, which goes under several names, including ‘media sustainability’, ‘financial/economic sustainability’, ‘business viability’, or ‘media resilience’” (GFMD IMPACT 2022b). According to the PRIMED learning brief, “most practitioners believe that viability is also linked to the manifold conditions needed to ensure professional standards, editorial independence and pluralism”, although current approaches focus on the financial dimensions of media operations (PRIMED 2022). Together, these deviances demonstrate a prevailing uncertainty of the concepts and language around Media Viability. However, “as a sector evolves, so must the terminology to describe it” (Leckner, Tenor and Nygren, 2017).

To date, there is no clearly defined concept that is commonly understood and agreed on that encapsulates the field of work for Media Viability. The terms are highly subjective and interpreted differently across actors, geopolitical contexts, and languages.

Why do we need conceptual clarity?

Developing a common understanding of terms and definitions is a key foundation for effectively addressing the challenges related to Media Viability. **Without a shared understanding, collective efforts risk ambiguity in communication, fragmentation, and diminished effectiveness.** To be more impactful and efficient in how we address Media Viability challenges, it is essential to establish a joint understanding of what we are talking about.

Conceptual clarity is beneficial in a number of ways, particularly for media development organizations in their role as intermediaries between donors and media organizations. It plays a key role in defining clear, overarching goals, developing precise monitoring and evaluation frameworks, ensuring accurate reporting of impact, aligning communication with donors, policymakers, and other stakeholders, and advocating convincingly for enhanced support.

Finding a common language on Media Viability is not a matter of convenience for the media development sector. It is a strategic imperative and the very first step in laying the groundwork for joint action on Media Viability.

Developing a common conceptual framework: Results of the global Media Viability survey

The joint understanding of Media Viability proposed by the MVM was developed in an inclusive, five-stage process, building on the results of a comprehensive mapping exercise, a co-creation workshop, a global Media Viability survey, an interactive conference session and a second conceptualization workshop (for information on the MVM's collaborative approach, see chapter 1.2). This section provides a brief overview of the key findings from the Media Viability survey.

The results of the global Media Viability survey underscore the lack of conceptual clarity and ambiguity surrounding key terms. Respondents pointed to a shortage of clear definitions for terms such as “viability,” “sustainability,” and “resilience,” and noted that they are “used interchangeably most of the time.” Additionally, 39 percent of survey respondents were uncertain if distinctions between systems and organizational levels were made in definitions and understandings within their organizations.

“ This clarifies the terms and principles which have previously been used interchangeably.

“ These definitions would indeed lend to [a] more common language and understanding [within] the sector.

Quotes from participants of the global Media Viability survey

Notably, the term “sustainability” is most commonly used by survey participants, with 78 percent indicating frequent or constant use. The term “viability” is frequently or always used in the day-to-day work of 53 percent of respondents. For both viability and sustainability, the analysis of participants’ understandings produced the following five recurring themes:

1. Financial aspects
2. Quality aspects (e.g., professional values, journalistic standards)
3. Business aspects (e.g., business model, managerial skills)
4. Audience aspects (e.g., serving public interest)
5. Ecosystem aspects (e.g., political and economic conditions).

However, while overlap existed, two distinguishing factors emerged between understandings of the terms. First, financial aspects associated with sustainability were described as more advanced compared to those under viability — for instance, sustainability entailed considerations for revenue generation, profitability, and diversification of funding, as compared to viability’s focus on covering costs, paying bills, and surviving financially. Second, temporal aspects, emphasizing future planning, foresight, and the continuity of operations over time, was identified as a distinct thematic category only within respondents’ understandings of sustainability, and not of viability.

Lastly, participants’ feedback on the draft conceptual framework yielded largely positive responses. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of participants expressed full agreement with the suggested terms and understandings. Moreover, respondents emphasized the practical utility of the proposed understandings, noting their potential to clarify terminology and facilitate a more common understanding within the sector.

The global Media Viability survey: Finding a common language for joint action

Objective: To explore diverse interpretations of Media Viability terminology and gather feedback on the draft conceptual framework developed as part of the MVM.

Timeframe: June 20 to July 17, 2023.

Questions: 15 questions organized into three sections:

1. Participants’ interpretations of terms: Exploring commonly used terminology and the understandings and nuances between different aspects and levels within these concepts.
2. Feedback on the draft conceptual framework: Asking respondents to review and provide insights on its applicability and alignment with their own perspectives.

3. Participants’ profile: gathering optional information on geographical region, field of work, and organization for contextualization of responses.

Respondents: 64 professionals from 29 countries representing 45 organizations across media development, journalism, civil society, and academia.

Insights: The survey responses were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, coded into distinct categories and themes, and utilized to refine the joint understanding of Media Viability presented in the MVM.

As a final step, the MVM core group collectively refined the draft conceptual framework, ensuring alignment with the many perspectives and insights gathered through the Media Viability survey and other milestone events (see chapter 1.2). This collaborative effort resulted in the following joint understanding of Media Viability proposed by the MVM.

A joint conceptual framework for Media Viability

Media Viability is widely understood as a field within the media development sector that focuses on the enabling economic conditions and resource implications that affect media organizations.

Within the overarching field of Media Viability, the MVM differentiates between two different states of being for independent media organizations: organizationally viable and organizationally sustainable. Collaborative media networks and partnerships, rather than solely individual organizations, may also be described accordingly, if they meet similar characteristics.

Organizational viability is an operational state at the business level where media organizations demonstrate their ability to produce independent journalism that serves the public good.

Achieving organizational viability involves prioritizing the audience's trust and being of service to a community, while implementing feasible business operations and staying financially afloat. Furthermore, organizational viability is characterized by a consistent commitment to editorial independence and ethical standards.

Organizational sustainability is an operational state at the business level that goes beyond viability, as viable media organizations continue operations over time and diversify revenue streams while demonstrating potential for growth, scalability, and profitability.

Media organizations achieve sustainability by fulfilling their journalistic purpose consistently over time. This may include engaging in more strategic activities such as developing partnerships, expanding content reach, developing capacity, and reducing costs.

Transitioning from being organizationally viable to organizationally sustainable requires a comprehensive set of capacities, capabilities, processes, strategies, and actions that allow media organizations to withstand long-term market disruptions and sudden shocks, sustain operations in challenging circumstances, and bounce back after a crisis. This includes measures to ensure safety and security, as well as the ability to pivot and to draw on local networks when necessary.

Such efforts should commence at the start and persist throughout the whole life cycle of an organization.

While viable media organizations can transition to become sustainable, the journey from organizational viability to organizational sustainability is not linear, and not guaranteed. Some viable media organizations may never become sustainable. This is particularly apparent in the case of emerging media ventures, and in challenging media environments where achieving sustainability may be hindered by a range of political, economic, and other factors.

These challenges explain why the Media Viability Manifesto proposes "Media Viability," rather than "sustainability," to describe the overall field within the media (development) sector that focuses on the enabling economic conditions and resource implications that affect media organizations. Despite "sustainability" being the more widely used term according to the survey results, it does not reflect the reality of opportunities within many contexts that local, regional, and international stakeholders in this field operate in. By focusing solely on sustainability, we would risk excluding media ecosystems and contexts in which organizational sustainability may not be achievable.

It is important to highlight that the proposed understandings of organizational viability and sustainability focus on the level of individual media organizations, emphasizing the activities and capacities of media organizations themselves. However, for stakeholders engaged in the field of Media Viability, it is vital to take a holistic perspective beyond media organizations and also consider the environments these organizations operate in. Naturally, organizational viability and sustainability depend on many actors and factors related to the broader context and structures of the information ecosystems that media outlets are part of.

The suggested definitions can serve as a basis for discussions, learning, and practical activities in the field of Media Viability. However, they alone can neither adequately capture the wider ecosystem considerations nor the strategic approaches that are crucial to improve the situation. Therefore, the MVM also proposes a joint Theory of Change that better accounts for the multitude of actors and factors influencing the viability and sustainability of independent media organizations, as well as the interrelations between them.

2.2 Strengthening strategic collaboration

A Theory of Change for Media Viability

Please find the Theory of Change at the end of the document.

Various experts in the field have pointed out a shortage of Theories of Change in media development. In their analysis of the use of Theories of Change in media and governance programs, Spurk and Koch (2019) conclude that **the media development sector has yet to fully utilize the potential offered by more detailed Theories of Change, highlighting cause-and-effect relationships, to enhance project planning, monitoring, and evaluation.** Discussions within the Media Sector Development Working Group at IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research) have reached the same conclusion.

Unlike most Theories of Change which are developed at project, program, or organizational level, the MVM's Theory of Change intends to be sector-wide. Aligning on a Theory of Change in this manner also provides a way for building

coalitions, assisting with collaboration, and for channeling a multi-layered, multi-contextual approach towards strengthening Media Viability from an agreed starting point.

However, "there is no 'one-size-fits-all' Theory of Change for media programs," as highlighted by donors, practitioners, and academics during a learning meeting facilitated by GFMD IMPACT (2021). While Media Viability is a global concern, the challenges vary significantly depending on context. Thus, far from promoting a homogeneous approach, **the Theory of Change proposed here is intended to be adopted flexibly, as a whole or in parts, ensuring distinctive and contextualized approaches.** In this way it serves as a tool to orientate and situate multiple initiatives in the field. As a framework, it serves to catalyze discussions and concentrate time and energy to delve more deeply into varied and innovative implementation methodologies, while also encouraging donors and policymakers to consider the complex systems and actors in driving change in a holistic and people-centered way (GFMD IMPACT 2021). The intention is for multiple actors to see where their work fits within the overall Manifesto.

What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change outlines a logical sequence of steps aimed at achieving a desired transformation, contextualizing it within the broader structural environment. In the case of the MVM, it reflects opportunities for the media development sector to coordinate its efforts around broader goals of enhancing the enabling economic environment for public interest media.

The components of a Theory of Change

The Theory of Change builds on an intended impact, describing a positive societal change that the media development sector seeks to contribute to. Its outcomes identify the actors and factors relevant to making the intended impact happen.

The narrative of a Theory of Change structures the chain of outcomes and describes how action by relevant stakeholders is expected to bring about the intended change.

Developing the MVM's Theory of Change

The MVM's Theory of Change for Media Viability was developed in an externally facilitated, three-stage participatory process:

1. Development

The first draft was developed by representatives from all MVM core group organizations during a facilitated in-person workshop. It began with gathering ideas for an intended impact. This was followed by a comprehensive context analysis, including a mapping of actors relevant to making the intended impact happen, and factors (political, economic, social/cultural, technological, legal, environmental) currently enabling or hampering the intended impact.

Next, participants collected and clustered what needs to be done to make the intended impact happen into four terrains of work. For each terrain, they identified intended outcomes, describing improvements in the behavior of relevant actors

Main steps of developing the MVM's Theory of Change



that would facilitate the achievement of the desired changes. Participants then established cause-effect relations between the outcomes, and integrated underlying causal assumptions.

2. Validation

The draft Theory of Change underwent external validation in an interactive online workshop, engaging 64 participants from 28 countries and 44 organizations worldwide. Participants received the draft Theory of Change in advance. In the workshop, they shared their expertise and perspectives. Afterwards, all feedback and comments were thematically clustered, prioritized, and integrated into the Theory of Change.

3. Simplification

Acknowledging the complex nature of several terrains of work, outcomes, and their various interconnections, the Theory of Change underwent a simplification process. The aim was to improve clarity and visual comprehension of the Theory of Change, in response to feedback from the validation workshop.

The MVM's Theory of Change for Media Viability

As media development organizations, our efforts in strengthening Media Viability together with all stakeholders involved aim to achieve a transformative impact. **The intended impact identified for the MVM's Theory of Change is: Financially and editorially independent and diverse media are economically sustainable.** Through these efforts, we strive to contribute to better-informed and stronger communities, thus advancing our shared vision of peaceful and democratic societies.

The intended impact of this Theory of Change is achieved through contributions clustered into four terrains of work:

1. Business and technical support
2. Coalitions and partnerships
3. Evidence-based advocacy
4. Research and insights

The following section presents each terrain of work of the MVM's Theory of Change in a narrative description, structured around the main actors needed to achieve the respective outcomes. These actors include media organizations and networks, media managers, media development organizations, media researchers, media freedom actors, media audiences, journalism professors and students, and public and private sector actors such as governments, policymakers, donors, philanthropists, foundations, investors, banks, private entrepreneurs, tech companies, and other relevant media stakeholders at the local, regional, and international level. Although the four terrains of work are closely interconnected, the narrative description intentionally minimizes the exploration of these connections to ensure clarity and comprehension.

1. Business and technical support

This terrain of work strengthens media organizations and their leaders by providing tailored technical and financial support, quality assurance, capacity development, and knowledge exchange. It focuses on:

1. **Business management:** Equipping media organizations with essential business skills through individual and peer-to-peer coaching (among other approaches);
2. **Audience engagement:** Ensuring content and products meet audience demands by leveraging data to inform decision-making;
3. **Income generation:** Accessing diverse and innovative revenue streams to support the creation of high-quality content and sustain operations;

The intended impact and four terrains of work of the MVM's Theory of Change



4. Content production and distribution: Consistent sourcing, production, and distribution of innovative and differentiated quality content and products.

A general assumption underlying this whole terrain of work is that media organizations will be more effective when they work together with like-minded CSOs, media, and tech companies. They rely on the necessary core support to operate successfully. The intended outcomes can be assisted by local, regional, and international media development organizations, but can also happen without their support. Another assumption is that media can find ways to work with their audiences in meaningful ways.

Professional operations

Based on a deep understanding of prevailing trends, opportunities, and risks, media organizations will be equipped with the knowledge and insights needed to navigate the complexities of ever-changing media landscapes. Through collaborative learning and peer engagement, media organizations will refine their strategic vision and mission, develop strategic plans, and professionalize their operations. While undergoing this process of professionalization, media organizations will be guided by clear values and identified points of difference. With comprehensive policies and procedures developed, including safety protocols to manage physical, digital, psycho-social, and legal risks, media organizations will strengthen their foundations and enhance their resilience in the digital era.

Leadership and quality content

During the implementation and evaluation of their policies, plans, and procedures, media organizations will be led by skilled and motivated business managers and editorial leaders. These leaders will run effective and inclusive teams, who will be driven by the commitment to sustain their outlet's operations. Strengthened leadership will also ensure that media organizations make effective use of technology for resource efficiency and pilot innovative strategies to attract and engage audiences. These foundations will enable media organizations to consistently source, produce, and distribute innovative and tailor-made quality content and products for their audiences.

Monetization and revenue streams

Furthermore, as media managers organize and deliver financial management, cash flow, grant portfolios, and commercial income, they will recognize ways to monetize content and products and successfully access a variety of both commercial and non-commercial income streams. This is because media managers will possess improved business management skills to navigate the diverse and often challenging market conditions faced by media organizations in different contexts. The recognition of new monetization strategies and income streams, together with the consistent sourcing, production, and distribution of innovative and differentiated quality content and products for and with their audiences, will put media

organizations in a position to enhance funding opportunities, diversify their revenue and generate cash flows.

Ultimately, these efforts will ensure that media organizations have the resources needed to deliver on their mission, leading to financially and editorially independent and diverse media that are economically sustainable.

2. Coalitions and partnerships

This terrain of work enables spaces for knowledge sharing on Media Viability and facilitates networking and cooperation between relevant actors, involving:

1. Relevant stakeholders in the field of media viability from all world regions;
2. Local, regional, and international media development organizations;
3. Media organizations from all world regions;
4. Local, regional, and international media stakeholders, including journalist associations, press councils, media owner groups, and think tanks;
5. Coalitions of media freedom actors.

Relevant stakeholders in the field of media viability

Relevant stakeholders in the field of media viability from all regions will be supported in engaging in local, regional, and international coalitions and partnerships for knowledge sharing and joint advocacy efforts. As part of these collaborative efforts they will develop strategies and positions that influence the international discussion on Media Viability. This will enable relevant stakeholders in the field of media viability to play an instrumental role in shaping the agenda for Media Viability at the global level.

Media development organizations

When local, regional, and international media development organizations learn from each other by sharing evidence-based knowledge, strategies, and best practices on Media Viability, they will synchronize strategies, approaches, and tools for increased impact. As a result, media researchers will enhance research methodologies and information exchanges through collaboration, including the consolidation, sharing, and deeper understanding of existing research. In close collaboration with the Media Viability expert networks, the better synchronized work of media development organizations will also lead to a more systematic use of existing, as well as the establishment of new forums and formats for information exchange with the local, regional, and international donor community.

Media organizations

Moreover, as media organizations work together to identify potential areas, topics, and processes for partnerships and content sharing, they will engage in collaborative efforts to enhance cost efficiency, particularly for cost-and research intensive topics of public interest, and exchange networks for

technical and editorial support. Media organizations will also increase their cost efficiency and audience share through joint innovation on the production and distribution of their content. These efforts will ensure that media organizations have the resources needed to deliver on their mission, leading to financially and editorially independent and diverse media that are economically sustainable.

Media stakeholders and media freedom actors

Other local, regional, and international media stakeholders engaged in coalition and partnership building on Media Viability include journalist associations, press councils, media owner groups, and think tanks. Their participation in consultations to gather context-specific insights and needs assessments will lead to improved decision-making and more targeted interventions by informing media development organizations in their synchronization of strategies, approaches, and tools on the one hand, and relevant stakeholders in the field of media viability in the development of strategies and positions within collaborative networks on the other.

In addition, these multi-stakeholder consultations inform and are informed by **coalitions of media freedom actors**, who will analyze evidence on, and monitor the implementation of public and private policy options that improve market conditions for media to identify a shared advocacy agenda most relevant and effective in their context.

3. Evidence-based advocacy

This terrain of work focuses on evidence-based advocacy for Media Viability during multi-stakeholder discussions and events within relevant fora. The undertaken efforts directly build on the research conducted and disseminated, the coalitions and partnerships established, and the insights gained from business and technical support to media.

When **coalitions of media freedom actors** jointly identify an evidence-based and context-specific advocacy agenda, they will broaden engagement, build public and private will, and push for reforms by coordinating evidence and advocacy efforts. As conversations on how to improve the market conditions for public interest media are happening across multiple spaces, the media freedom coalitions will engage relevant actors from related fields, including the governance sector and the broader international development community. If the evidence-based advocacy efforts of media freedom coalitions are successful, they will lead to long-term changes on the side of three actors:

Media audiences

First, media audiences will increasingly recognize and defend the importance of independent, quality journalism, which will drive them to support independent media morally, practically, and if possible, financially. This support contributes to the intended impact of financially and editorially independent and diverse media that are economically sustainable.

Public policymakers

Second, as policymakers are held accountable by the public, the increased support of independent journalism by media audiences will motivate public policymakers to engage with relevant stakeholders to create infrastructure and implement policies and regulations that support a viable, independent, and pluralistic media sector. Widely coordinated evidence and advocacy efforts of media freedom actors will enhance this engagement. This may include public subsidies, government advertising, bargaining codes, ownership regulations, and a fair allocation of advertising. In the long term, these policies and regulations will result in media organizations having the resources they need to deliver on their mission, which directly contributes to the intended impact of the Theory of Change.

Public and private sector

Third, the evidence-based advocacy efforts of media freedom actors will increase the public and private sector's recognition of the need to support a viable independent media sector and their role within it. This is because the implementation of new public policies targeting the private sector to reimburse media for the content they use on their platforms will compel the private sector to become more aware of this topic. As a result:

- Tech companies including social media platforms, search engines, and AI companies will promote public interest content in feeds, support inclusion lists, and be more transparent. If tech platforms also compensate media organizations for disseminating their news content, with ethical advertising returns for public interest media, these practices will contribute to media organizations having the resources they need to deliver on their mission. In the long term, this leads to the intended impact.
- Tech companies will share data that is useful to media viability including news performance in algorithms, inclusion lists, advertising revenue returns and open APIs. Eventually, this will put media organizations in a position where they have reliable and effective data and insights on content, audiences, and markets.
- Private companies will develop principles and policies related to ethical advertising and investment in the media. In the long term, these principles and policies will lead to enhanced private sector investments in independent media because policies, regulations, and public pressure will drive private sector policy- and decision makers to support Media Viability. Increased investments which do not compromise media's independence lead to the intended impact of financially and editorially independent and diverse media that are economically sustainable.

Finally, these long-term outcomes are also a result of media organizations and networks actively engaging in national and international policy debates and advocacy efforts for Media Viability.

4. Research and insights

This terrain of work focuses on a variety of evidence-based research and insights, including research on audience behavior, industry trends, business models, and market factors, as well as needs assessments, case studies, project evaluations, and project mappings.

These initiatives may be conducted by academics, media development organizations, civil society organizations, government agencies, NGOs, think tanks, and other media researchers at the local, regional, and international level. Their research activities closely involve media organizations, and incorporate other fields such as psychology and neuroscience to better understand audience decision-making processes.

To ensure that research has impact, it must be shared with relevant actors through targeted and effective dissemination strategies, in accessible formats and languages. Promoting this sharing, and collaborating to do so can increase and broaden the impact of the research, making donor support vital. In this mode, research may generate impact both when it is shared publicly or in a more restricted fashion.

The research and insights terrain of work is based on the underlying assumption that evidence-based data in multiple forms helps local, regional, and international public and private sector actors, media organizations, academics, journalism schools, and other actors to make more informed decisions.

Public and private sector

Local, regional, and international public and private sector actors, including governments, policymakers, donors, philanthropists, foundations, investors, banks, private entrepreneurs, and tech companies, play crucial roles in supporting independent media and raising the issue of Media Viability as a priority in international fora. If these public and private sector actors understand the importance of independent media and their needs, they will increase financial and organizational support for media through mechanisms such as public subsidies, journalism funds, taxation, Official Development Assistance, venture capital funds, and licensing deals with technology and infrastructure companies. This is because public and private sector actors will be more likely to support media they might not have supported otherwise when they are presented with stronger evidence and better understand the importance of independent media. The increased support directly contributes to the intended impact of the Theory of Change.

If public and private sector actors are regularly informed by research, knowledge, and evidence-based practices, they will also be more likely to fund research on Media Viability in the future. This directly feeds back into the research activities and initiatives conducted in this terrain of work.

Providing the private sector with inclusion lists and media directories informing about independent, public service, and brand safe media will increase the advertising spending with those independent media. This is because it is assumed that advertisers will choose public interest media from inclusion lists and spend more with them. As a result, media organizations will have the resources they need to deliver on their mission, which directly leads to the intended impact of the Theory of Change.

Public policymakers

Robust evidence regarding the dynamics of the information ecosystem and the value of a free press needs to be provided to public policymakers, who need to be able to effectively leverage data to design and implement context-specific policy responses. This will allow them to engage with relevant stakeholders to create infrastructure and implement policies and regulations that support a viable, independent, and pluralistic media sector. These improved policies and regulations are a combined result of targeted advocacy efforts by media freedom actors, and increased recognition and support of independent quality journalism by media audiences, as mentioned above.

Media organizations

Media organizations themselves also benefit from research initiatives that focus on audience research, trends, best practices, and advancements in technology and journalistic techniques, such as fact-checking and solutions journalism. On the one hand, it enables them to better understand the overall trends, opportunities, and risks in their contexts. On the other hand, media organizations can use the data to make evidence-based content and business decisions and drive audience engagement, strengthening their viability as media organizations (see business and technical support).

Media and journalism educators

Journalism schools represent another target audience for evidence-based research initiatives. Media research contributes to the creation of new courses and the development of curricula, including the integration of business skills and entrepreneurship. These improvements lead to better-prepared journalism professors and journalism students who—equipped with the required knowledge and skills—go on to become the future leaders of viable media organizations.

The described four terrains of work outlined in the MVM's Theory of Change provide a systematic framework that, among other things, can be used to situate a wide range of Media Viability strategies and activities available to practitioners. The subsequent chapter links to that, and offers an indicative overview of relevant approaches and tools utilized in the field of Media Viability.

2.3 Aligning practical implementation

Typology of existing Media Viability tools and approaches

It is broadly accepted that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to Media Viability (Cook, 2021; DW Akademie, 2019; DW Akademie, 2020; Picard, 2017). Instead, solutions have proven both elusive and disputed. Given the absence of any normative solution to Media Viability questions, there are a broad range of approaches championed, and their diversity has grown substantially as Media Viability has tacitly grown across the media development agenda.

This indicative typology of work from a range of stakeholders was gathered throughout the process of developing the Media Viability Manifesto (see chapter 1.2), and clustered according to the four terrains of work of the MVM's Theory of Change presented in the previous chapter. It is drawn from a mapping exercise on Media Viability tools and approaches, including desk-based research as well as semi-structured online interviews with representatives from media development organizations and other stakeholders with practical experience in Media Viability, and complemented by additional expert input along the way. While it includes a vast number of initiatives and activities, it does not claim to be exhaustive.

Direct links to mentioned tools and approaches are provided in the online version of this publication. While this feature is not feasible in the printed version, all resources mentioned can be readily accessed online.

Existing tools and approaches within the MVM's terrains of work

1. Business and technical support

- Investment funding
- Direct and core funding
- Innovation approaches
- Practitioner training and capacity development
- Mentoring and consultancy
- (Online) learning platforms
- Analytical assessment tools
- Resource guides

2. Coalitions and partnerships

- Expert pools
- Community and exchange platforms
- Multi-stakeholder coalitions
- Participatory sustainability
- Ubuntu approaches
- Partnership approaches
- Interdisciplinary approaches

3. Evidence-based advocacy

- Sector consultations
- Sector inclusion lists
- Public policy and philanthropy
- National journalism funds
- Pushback against big tech

4. Research and insights

- System indicators and analysis
- Data-led approaches
- Mapping approaches
- Action research
- Foresight scoping

1. Business and technical support

Investment funding

Given the immense sustainability challenges independent media are facing, greater engagement of the private sector is being sought. Case studies in [Czechia, Romania, and Serbia](#) show that the private sector can and does play a role in protecting information integrity. The [Media Development Investment Fund](#) and [MDIF Ventures](#) provide affordable debt and equity financing and also invest in tailored technical assistance and advisory services to support independent media. As with examples such as the impact of the Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism (NFNŽ) on media sustainability in Czechia, understanding what motivates the business community and designing [new models of support](#) are crucial for incentivising the private sector to support media development.

Direct and core funding

The [OECD principles](#) emphasize the need for more “direct, flexible, and reliable support, including core funding and longer-term, multi-year funding” (OECD, 2024). This financial support can come in the form of direct and core funding. While direct funding is typically project-based and thus tied to a specific activity, core funding provides financial assistance to an organization independent of a specific activity. Direct and core funding are increasingly important components for the viability of many media organizations, enabling them to maintain operations, innovate, and adapt to challenges.

Direct funding provides essential financial resources to cover specific services or positions to achieve defined objectives or deliver specific outputs. This type of direct assistance is often provided by media development organizations as part of a particular project, activity, or initiative.

In addition to direct funding, financial support can also come in the form of core funding. This type of funding is given to media outlets to strengthen their overall capacity and stability, allowing them to cover their operational costs, infrastructure, and overhead expenses. Examples of core funding mechanisms include the [International Fund for Public Interest Media \(IFPIM\)](#), which distributes core funding to media houses in low- and middle-income countries, and the [Media Forward Fund](#), which provides both core and project-based funding to independent public interest media registered in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The [European Endowment for Democracy](#) offers core funding to media organizations in the European Neighborhood.

Innovation approaches

Given the dynamic and rapid changes facing journalism, much sustainability work focuses on innovation processes. For example, [MEDIA LOVES TECH](#) is a digital journalism innovation incubator launched by DW Akademie that seeks to identify the best digital ideas and concepts for innovative and quality journalism in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. Furthermore, the focus on design thinking and agile methodologies puts

emphasis on understanding processes, outputs, and key results to inform decision making, often with an emphasis on [user needs](#). Henry Chesbrough’s thinking on [open innovation](#) also helps explain coalition and collaboration approaches to sustainability. A sub category of approaches include those that lean on [bricolage](#) or “[effectuation](#)” theory within entrepreneurial journalism (Konieczna 2020).

Practitioner training and capacity development

Training programs allow practitioners in media outlets to enhance their skills. Media management training, for instance, supports media managers, administrators, and journalists in developing managerial skills and knowledge that will help them run a media business successfully (e.g. Fondation Hiron-delle, FPU, [Digital Media Viability Lab](#) organized by Maharat Foundation and DW Akademie). Consultancy trainings, such as those provided by Sembra Media ([Clínica de Consultores](#)) and DW Akademie (e.g. as part of the [Media Futures East Africa Project](#)), are designed to provide media experts who already work or want to work as Media Viability consultants with specialized training and support, typically including areas such as business models, metrics, audience engagement, and media products. There are also training initiatives that enable media outlets to conduct their own audience research (e.g. BBC Media Action). The MDIF-led [Learning Brief on Media Viability](#), produced as part of the [PRIMED](#) project, offers various practical examples of strategies and solutions in areas such as revenue generation, audience development, organizational management, and digital development, that are effective in supporting the financial viability of independent media in fragile contexts.

Mentoring and consultancy

Consulting for individuals or cohorts of media outlets, media and journalism networks, training centers, and other institutions is another approach that can enhance organizational viability, allowing media businesses to access knowledge and guidance on how to remain competitive, sustainable, and relevant in today’s rapidly changing media landscape. This often starts with building trust and a viability analysis of the media outlet (assessment tools used for this purpose are described below). Not only do consultants support media outlets in developing viable business models and in identifying gaps in their operations, but they also [transfer knowledge](#) in areas such as product development, audience research, business strategies, and revenue diversification. Organizational development is another crucial consultancy approach provided to media outlets. Examples of media development organizations that offer consulting services include BBC Media Action, DW Akademie, FT Strategies, IMS, Maharat Foundation, and SembraMedia.

Within the range of consultancy approaches, there are coaching programs that support media outlets in developing the skills and knowledge of their staff. For example, initiatives like the [Roadmap for Media Growth](#) by FPU and the [Southeast Asia Technical Assistance Initiative](#) by MDIF provide coaching

to help media organizations develop business capacity and their own business models. Similarly, the International Press Institute's [Transition Accelerator](#) program supports small to mid-sized digital and legacy media in leveraging innovation to become more resilient in the face of increasing global challenges. DW Akademie's [V\(iability\)-sprints](#) are a systematic consultancy tool for media outlets wishing to explore and validate their viability as well as design or re-adjust their strategies.

Based on a long-term relationship between mentor and mentee, mentoring presents an additional approach to improve organizational viability. Consultancy may transform into mentoring, as a follow-up process over time after an intense consultancy phase. Mentoring can also be used to build leadership and business skills. For instance, [Metis by SembraMedia](#) is a mentoring program designed to help women founders of Latin American digital media build stronger leadership and business skills. At IMS, [local Media for Democracy](#) offered technical support through mentoring.

(Online) learning platforms

(Online) learning platforms typically offer a range of (on-demand) courses and learning resources that are created for (and often by) media professionals to help media organizations become more viable and sustainable. Experts and specialists cover different topic areas such as management, accounting, advertising, audience engagement, product development. For example, in [Armenia's first Media Management E-School](#) opened by DW Akademie and the Media Initiatives Center (MIC), students can acquire skills in strategic and financial management, business planning, marketing, and project development. [Splice Media's School of Splice](#) offers purpose-built audio lessons with transcripts to help build viable media businesses and products for niche audiences. It also includes a community-network that allows media professionals to connect and collaborate with others in the industry. Further examples include [FPU's Media Viability Webinars](#), which pull together lessons learned from media outlets in different countries around topics such as native advertising and membership models, as well as the [SembraMedia School](#) and [Fondation Hironnelle's Masterclasses](#). IMS runs training through its [IMS insights](#) platform in partnership with organizations including UNESCO.

Analytical assessment tools

Media development organizations offer a range of analytical assessment tools that can help media organizations to get a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as well as gain insights into how to become more viable. These analytical tools are typically designed to assess specific aspects of media organizations, either from an external perspective or through self-assessment. As an example, the organizational viability of small and medium-sized outlets can be analyzed with tools such as [FPU's series of sprint modules](#) or [DW Akademie's V\(iability\)-Sprint](#) and [VAM360°](#). In addition, risk and crisis preparedness analysis can support media

organizations in enhancing their resilience (e.g. [Media Resilience Scanner](#) by DW Akademie), and digital security tools help to protect media outlets from potential online threats by analyzing a project's environment and estimating the likelihood of attacks (e.g. [Threat Modeling Guide](#) by DW Akademie). Other tools put media landscapes into context by providing media outlets with insights and recommendations for transformation based on the analysis of the needs of journalism start-ups and creators within a specific environment (e.g. [Splice Media in Asia](#)).

Resource guides

Resource guides provide media organizations with valuable information and replicable models of success on topics such as business models, business development, revenue streams, and innovation. Examples include guides by organizations such as [FPU](#), [FT Strategies](#), [DW Akademie](#), [SembraMedia](#), and [IMS](#) (e.g. [Native Advertising Playbook](#) and [Social Media Monetisation Playbook](#)). More specifically, in an attempt to bridge the language gap, [SembraMedia](#) offers a [collection of digital platforms, apps, and tools in Spanish](#) as well as an [overview of funds for independent media entrepreneurs in Latin America](#). The [East Library](#) developed as part of the Media Futures East Africa project conducted by the Aga Khan University and DW Akademie offers key publications on Media Viability and innovation in East Africa and beyond to media professionals, academics, and policymakers. Additionally, [Lion Publishers](#) provide a collection of programs and resources around the topic of [news organizations' sustainability](#), while the [GNI Start-ups Playbook](#) aims to demystify the process of launching a digital news startup and help build financially viable and journalistically impactful businesses. Similarly, the startups guide from [Columbia Journalism Review](#) and membership related resources from the [Membership Puzzle](#). A number of analytical resources are available from [UNESCO](#).

2. Coalitions and partnerships

Expert pools

Another approach towards strengthening Media Viability is to build up a pool of (certified) experts and consultants, who can provide valuable insights and guidance on strategies for improving organizational viability. One such example is [SembraMedia's Ambassadors](#), a network that represents more than 1000 digital media in 24 countries in Latin America, Spain, Canada, and the United States. The Ambassadors are involved in an ongoing research project that involves mapping and studying the ever-changing independent digital media ecosystem. They are also responsible for creating and managing the [Digital Media Directory](#) (see above). In addition to the Ambassadors, [Sembra Media](#) coordinates a network of professors ([Red de Profes](#)) who teach entrepreneurial journalism and other business innovation and digital journalism classes in Iberoamerica. DW Akademie has also built a [network of Media Viability experts](#) who offer training and consulting services within the media sector in various countries.

Community and exchange events

Online communities provide important opportunities for media outlets to connect, exchange, collaborate, and network on topics such as product and audience strategy, funding and investments, business advice, jobs and opportunities, and digital tools. [Planet Splice](#) represents a good example of such a platform, where media professionals can join discussions, access exclusive resources, and collaborate with others on projects and initiatives. Moreover, [Stars-4Media](#) or ICFJ's [Elevate](#), [Tablestakes Europe](#), are innovation exchange programs to accelerate media innovation and cross-border coverage in Europe by facilitating cooperation between media professionals. Knowledge exchange communities hosted by university programs, for example the [Journalism Innovation and Leadership](#) program at the University of Central Lancashire, facilitates global exchange through direct messaging groups. Regional expert portals, such as in the [Western Balkans](#), also exist as do [media festivals](#) for new knowledge exchange.

Multi-stakeholder coalitions

[Multi-stakeholder coalitions](#) support the viability of media ecosystems by bringing together different stakeholders from multiple sectors to foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and resource mobilization. As an example, [United for News](#) (led by Internews in collaboration with the World Economic Forum) seeks to support local media organizations in their transition to digital and to foster an economically viable creation and distribution of trusted content. Through this coalition, local media outlets can benefit from the expertise, networks, and resources of multiple stakeholders while increasing the positive impact of quality content on the well-being of native businesses, government, and citizens. [Multi-stakeholder task forces](#) or commissions of inquiry can tailor solutions and help maximize the effectiveness of regional funding without compromising independence.

Participatory sustainability

Situated within the fields of media for social innovation, a number of initiatives hold at their heart ways to engage citizens and multiple stakeholders in journalism as a participatory process aimed at bringing around social change. These social sustainability dimensions can range from connecting journalism within the community (Matthews 2017) to [local news plan development](#) or to extensive [technological developments using artificial intelligence](#) with public interest sovereignty. Similarly, the [Global Sound Movement](#) captures rare sounds for digital audio products from around the world and makes them globally accessible through new technology, providing a world stage for communities in social or economic need.

Ubuntu approaches

Some media development and journalist activities now advance an idea of a "decolonial public interest journalism" based on the moral philosophy of ubuntu that advances

freedom of expression under conditions which enable the emergence of truths relating to the public interest (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede 2022). In practice, this kind of journalism promotes the possibility of harmonious social interactions by enabling members to share common systems of values integral to ubuntu, and strengthens cooperative social interactions that are fostered by the trust.

Partnership approaches

Commercial inter-media partnerships exist of different scale and scope with an objective of achieving sustainability through scale, visibility in otherwise crowded marketplaces, and increasing advertising offers. For example from shared platforms such as collaborative advertising networks like publisher-led programmatic advertising marketplace MCIL Multimedia Sdn Bhd for nine participating media in Malaysia or Krama ad platform, a bespoke classified ads platform, developed by and for independent media, especially regional and local as an alternative to Russian-based Yandex ad system, on which many Belarusian online media are dependent (Cook 2022).

Interdisciplinary approaches

Inter- and intra-disciplinary approaches allow for multidimensional and holistic views of sustainability. The [Sustainable Journalism Partnership](#) is one such example as it seeks to pollinate across journalism, business, and environmental sectors against a backdrop of sustainable societies. The multi-stakeholder initiative cross pollinates outside of solos combining grounded, academic, and development actors. There are also initiatives which focus primarily on the intersection between viability and [gender](#), ecological sustainability, [safety](#), [digital surveillance](#) and other key elements of enabling environments.

3. Evidence-based advocacy

Sector consultations

On the national or regional level, sector-wide consultations can contribute to a better understanding of the operational and financial state of media outlets and the broader media landscape. Consultations involve gathering insights and feedback from relevant actors of a media landscape to find solutions for identified challenges that strengthen Media Viability in the long term and to foster cooperation among national/regional actors. For example, [PRIMED](#) is a three-year project supporting public interest media in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone, and learning what works in making media more sustainable, which produced learning briefs on [Media Viability](#), [public subsidies](#), [gender representation](#), [coalitions and coalition building](#), and media development strategies, shared with the wider media development community with the support of GFMD. Furthermore, the [GFMD International Media Policy and Advisory Centre \(IMPACT\)](#) regularly organizes multi-stakeholder learning meetings and other forms of local, national, and regional consultations, that facilitate communication, sharing of knowledge, and exchange of experiences.

Sector inclusion lists

The Internews-led initiative [Ads for News](#) provides a global inclusion list of reputable, local news websites, making it easier for brands and advertising agencies to reach audiences on trusted media. From the branding site, there are initiatives such as the [Global Alliance for Responsible Media](#) and increased scrutiny to [ad exchanges](#) and the impact on Media Viability. Work with media experts to design impactful income-generating to the private sector (e.g., [PressHub Market](#) in Romania, or [Konšpirátori](#) in Slovakia) and trust building tools such as [Journalism Trust Initiative](#) and [NewsGuard](#) can build additional support networks.

Public policy and philanthropy

Alternatives to a commercial news system focused on profit maximization require a range of responses across subsidies, policy interventions, the [impact of charitable status and tax law regulation](#), and more. These steps reign in neoliberal paradigms that see news as commodities whose value is dictated by profitability (Pickard 2017). The case for [philanthropic involvement](#) has also been deepened. The [Journalism Funders Forum](#) is an open community of European funders working together to ensure more effective and impactful funding of journalism in Europe.

Some foundations are supporting efforts to [buy up community news outlets](#) in order to help put them on a solid financial footing. [Public subsidy models](#) can work in different ways. Tax credits for media outlets are being proposed and implemented in a number of countries as they are a relatively simple way of getting funding to large and medium-sized outlets. A comprehensive typology of [policy interventions](#) has been developed by UNESCO.

Pushback against big tech

Pioneering laws and policies based in copyright and competition legislation, such as Australia's 2021 News Media Bargaining Code and the European Union's 2021 Digital Copyright Directive, which compel platforms to pay for the news they use, have inspired publishers globally to re-evaluate the [remuneration](#) from platforms. Taxing digital advertising, empowering news media to collectively bargain with big tech, and requiring tech companies to pay licensing fees for using news content are three main ways to push back (Radsch 2022). The media development sector is fostering a number of initiatives, including the [Dynamic Coalition](#) on the Sustainability of Journalism and News Media, to connect a global forum of media experts, practitioners, and scholars to [analyze](#) and [design new systems](#). The [Forum on Information and Democracy](#), rooted in an initiative by Reporters Without Borders, defines and facilitates international multi-disciplinary working groups composed of experts and scholars to implement democratic principles for the global communication and information space. IMS has used [round tables](#) for dialogue to impact change in Ukraine.

National journalism funds

Calls for governments in particular to do more to support and sustain media financially have accelerated during the Covid-19

pandemic. A [national fund for journalism](#) is a dedicated structure that is designed with a strategic sectoral purpose to provide long-term funding to an independent journalism ecosystem in a particular country, region, or place. Briefings on [national funds for public interest media](#) have identified a common set of questions countries face when setting up such funds, including how to design them and ensure they are not captured, which established funds should be emulated, and why.

4. Research and insights

Media Viability research typically involves studying the broader trends and factors that impact the viability and success of media industries. This includes examining the political, economic, social, technical, legal, and environmental contexts in which media organizations operate, as well as the regulatory frameworks and policies that govern the media sector. As an example, CIMA conducts research on the systemic conditions that allow media outlets to be viable, focusing on policies and institutions, as well as on the intersection of internet governance and Media Viability. Media market research is another focus area for media development organizations which aim to understand the dynamics of the media industry. It includes collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data about media markets such as media consumption patterns and advertising trends, as has been done for example by FPU at the request of specific partners in Central America and Eastern Europe.

System indicators and analysis

Media development actors also examine systems to better understand the complex interplay between diverse actors and factors that shape the media landscape in a specific context. Systems thinking is a way of understanding the world as a complex system of interconnected parts, how these parts relate to one another, and what loops and effects occur, such as in this [example from the Strategic Foresight Initiative \(MEI\)](#). Another example are the [Media Landscape Guides](#), which map the entire journalism ecosystem of twenty countries and are put together and updated regularly by media experts. Systems thinking and analysis is a vital step before implementing media development projects because it allows media developers to design interventions that correspond to the needs and challenges within a particular media environment by addressing identified opportunities for development (e.g. BBC Media Action and IMS, see also [Handbook on mapping media landscapes](#) by IMS and the [Vibrant Information Barometer](#) by IREX).

There are different ways of analyzing the context, including many examples of broad [trends and mapping](#). One possibility is using indicators that provide a framework to assess Media Viability at the level of entire information ecosystems or individual media outlets, offering valuable information for media practitioners, media development organizations, scholars, activists, civil society, and policy makers. As an example, DW Akademie's [Media Viability Indicators \(MVIs\)](#) provide a

practical analysis tool to gather data and evidence for more effective strategies, considering a range of aspects covering politics, economics, communities, technology, and content. The MVIs provide a foundation for understanding the environment in which news media organizations are operating. They provide a foundation for developing key performance indicators so that benchmarks for successful news media organizations and successful media ecosystems can be identified.

Data-led approaches

The [Media Viability Accelerator](#) (MVA) aims to be a web-based platform that helps news media become more financially sustainable by accessing solutions and market insights to inform effective business strategies. A joint initiative between Internews, Microsoft, and USAID, the MVA consists of two components: MVA Insights, a data-based platform that collects and provides market intelligence to help newsrooms with their business models and MVA Solutions, a diverse marketplace of government, non-profits, and businesses solutions and services that media can use to find investors, funders, advertisers, technology solutions and advisors.

FT Strategies has developed a [Publisher Sustainability Diagnostic](#) working with more than 500 publishers in 50 countries, as part of the Google News Initiative publisher programs. The [Media Sustainability Barometer](#) was a quantitative index tool to both measure and monitor the media ecosystem, in terms of its sustainability across key contributing forces—from 18 database sources and a panel survey, and employs advanced statistical methods to construct a quantitative index to measure and model the media ecosystem. These initiatives have in common a data-led approach capable of delivering market level intelligence and the power to model how changes in the ecosystem impact on media sustainability in specific countries or blocs.

Mapping approaches

In today's digital age, the collection and management of data is an important resource to strengthen the enabling environment for independent media. To illustrate this point, Splice Media documents the media ecosystem to create a database into how it currently works together — and how it could potentially work together — by building a Global Media Ecosystem Database. Moreover, the [SembraMedia Directory](#) maps (digital) media organizations in a living database that can be searched by different filters, providing a valuable resource for media leaders, investors, academics, and others interested in understanding the trends, challenges, and opportunities for digital media in 20+ countries of Latin America and the US. [Project Oasis](#), a partnership between SembraMedia, IMS, GFMD, and others, maps digital natives to bring greater visibility to digital native media organizations, and to uncover new insights about the trends, opportunities, and challenges in this growing market sector. Other notable country level mapping has been led by [LION](#), [Carnegie in the UK](#), and [Colombia](#). Some depart rather at the [story level](#). Index level analysis extends

the insights from mapping activities such as [Inflection Point](#) covering Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa, [majority world startups](#) and [Public Interest News Foundation](#) in the UK. FPU carried out an assessment of [income streams](#) of independent media. Further [research](#) builds on insights to emerge trends and recommendations.

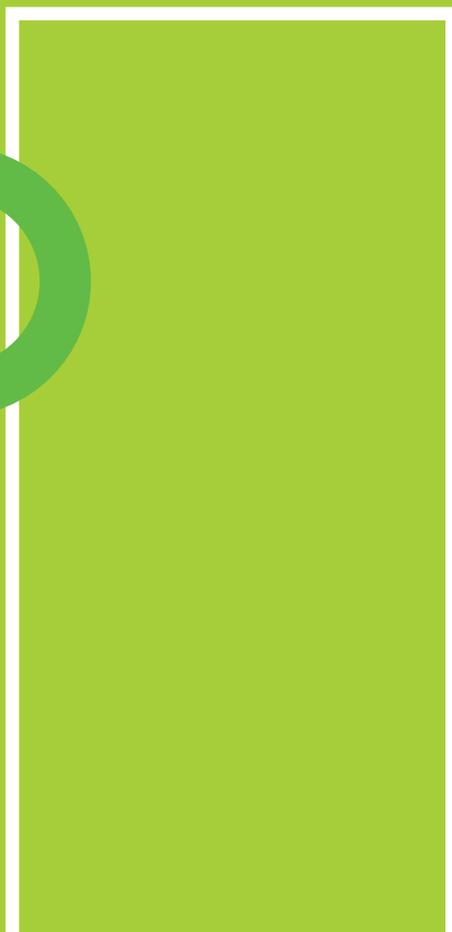
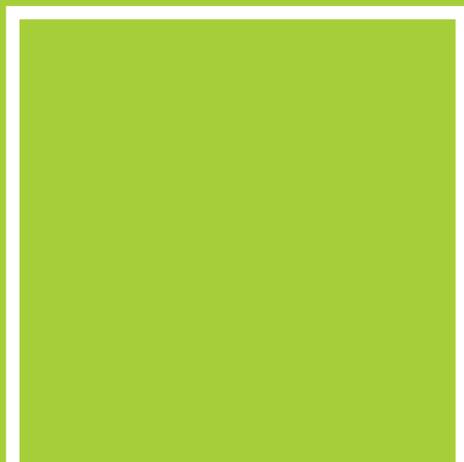
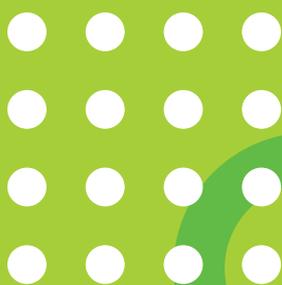
Action research

Organizations such as BBC Media Action and IMS conduct audience research, which looks at larger societal trends as well as characteristics and demographics of certain groups of people, to better understand how these factors relate to their behaviors and preferences. Where the approach takes on a pragmatic and cyclical learning through experiments and field trials, this can be termed as action research as a viability strategy. [IMS works](#) on co-development of new products and technical solutions with partners, such as through the [Digital Publishing Lab](#).

Foresight scoping

A range of future scenario planning methodologies are emerging in the media development terrain as a way to explore sustainability from a long-term perspective. Futurists start by imagining alternative plausible futures, and from this vantage work backwards to ascertain priority changes now. The Delphi method used in the [Future News 2035](#) project has a mandate to explore how the supply of trustworthy public interest news in the UK can be secured. [Ariadne](#) convened a funder's reflection imagining a different future to work on more resilient strategies, and applying a future mind set to grant making. Design fiction is a speculative design practice that mixes design and science fiction to create artifacts, scenarios, and experiences that explore possible futures. [What Is Design Fiction?](#) e.g. [storytelling on African digital futures](#). Scenario planning is a method for developing multiple possible futures. It involves identifying key trends and uncertainties, and then [developing scenarios that "look at the future not in order to predict it, but to give us a vantage point on the present and highlight emerging issues which we might need to address."](#) These are some of the [scenario processes](#) used in South Africa alone. Foresight/horizon scanning is used to identify and track emerging trends by gathering and analyzing information from a variety of sources. It often uses trends across a range of disciplines or areas—PEST, STEEPLE, and so on - to capture diverse types of information. Here is [UNDP's scanning system](#), and a futurist's [manual on horizon scanning](#). Backcasting is a method for developing a desired future and then working backwards to identify the steps that need to be taken to achieve it. It is often used by governments and businesses to develop long-term plans. It can be difficult to engage with depending on how far out that future is. This [report from the Asian Development Bank](#) illustrates the use of backcasting. Force field analysis is a tool for identifying driving forces and restraining forces around a particular desired change, and then developing strategies to overcome the latter and capitalize on the former. Here is a walkthrough of [how to use FFA](#).

Chapter 3



3.1 Next steps

Implementing the Media Viability Manifesto

The MVM is a starting point for more joined-up thinking to improve the economic conditions for media. It is a call to action in recognition of the urgency needed to overcome the broken funding models and markets around the globe in which diverse media organizations, content producers, and journalists are operating. As a flexible framework, it offers a common language and understanding of Media Viability. It highlights the strategic and practical contributions that the media development community and other stakeholders can make within this framework. Furthermore, it provides an overview of the work being done, predominantly by media development organizations and their partners, along with areas for future expansion.

The Media Viability Manifesto serves as a resource that can be used by a wide range of stakeholders, including policy and decision makers, media development organizations, governmental and non-governmental donors, academics, think tanks, media organizations of all sizes, as well as journalists and content producers seeking to identify their specific needs.

Limitations of the Media Viability Manifesto

The proposed joint understanding of Media Viability does not offer highly nuanced or theoretical definitions, as its primary use is as a practical tool in the field. Therefore, the terms and definitions will hold value to the academic community only as a starting point for further debate and scrutiny. Moreover, nuances in meaning between terms like viability and sustainability, as well as the relevance of the debate, may vary based on the linguistic and cultural context.

The MVM's Theory of Change serves as a comprehensive framework offering a systematic overview of the Media Viability field. However, not all goals and outcomes outlined in the Theory of Change are feasible in every media environment. For example, considering the significant opposition to independent media and deliberate efforts to suppress media freedom around the world, political will for implementing policies aimed at improving market conditions for media will be limited in certain contexts. Additionally, economic pre-conditions, including the business models and surveillance

practices of technology companies, present challenges to supporting the viability of independent media. In cases where political and private will is lacking or participatory approaches are simulated without genuine intent, alternative strategies are required to advance Media Viability. As always, these approaches must build on local ownership and tailored to the specific context to effectively address barriers.

At this stage, the Theory of Change lacks a foundation in data-driven problem analysis. Moreover, causal assumptions, activities, and outputs need to be developed and tested, especially for individual projects and programming within specific contexts. Monitoring and regular updating is also required to ensure its effectiveness.

The typology of Media Viability tools and approaches provides an overview of the activities implemented by a range of stakeholders and how they can be clustered. However, this summary only represents the existing initiatives at a certain point in time and is not exhaustive. An all-encompassing, co-created, and searchable database of tools, frameworks, initiatives, programs, and projects alongside their corresponding outcomes would be a helpful and rich resource.

Next steps: Putting the Media Viability Manifesto into practice

Just as the development of this manifesto was organic and needs-driven, its application should follow the same principles. Far from prescribing a conceptual, strategic, and practical framework on all media development organizations and related stakeholders, the MVM's purpose is to offer an overview in which both systematic discussions and specific strategic intent can be oriented. It can be used to situate initiatives, identify areas for collaboration more clearly, and assist with coordination and prioritization.

The **conceptual framework** is presented as a starting point, so that clearer communication can be achieved at the sector level based on a shared understanding. As a next step, the conceptual framework could be used for more informed reflections and strategizing on actual, realistic goals of Media Viability

initiatives in different contexts (viability vs. sustainability) and what this means for concrete approaches. They could also be validated and reviewed, using learnings from specific projects and initiatives.

The **Theory of Change** can be read in multiple directions. Organizations committed to using the Theory of Change, or parts of it, should operationalize it by attributing concrete measures and even indicators to the different outcomes. Designing a proper monitoring and evaluation scheme for the Theory of Change would be a key effort for putting it into practice and for validating it systematically. Furthermore, building on experiences and best-practices of the different stakeholders involved, the terrains of work and their outcomes could be prioritized depending on evidence on what works (and what doesn't), where change is most likely to happen, and where positive impact could be replicated. Collating existing evidence to verify the assumptions in the Theory of Change and combining such evidence to the specific elements of the Theory of Change will help make the case better to policymakers and donors and thus to achieve longer-term outcomes.

“Far from prescribing a conceptual, strategic, and practical framework on all media development organizations and related stakeholders, the MVM's purpose is to offer an overview in which both systematic discussions and specific strategic intent can be oriented.

The indicative **typology of existing tools and approaches** can help to get an overview of what other actors are doing and identify synergies and possible areas for collaboration on that basis. It could be extended into a living resource. The overview also assists in placing specific initiatives within the wider field of activities to see where there is potential for complementation, coordination, and thus increased impact. One example could be to identify more explicit actions needed to change the role of tech companies in the Media Viability discussion. Ultimately, the typology may also help to avoid duplication and repetition of approaches.

Overall, the MVM is a tool to review strategic programming, partner selection, monitoring and evaluation, coherent reporting mechanisms, and strategic advisory to donors and internal stakeholders alike. It can serve as a common strategic basis for developing programs as consortia consisting of various organizations, and for joint fundraising generally. The focus of next steps could include developing a research agenda for Media Viability and within that gathering evidence and measures of the impact of support to Media Viability (and the wider information ecosystem). Further, the MVM could be used as a coordination mechanism or prioritization tool such as for an advocacy action plan looking at advocacy for what, to whom, and how. The framework is relevant for media

development organizations in their role as intermediaries between donors and media and journalism organizations. It can serve as a catalyst in engaging new donors, guiding them through the complex field of Media Viability. After all, the goal is to harness effective synergies, and scale effective approaches in addressing the challenge of Media Viability.

The MVM initiative is a sea-change in the systematic collaboration of the global media development community in the field of Media Viability. In demonstrating willingness to work and learn together, the Media Viability Manifesto paves the way for more coordinated and impactful action. **Now it will depend on us, the different stakeholders engaged in strengthening Media Viability worldwide, to make the most of this common framework—and bring it to life.** Certainly not for its own sake, but to safeguard the fundamental right to freedom of expression and access to information around the world.

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The Media Viability Manifesto's Theory of Change

Jointly developed by 13 media development and support organizations

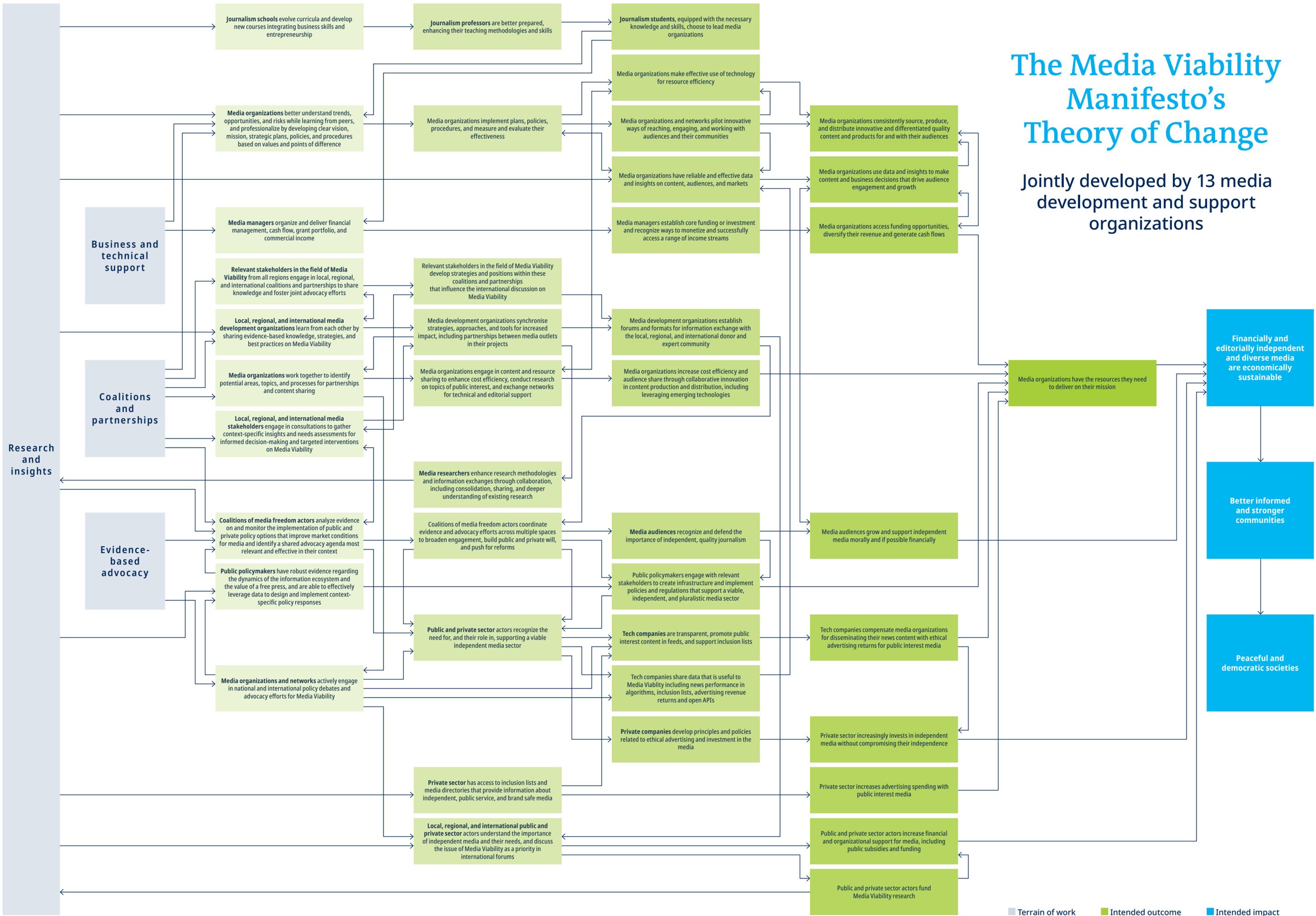


The Media Viability Manifesto core group:



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The Media Viability Manifesto initiative is coordinated by DW Akademie and International Media Support.

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