



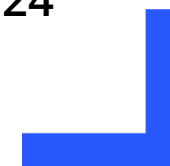
# Annual Report 2023

[www.ifpim.org](http://www.ifpim.org)



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# Letter from the CEO



The past year was a momentous one for the International Fund for Public Interest Media. On World Press Freedom Day, we announced the launch of our First Phase of Operations at United Nations HQ. Since then, we've been rapidly growing our footprint and impact as we strive to meet the important and increasing need for our resources across the world.

I am proud of the steps that the International Fund took in 2023 to advance its mission. We published our first strategy, expanded the global coalition supporting our work,

and increased our total investment in news publishers in our focus countries to over \$8 million USD across 31 portfolio organizations. We also created a new multilateral entity that will soon open its headquarters in Paris as an international organization. This was marked by a ceremony at the sixth edition of the Paris Peace Forum at which the Ghanaian, Moldovan, and French governments approved our Statutes and formally appointed our Board. The Republic of Ghana additionally announced that it would provide the International Fund with privileges and immunities and host our Africa regional headquarters in Accra.

In 2024, the International Fund will continue to scale up its activities in preparation for the next phase of its development. We plan to deploy more than \$20 million USD in direct grant funding, substantially growing our commitments to sustainability and innovation in global media markets. We will also begin analyzing the early learnings from our growing portfolio, assessing the impact of our financing, and iterating our grantmaking approach.

Our team has grown considerably, and we now have team members in all of the regions in which we work. Makmid Kamara is our Regional Director for Africa and the Middle East and is based in Accra, Ghana. Irene Jay Liu, who joined us from Google News Partnerships, heads up our work in the Asia-Pacific region from her base in Singapore. Vanina Berghella, our Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, has been with us for more than a year now and lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In Eastern Europe, our portfolio is led by our senior advisor Nino Danelia, who is based in Tbilisi, Georgia. Together, these leaders and

their teams have allowed us essential insight into the evolving media ecosystems and political economies of our focus countries.

## Public interest media is struggling all over the world

In recent months, our regional offices have noted a startling contraction of news media activities in our focus countries. Traditional news publishers are struggling to find new, consistent revenue streams and digital natives are struggling to grow their audiences as social media referrals to their content decline sharply. These contractions are compounded by challenging larger trends that are hurting journalism, such as autocratic expansion and an uncertain macroeconomic outlook in many countries.

As a record number of people around the world go to the polls in 2024, we are reminded of the tremendous impact that journalism can have on informing voting populations. In South Africa, Bush Radio, the country's oldest community radio station, used our financing to continue broadcasting through the country's energy crisis, which had forced them off air for several hours per day. Our support will ensure that Bush Radio — as well as our grantees in Ghana, Georgia, and other countries holding critical elections this year — can provide voters with access to vital, accurate information and hold candidates accountable in their campaigns.

DII-Ukraine has used its grant from the International Fund to ensure it is able to expand its public interest output. The outcome has been a sharp growth in reach — in mid

2023, monthly website views increased by 27% compared to the previous six-month period and the number of subscribers of the YouTube-channel increased by 39%. This has resulted in the reinforcement of fact-based, accessible, Russian-language journalism against an onslaught of Russian disinformation.

We are also encouraged by the number of systems-level initiatives to positively change the structure of journalism markets. In Brazil, for example, we became the founding funder of the Journalism and Tech Task Force, which will commission research focusing on the relationship between tech platforms and media and seek new equilibria that could sustain independent journalism. The Task Force is led by Brazilian founder and journalist Paula Miraglia, one of the most respected new media professionals in the world.

The International Fund is committed to supporting locally led, diverse media organizations and newsrooms in all our regions. For example, in Lebanon we fund Daraj, one of the most important sources of independent journalism for Arabic speakers. It is led by Alia Ebrahim and Diana Moukalled, whose work continues to demonstrate the positive potential of quality journalism. In Nepal, we support Himalmedia, which has used our funding to recruit a new cohort of journalists from traditionally underrepresented communities in Nepal. Gender inclusivity is just one of the many dimensions of diversity that we value deeply at the International Fund, and we aim to live our values: more than half of our team, 55% of our Executive Group, and 62% of our Board identify as women.

## We need to scale up support — and do so collectively

There are many changes facing the media landscape. In addition to the financial challenges for journalism, disinformation is growing in reach and power. Fostering resilience within our civic information spaces has become a crucial part of our work. The creation and dissemination of reliable, trustworthy information are fundamental to supporting democracy, driving economic development, and effectively managing conflict and crisis situations. By collaborating with exceptional news media organizations globally, the International Fund is at the forefront of enhancing the vitality — and endurance — of healthy media ecosystems. The organizations we support often become the benchmark for factual, evidence-based journalism in their contexts. Without those benchmarks, communities are far more susceptible to disinformation and destabilization.

As quality journalism erodes, information integrity has also declined in almost every country in the world. Yet, as OECD data shows, donor support to media is alarmingly low and has remained largely static over the last decade. Perhaps most egregiously, less than 10% of the assistance that is allocated to news media actually reaches media entities in middle- and low-income countries. This is what makes the International Fund so distinctive: our work is to scale up financial assistance to journalism, to target it more directly at media entities, and to generate long term, systemic solutions that can sustain healthy information ecosystems.

Learning from these interventions across our focus regions, the International Fund aims to develop insights around the economic resilience of media that can be shared with news outlets, fellow funders, and media development actors. This work will be led by our 'What Works' Unit, for which we confirmed new funding in 2023. We will work closely with our grantees to develop monitoring, evaluation, and learning approaches that are need-driven and responsive to the diverse context in which our partners work.

The challenges facing public interest media cannot be solved by any one country, or the journalism community alone. They require collective action. The International Fund was established to pool resources and support effective solutions to the crisis of economic resilience for media in the Global South. Our innovative, multilateral governance structure allows us to draw on capabilities and ideas from an array of public, private, and non-profit actors. Acting alone, even the most powerful states and companies have struggled to halt the erosion of fact-based journalism. If we act together we can ensure our societies regain shared truths and shared narratives: the essential elements for us to sustain trust in our democracies.

I want to thank you, friends of the International Fund, for your continued support. I hope we can continue to work together on this vital mission.

With gratitude,

**Nishant Lalwani**  
CEO

# 「Support for the Fund」

The International Fund for Public Interest Media is an independent fund made possible with the generous financial support of the donors below, including the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*.



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*The International Fund for Public Interest Media is a fiscally sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.*

# Launching a strategic framework to achieve early results

In May, the International Fund announced its First Phase of Operations (FPO), which will continue through mid-2025. Its strategic approach during this period has several key pillars.

## Defining Public Interest Media

The International Fund supports independent, public interest media through funding organizations that either produce it directly or work to enable its production. It defines public interest media as that which:

- Exists to inform the public on matters that concern them or helps to ensure that power is held to account;
- Provides fact-based information in a trustworthy manner;
- Commits to the demonstrable pursuit of truth, for example through sourcing practices and the representation of the audiences it hopes to serve;
- Is editorially independent;
- Is transparent about processes, finances, and policies used to produce it.

## Identifying areas of impact

The International Fund aims to boost the economic resilience of independent media organizations and bring about a new paradigm of sustainability for journalism. It hopes to create impact in three primary ways:



1. **Sustaining outlets that are both working in the public interest and in danger of extinction or capture**, recognizing the value of public interest media for public participation and civic engagement.



2. **Supporting outlets transforming their operations to create stronger public value** and achieve greater economic resilience.



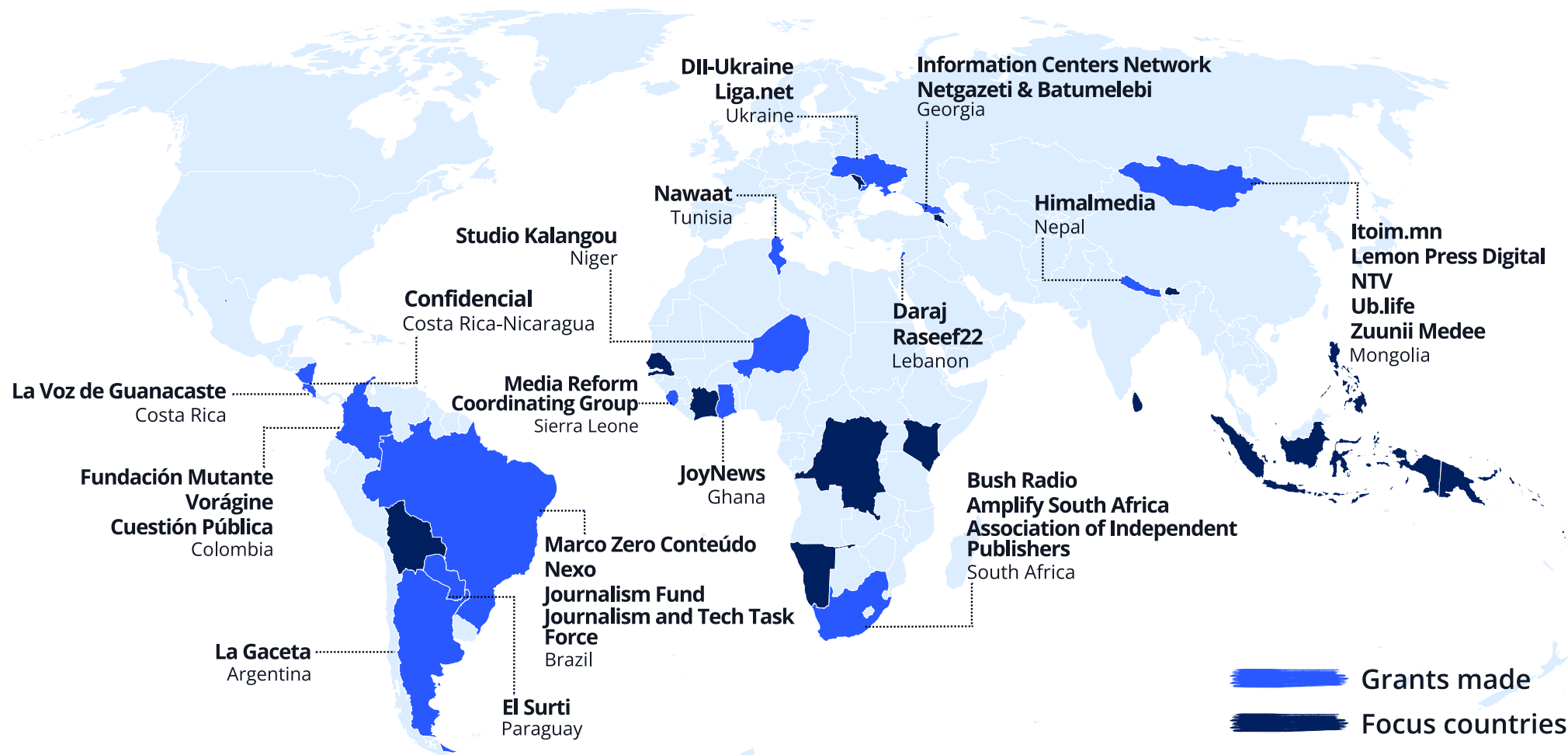
3. **Fostering initiatives that seek to address structural market challenges and shape change at the national and global levels** to enable media markets to function more effectively for the public interest.

The International Fund also believes that **journalism needs to evolve to better serve the public**. The International Fund therefore supports public interest media organizations seeking to **broaden audience reach and deepen engagement with diverse audiences**, with the goal of ensuring that more communities, particularly those that have been historically underrepresented in the media, can access and participate meaningfully in the creation of the news.



## Growing global engagement

Throughout the FPO, the International Fund will work in 39 countries across its four focus regions: Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe.



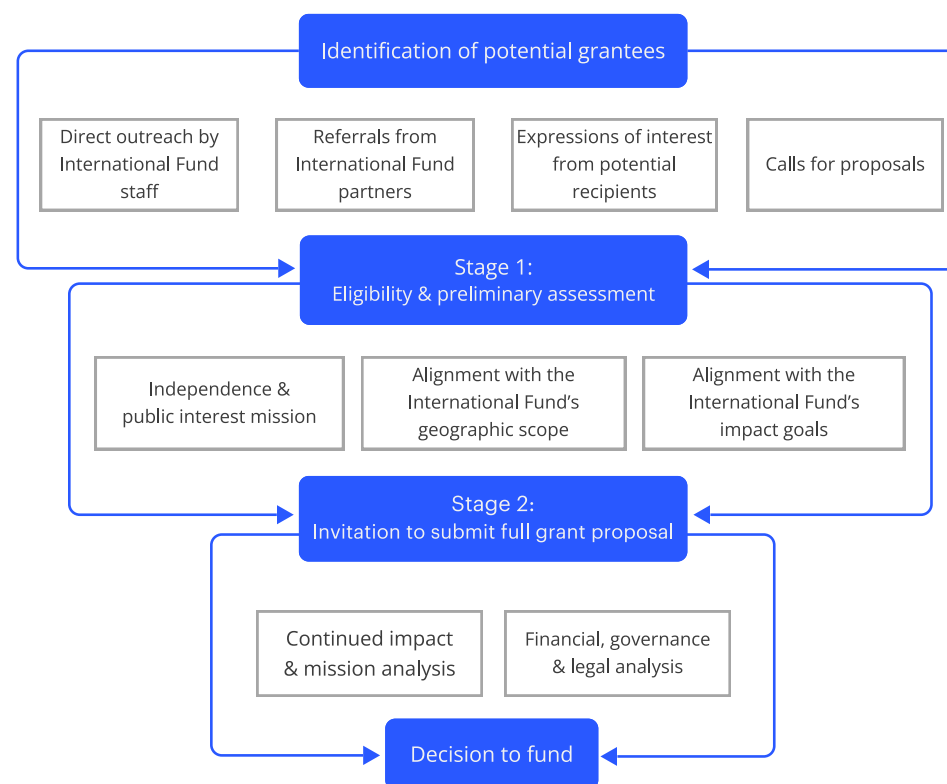
# Scaling up grant-making

In 2023, the International Fund significantly grew its grant-making activities. Following the launch of its First Phase of Operations (FPO, mid-2023–mid-2025), it committed more than \$5 million USD across 17 grants and direct support to media organizations publishing in a range of contexts and formats, as well as to organizations working to enable a better, more sustainable future for independent, public interest media.

This new grantee cohort built on the success of the International Fund's inaugural call for proposals, launched in May 2022, and on early lessons learned from those initial grant recipients. In total, the International Fund has now committed more than \$8 million USD in funding to public interest media ecosystems in its focus regions. In 2024, it plans to deploy more than \$20 million USD in additional funding.

## Grant-making process

The International Fund is committed to equity and transparency in all its activities and processes, including the selection of grant recipients. It uses a two-stage assessment process to select grant recipients, outlined below.



More information about the International Fund's grant-making progress (including an FAQ and additional information for organizations interested in receiving funding) is available at [www.ifpim.org](http://www.ifpim.org).



# New grants made in 2023

In 2023, the International Fund significantly scaled up its grant-making activities, committing more than \$5 million USD in direct funding and support to its public interest grantees. Three of the International Fund's latest interventions are highlighted in this section; all remaining members of this latest grantee cohort are described as well.

## Mongolia Cohort

In Mongolia, the International Fund launched a three-year cohort program designed to both promote innovation and financial sustainability for participating public interest media organizations as well as to enable collaboration across the Mongolian media ecosystem, which has received comparatively low levels of investment and development support.

In partnership with the Nest Center for Journalism Innovation and Development, an Ulaanbaatar-based NGO, and Financial Times Strategies (FTS), the International Fund solicited applications from a wide range of public interest media organizations before selecting the final participants, listed below alphabetically:

- **Itoim.mn**, an online news platform dedicated to analytical and investigative reporting;
- **Lemon Press Digital**, a young and ambitious publication focused on financial news;
- **NTV**, an established TV broadcaster with a reputation for holding power to account;

- **UB.life**, a digital news and lifestyle platform focused on reaching younger audiences;
- **Zuunii Medee (Century News)**, Mongolia's second-oldest private print newspaper.

All organizations participated in a four-day strategic planning workshop, jointly led by the Nest Center and FTS, during which they articulated a strategic plan and identified key milestones.

*"For start-ups, or small companies like ours, defining our strategies and ensuring sustainable activity in the media market is a huge challenge," said Khulan Jugder, deputy director of UB.life and Gereg magazine. "We are very pleased that this program allows us to define our three-year strategy and ... allows us to experiment without any burden on our daily operation."*

All participating organizations will receive financial and developmental support from the International Fund, Nest, and FTS over the course of three years, as they work to deliver against their strategic plans.



Participants at the four-day strategic planning workshop led by the Nest Center and Financial Times Strategies. (Photo courtesy of the Nest Center)

## Netgazeti and Batumelebi

### Georgia

In 2023, the Georgian government attempted to adopt the controversial Russian-inspired foreign agent law, posing significant threats to civil society and independent voices. In response, Batumelebi and Netgazeti, jointly published regional and national independent online news platforms, produced extensive critical reporting and analysis on the proposed legislation. Their approach included exposing parallels with the Russian law; showcasing the vital role that civil society, which relies on international donor support, plays in Georgia, and engaging influential figures to express concerns about the law. These measures contributed to widespread national engagement and ignited international outcry, ultimately forcing the government to abandon the bill.

Georgia is now gearing up for national elections later in 2024, which come at a pivotal moment for the country given its closing civic space, proximity to the war in Ukraine, and potential EU candidacy. This means that the role of independent media outlets, like Netgazeti and Batumelebi, in providing public interest reporting to national and regional audiences is more important than ever. Yet these outlets face mounting pressures, including an increasingly polarized media landscape, the politicization of the advertising market, and a decrease in apolitical funding sources, all of which put significant financial strain on their ability to maintain current operational levels.

As economic and political pressures intensify for Netgazeti and Batumelebi, support from the International Fund will enable them to sustain their pivotal role in the ecosystem, ensuring the

continued delivery of their quality and balanced reporting for large, diverse audiences at a critical moment for the country.

## Confidencial

### *Costa Rica–Nicaragua*

Founded in 1996, Confidencial has a long history of holding power to account in Nicaragua. Originally a print newspaper, Confidencial now publishes online, covering a broad range of political, economic, and human rights issues. Since June 2021, Confidencial has operated in exile from Costa Rica as a result of government harassment and crackdown on media and free expression (in 2018, its offices were raided by the National Police).

Despite being forced to relocate, Confidencial continues to carry out meaningful investigative reporting, providing vital information to the Nicaraguan diaspora — those still in the country as well as those displaced due to political unrest. Confidencial also supports other media operating in exile throughout the region, providing a leading example of cross-border collaboration to enhance regional media ecosystems — even in the face of government crackdowns.

With the International Fund's support, Confidencial aims to counter the threat of independent media extinction in Nicaragua by serving as a successful example of exiled media in the region. The grant will allow Confidencial to sustain its operations, expand its distribution network using a partnership model with other exile media, and shift from survival mode to focusing on long-term sustainability and growth.

## Africa and the Middle East

### Amplify South Africa

#### *South Africa*

Amplify South Africa is a continuation of the South Africa Media Innovation Programme (SAMIP), a media business capacity-building program managed by the Media Development Investment Fund. Over the past six years, SAMIP has successfully supported 27 media outlets in the country with a mix of advisory services, training, and financial support. The International Fund's grant will allow Amplify South Africa to continue its important work, supporting a new cohort of independent media outlets with funding, coaching, workshops, and training with the aim of developing the tools and skills needed to experiment with different revenue and audience generation opportunities.

### Association of Independent Publishers

#### *South Africa*

AIP is a membership-based organization in South Africa that represents grassroots independent publishers (print and digital). AIP's membership comprises hundreds of small, locally owned media outlets from across the country, including newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and online publications that publish primarily in townships, rural areas, and small towns in all 11 official languages of South Africa. The International Fund grant will support AIP's work to improve the long-term sustainability of its members.

### JoyNews

#### *Ghana*

Established in 1995, JoyNews started as the first licensed private radio station in Ghana. It has evolved into one of the largest and most staunchly independent media channels in the country, renowned for exposing corruption within public institutions. The International Fund grant will support the station's work to continue pursuing its mission in an increasingly difficult operating environment. This funding will specifically enable the organization to invest in essential digital infrastructure, including technological upgrades and staff capacity building. The ultimate objective is to optimize its digital assets for the efficient dissemination of content.

## Eastern Europe

### Information Centers Network

#### *Georgia*

ICN consists of two platforms: Mtis Ambebi and Sakartvelos Ambebi, both focused on reaching underserved communities in Georgia with a particular emphasis on the mountainous regions. It plays a unique role in the media landscape, combining investigative journalism with solutions-focused coverage of overlooked subjects and regions, which often then gain traction at a national level. The grant from the International Fund will enable ICN to continue its impactful work in remote regions, serving underprivileged audiences with limited access to public interest information, and inspiring civic engagement.

## Latin America and the Caribbean

### Cuestión Pública

#### Colombia

Cuestión Pública, a young and digitally native independent news organization, is well known for its innovative investigative data journalism covering issues related to corruption. The grant from the International Fund will help Cuestión Pública strengthen its content creation model, develop new types of innovative and inclusive content, and establish itself as a benchmark for investigative journalism in the country. The organization is also looking to experiment with AI solutions to optimize its social media strategy and to improve internal protocols with respect to journalist well-being.

### El Surti

#### Paraguay

El Surti stands out for its effective use of memes and illustrations in its reporting. The organization focuses on critical public interest issues, including climate change, disinformation issues, and gender-related concerns, always through the lens of holding power to account. With the support of the International Fund, the outlet is looking to further refine and expand its innovative approach to impact journalism. This involves testing and implementing new content formats, ultimately aiming to inspire civic action through strong investigative journalism and compelling storytelling.

### Journalism and Tech Task Force

#### Brazil

Journalism and Tech Task Force aims to become a recognized knowledge hub and thought leader on the challenges facing the media sector, particularly as they relate to tech platforms. With the International Fund's support, the Task Force will commission research on the relationship between tech platforms and media actors and disseminate findings broadly throughout the media ecosystem; support communication efforts to raise awareness and develop partnerships on these issues; and explore the creation of an 'urgent response fund' meant to enable support from civil society for public interest media. The Task Force will be led by the recognized journalist Paula Miraglia and will be hosted by International Resource for Impact and Storytelling (IRIS), a donor-collaborative platform.

### Journalism Fund

#### Brazil

Instituto Incube, with support from the Associação de Jornalismo Digital (Apor), a digital media association dedicated to promoting a free, diverse, and pluralistic press, will begin the process of designing and establishing a new Journalism Fund to support public interest media organizations in Brazil, in partnership with a cohort of philanthropic organizations and media practitioners. The new fund will focus on supporting those media that have had fewer opportunities to access funding and are underrepresented in the media landscape. The International Fund's grant will allow the partnership to design the fund's initial structure and to launch its pilot round of grants to independent media organizations.

### La Gaceta

#### Argentina

Founded in 1912, La Gaceta is an independent newsroom in the province of Tucumán, located in the Northwest of Argentina. La Gaceta is the fourth best-selling print newspaper and one of the most visited online media in the country. It is a prestigious institution known for its quality journalism covering economic, political, cultural, and local issues. The organization will use the grant from the International Fund to attract and retain a younger audience and innovate through the creation of new digital products. It will also engage in an internal transformation process aimed at nurturing innovation and inclusivity in the workplace.

### La Voz de Guanacaste

#### Costa Rica

LVG is a nonprofit bilingual (Spanish and English) digital media outlet focused on providing the local Guanacaste community with high-quality, hyper-regional investigative journalism. LVG is a leader in Costa Rica's growing digital media landscape as well as a pioneer in collaborative journalism. The International Fund will support LVG to invest in AI innovation, produce more high-quality journalism that showcases a variety of traditionally underrepresented voices, and strengthen its connection with younger audiences.

# Initial insights developed from pilot grant-making round

In May 2022, the International Fund announced the launch of an open call for proposals as part of a pilot funding round, building on successful early fundraising and a demonstrated need from media organizations in its focus regions. After receiving more than 200 proposals, the International Fund awarded 13 grants to its inaugural grantee cohort, the final of which were confirmed in early 2023.

Now, more than a year later, early insights and lessons learned from these grants are emerging. As the International Fund continues to develop its research agenda, overseen by the 'What Works' Unit, it will scale up the breadth and depth of learnings shared across the media and media development sectors, in close partnership with its grantees.

The case studies below represent a sample of key initial takeaways from the International Fund's first grants to media organizations. Along with learnings from across the rest of the International Fund's portfolio, these early insights will inform future priorities.

# Nepal's Himalmedia

## Promising results from investing in diverse newsrooms

For more than 20 years, Himalmedia has been a mainstay of independent journalism in Nepal. And it has suffered for its independence. Throughout its history, the journalists and founders of Himalmedia have suffered attacks, often physical, that have gone unpunished. Their newsroom has been stormed, distribution routes attacked, and journalism undermined. The founders have been jailed. But they have held strong, clinging to the principles of fact-based independent journalism.

But while the impact of Himalmedia's journalism cannot be overstated, the organization — like many of its size around the world — has grappled with the continuity and growth of its mandate. With one print magazine

and two websites, the organization has traditionally catered to thought leaders, including politicians, academics, and others in positions of influence in Nepal. However, with the support of the grant from the International Fund, Himalmedia plans to broaden its reach to a more diverse and, crucially, younger audience through developing a newsroom that better reflects Nepal's diversity.

**The core question is: can a more diverse newsroom result in a broader spectrum of issue coverage, and can this inclusive content engage a more diverse and interested audience? The early signs are promising.**



The recruitment of five new journalist fellows, chosen from an open call that attracted a strong response of 117 applications, is already a testament to the program's success. After an extensive six-month induction, including training, mentorship, and immersion in the principles of journalism, the cohort of fellows are already making a notable impact on Himalmedia's published content, bringing fresh perspectives and addressing underreported issues within their communities.

Dhanu, one of the fellows, leveraged her proficiency in the Bajurali dialect to report a ground-breaking story on shifting labor migration patterns in the far-west district of Bajura. This story resonated not only within the community but was also translated into English, amplifying its impact.

Shamshad, a Muslim fellow from the border areas, uncovered the activities of a far-right fundamentalist group, known as the Hindu Swayamsewak Sangh, affecting his family and community. The resulting report, a collaboration between Shamshad and the editorial team, shed light on previously unreported issues.

As the fellows now complete their first exercises in in-depth reporting, the importance of their presence in the newsroom becomes even more clear. An upcoming longform story by Urmila, another fellow, on an indigenous

community's dispossession of its land, for instance, calls attention to an aspect of land relations that receives next to no coverage in the mainstream press.

According to Shamik Mishra, the critical studies teacher for the fellows, "the selected journalists not only come from minority backgrounds and historically marginalised communities, but the group is equally diverse in their upbringing, education, and professional exposure. Bringing them together itself was an audacious attempt at doing something good and one that has potential long-term implications for Nepali journalism and society."

As a next step, the fellowship program is now planning an exercise in engagement reporting. Working with a field site community, fellows will learn about what information community members typically seek, how they seek it out, and ultimately produce multimedia content tailored specifically for their needs. The journalistic practice that evolves from this exercise, committed to radical inclusion, will both energize Himalmedia's mission and support its transition toward a membership model that will bolster its sustainability.



Top: Himalmedia fellow Urmila listens to the story of a woman protesting exploitative money-lending practices. Right: Himalmedia fellows with senior journalist Yubaraj Ghimire. (Photos courtesy of Himalmedia)



# Resilience Amidst Conflict

**DII-Ukraine's journey to preserve public interest content and strengthen audience engagement**

As the war in Ukraine continues, the mission of DII-Ukraine (formerly the Donetsk Institute of Information) — to provide independent public interest journalism to all, particularly those most vulnerable to disinformation and propaganda in occupied or newly liberated territories across Ukraine's eastern and southern regions — becomes more critical than ever. Launched in 2003, DII-Ukraine is one of the oldest outlets in the region and has provided uninterrupted coverage to its audiences despite its forced relocations in 2014 and 2022.



*Top: Members of the DII-Ukraine team.*

*Right: DII-Ukraine journalist Anastasia Volkova reporting from Siversk in the Donetsk region, less than 9km from the front line.*  
*(Photos courtesy of DII-Ukraine)*



The people of the Donbas region have been systematically targeted with propaganda and disinformation, making it a challenging environment to distinguish facts from state-sponsored fiction. Against this backdrop, DII-Ukraine plays a vital role in reporting on the lived realities of these communities. Its coverage includes regular monitoring and updates on investigations into local corruption and often overlooked humanitarian issues. Unlike most mainstream Ukrainian and international outlets, DII offers content in Russian, the primary language of many in the region.

Support from the International Fund has ensured that DII-Ukraine can sustain and even expand its production of public interest content while adapting to myriad new challenges amidst an active conflict: increased online censorship and cyber-attacks, the collapse of commercial revenues, security challenges, and difficulties retaining and hiring staff. Over the grant period, DII-Ukraine experimented with new interventions to address its audience's evolving needs. This included strengthening its technical infrastructure following a major cyber-attack, expanding its editorial team,



and experimenting with new platforms and formats. In the first half of 2023, DII-Ukraine successfully transformed into a fully bilingual website (adding content in Ukrainian in addition to Russian), launched a TikTok channel, expanded its YouTube presence with new formats, and introduced 'long reads'. These changes correlated with a 27% increase in monthly website views compared to the previous six-month period, a 39% increase in YouTube subscribers, and millions of views on TikTok.

Investments in audience analytics have also enabled DII-Ukraine to tailor content to better resonate with its audience. For instance, insights revealed a strong interest from readers in in-depth and investigative explorations of war-related issues, such as the "ecological impact of the war and its effects on mental health." The popularity of short-form video content also prompted DII-Ukraine to establish a Ukrainian YouTube channel which contributed to increasing the share of its audience under 34.

These continued efforts to adjust to audience needs also made an impact on audience trust, as evidenced by recent research on regional media in Ukraine conducted by the Media Development Foundation. The data collected for this study suggest that DII-Ukraine has built a higher level of trust than the average regional media outlet and highlighted that visitors to its News of Donbas website view almost 30% more content per visit than the regional media average.

DII-Ukraine continues to make strides and find innovative and impactful ways to gain the trust of its audiences, even amidst the challenge of operating in a war zone and a media environment ripe with propaganda and disinformation.

# Daraj

## Pioneering experimentation for growth

Adaptability and experimentation. These are two values guiding the resilience of Daraj, an independent digital media platform based in Lebanon. Founded in 2017 by three seasoned journalists disillusioned with the limitations of large news media corporations, Daraj has emerged as an indispensable source of independent journalism for Arabic speaking people around the world and built a reputation for its hard-hitting investigative journalism and international collaborations.

Daraj's values of adaptability and experimentation are especially evident through its audience engagement and revenue generation strategies. With support from the International Fund, Daraj has adjusted content formats and the length of stories and developed greater insight into which platforms work best for which content style with the assistance of an AI impact tracker called RADAR. This tool, focusing on impact often missed by social media metrics, allows Daraj's team to track changes in policy, legal actions, community mobilization, and more.

This effort has led to a shift in content formats. Daraj now produces 30% more video content per month. This type of responsive audience strategy has been proven to be vital for deepening audience engagement. Daraj's investment in engaging young people has also paid off: in 2020, young people (18–24 years) represented 6% of its audience; presently, this share is 25.1%, standing close in proportion to its largest age group audience (25–43 years).

Daraj aspires to provide an alternative perspective of the Arab region to a broader international audience, challenging and dismantling discrimination while offering impartial and accurate analyses of news events affecting its audience. Supported by the International Fund's grant, Daraj has also introduced an English page on its website and added English subtitles to much of its video content, broadening its reach.

Continuously advancing its experimentation in building new revenue streams, Daraj is also in the final stages of negotiations with large streaming services to collaborate on the production of two docu-series tackling issues that until very recently were considered taboos in the Arab world: mental and reproductive health. While both series rely heavily on high quality journalism and storytelling, they differ in formats. The first delves into the story of a leading Arab singer whose struggles with depression and drug addiction made headlines and went viral on social media. The second belongs to the reality TV category and tackles sexual health problems based on the testimonies and life stories of a group of women.

Those endeavors align with Daraj's ambition to band its work together with the documentary and storytelling sector as part of its consultancy

and production arm that will facilitate additional income to fund news reporting, while contributing to a healthier production ecosystem by setting higher standards of journalism and writing.

Building upon its ongoing dedication to diversifying revenue streams, Daraj is exploring potential synergies, alliances, and mergers with other independent Arab media organizations to optimize revenue generation and reduce costs. Recognizing the importance of such

alliances in confronting the immense challenges of media viability in the region collectively, it is in advanced talks to establish the "Advertising Alliance of Independent Media (AIM)" with over 10 like-minded entities across the Arab world. These networks and alliances are crucial factors in building resilience.

Altogether, Daraj has proven to be a key point of information for Arabic speaking people, and its culture of adaptability and experimentation has been a distinctive feature of that success.



Some of Daraj's Board of Directors and team in action. (Photo courtesy of Daraj)

# Media Reform Coordinating Group

## The Sierra Leone National Media Fund (NaFPIM)

While the traditional business model for news media flails around the world, new ideas to help fund media are slowly emerging. However, in some markets, even those traditional models driven by advertising never showed much success. Fledgling economies, emerging from conflict and navigating poor infrastructure, have been grappling with this challenge for some time. Sierra Leone, then, is an ideal candidate for understanding how alternate funding mechanisms for news media might operate — there, and elsewhere.

The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), a non-profit media support organization, is at the forefront of establishing the National Fund for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM) in Sierra Leone. With support from the International Fund, NaFPIM is designed to offer essential assistance to a diverse range of public interest media organizations across the country.

*Interview with Dr. Francis Sowa, Director of MRCG*

### *What role does NaFPIM play in addressing the needs of the media ecosystem of Sierra Leone?*

If you look at the content produced by a majority of the media in Sierra Leone, it is of low quality, and the primary reason is a financial one. For instance, a media organization aiming to investigate stories on corruption, rape, or education often lacks the resources for transportation, essential equipment for content production, journalists with time to conduct thorough investigations. So, stories of this nature typically fade away in the process. What you see, instead, is extensive coverage of press releases and events, as these sources may provide financial support for content creation. However, with core funding directed towards these media institutions, they would have access to the necessary equipment and resources to produce impactful public interest stories.

### *How did the concept of the national fund originate, and what is its primary objective?*

The government of Sierra Leone, media stakeholders, and the BBC Media Action came together to host a national conference on the future of media viability in Sierra Leone. Eventually, the conference turned into a platform that helped formulate the first National Action Plan for Media Viability in Sierra Leone. The need for a national fund for public interest media was one of the most prominent recommendations coming out of the Action Plan. The fund's purpose is to assist media outlets to deliver independent, impartial content to the citizens of Sierra Leone. It aims to:

- Continue producing high-quality content: Empowering citizens to make informed decisions and fostering inclusive discussions on issues affecting their lives.
- Promote innovation and excellence: Granting recipients the freedom to test new approaches and align their editorial outputs with audience needs.
- Foster media viability and sustainability: Enabling media outlets to strengthen internal systems and diversify revenue streams.

*How has the International Fund helped your progress, and what were the critical issues you needed to address before launching the fund?*

The International Fund provided the seed money for the secretariat's operations, enabling the development of the NaFPIM's operating framework. We now have a well-defined governance structure in place and a board that has met regularly to deliberate on key issues such as the formulation of the selection criteria and addressing operational challenges. We have established a solid foundation for the fund's effective and transparent functioning.

*What have been the most significant challenges you've faced so far?*

The biggest challenge we've encountered revolves around securing counterpart funding from the government. The fund's model and concept called for government support, and while there has been unwavering political will, manifested through vocal commitments from the President and key ministers, the crucial financial backing has yet to materialize. Several factors contribute to this delay, including the conduct of the elections during this period and the government's limited budget, primarily allocated to pressing urgent needs like health, education, and poverty alleviation. Investing in the fund might be perceived as less prioritized given these circumstances. This delay has had a cascading effect on the expectations of media practitioners who had anticipated an earlier start to the fund's operations.

*Where do you see the Fund in a year's time?*

We want to bring in more funders and we believe another national engagement is essential, involving key stakeholders such as the UN and World Bank. This broader involvement of key stakeholders will bring together a set of diverse supporters to the fund, critical for the fund's sustainability and independence. Additionally, we are registering the fund as a legal entity which in the initial phase would be managed by the MRCG. This step is crucial to establish the fund's autonomy.



*Dr. Francis Sowa speaking at the launch of the National Fund for Public Interest Media.  
(Photo courtesy of MRCG)*

In the coming year, I see a fully operational fund with substantial evidence showcasing its impact. Within the initial year of grant distribution, our objective is to witness a tangible improvement in public interest content. I am confident that the impact will become evident in how this content addresses national issues and fosters engagement with the public.

*What advice would you give to others who are in the process of setting up a national fund?*

Organizations must prioritize getting their funds' governance and structures right. It is crucial that management and governance can operate independently, free from external influence from any state or institution. The structure should be reflective of key national actors in the media ecosystem. It's also important to diversify funding sources from the very start to maintain autonomy and avoid potential challenges.



# Building an international organization to sustain media in low- and middle-income countries

In 2023, the International Fund made significant progress toward its establishment as the first-of-its-kind multilateral organization designed to support journalism in low- and middle-income countries. It is now well on its way to opening its global headquarters in Paris with the privileges and immunities of an international organization in France. The development of regional offices is also underway, including following the Republic of Ghana's announcement that it would host the International Fund's Africa headquarters in Accra, also with privileges and immunities.

## A year in review

### Launching the First Phase of Operations

In May, Journalist-in-Residence Khadija Patel announced the launch of the International Fund's First Phase of Operations (FPO) on the floor of the United Nations General Assembly. The announcement, which took place as part of the 30th anniversary recognition of World Press Freedom Day, covered the International Fund's strategic focus and geographic scope for the FPO, and reinforced the urgency of its mission to sustain independent media across low- and middle-income markets.



*Khadija Patel, journalist-in-residence, announcing the launch of the FPO*

"What we are now confronting is a world where media organizations are contracting, the number of journalists in active employment rapidly dwindling, and with them the number of stories in the public interest. The result is that we understand less of the complexities of who we are, we are alienating from the big decisions made in our name, and we are ultimately deprived of our human rights."

### Creating a new entity in France

In November, the International Fund's Statutes were approved by the Governments of France, Ghana, and Moldova, during a ceremony at the sixth edition of the Paris Peace Forum. This ceremony triggered both the International Fund's creation as an independent legal entity in France as well as the formal appointment of its independent Board of experts.



Photo courtesy of ©Laurent Hazgui/CAPA Pictures for PPF 2023

"I'm happy to announce here, today, that the Republic of Ghana has entered a partnership with the International Fund for Public Interest Media. Specifically, Ghana will host the Africa regional headquarters of the International Fund and extend the same privileges and immunities offered to other international organizations. I call on all other states to partner with the International Fund."

*Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, Minister for Information, Republic of Ghana, at the sixth edition of the Paris Peace Forum*

## Growing an ambitious and experienced team

The International Fund's work is guided in the day to day by its Secretariat, led by Chief Executive Officer Nishant Lalwani, Chief Operating Officer Amélie Baudot, and an experienced Executive Group. Biographies for all Executive Group members can be found below. In 2024, the International Fund's team will continue to grow, including to fill out the regional teams guiding the implementation of the International Fund's grant-making priorities and strategy.

## Building out an innovative governance structure

Throughout the year, the International Fund continued to build out its Board and Council, the two bodies comprising its innovative governance structure. The Board is responsible for overall strategy, impact, and performance, including through approving grants, ensuring that funding decisions are made independently, and protecting the editorial integrity of the International Fund's grantees. The Council is responsible for accountability and oversight, ensuring that the International Fund is operating within its mandate and that its financial resources are safeguarded.

The International Fund made significant progress toward confirming the inaugural Council in 2023. In addition to France as the host state, the Presidents of Moldova and Timor Leste agreed to take seats, as did the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, the Ford Foundation, and Google, as the International Fund's highest International Organization, philanthropic, and corporate donors, respectively. UNESCO has also agreed to join as an observer, and an additional observer seat is reserved for the Global Forum for Media Development. The Council is core to the International Fund's commitment to forging meaningful connections between governments and media organizations across the Global North and Global South. Additional appointments will be confirmed throughout 2024.



*The Statutes of the International Fund were approved at the sixth edition of the Paris Peace Forum. From left to right: Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Minister of State for Development, Francophonie and International Partnerships, French Republic; Maria Ressa, Nobel laureate and International Fund Board co-chair; Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, Minister for Information, Republic of Ghana; Julie Posetti, International Fund Board member; Nicu Popescu, Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Republic of Moldova. (Photo courtesy of ©Laurent Hazgui/CAPA Pictures for PPF 2023)*



# Board

In 2023, the International Fund confirmed the appointments of two new members to its Board: Stefan Löfven, former prime minister of Sweden, and Bettina Tucci Bartsiotas, former assistant secretary-general and controller of the United Nations. Ms. Tucci Bartsiotas will also serve as the chair of the Board's Audit and Finance Committee.

Mr. Löfven and Ms. Tucci Bartsiotas joined Maria Ressa and Mark Thompson, co-chairs, and Gina Chua, Pascal Lamy, Nanjala Nyabola, and Julie Posetti on the Board.



**Maria Ressa**  
*Co-chair*

Nobel laureate Maria Ressa is the co-founder and CEO of Rappler, the digital news site in the Philippines known for its hard-hitting investigative journalism. For her work on disinformation and fake news, Ms. Ressa was named Time magazine's 2018 Person of the Year and has received many other international awards.



**Mark Thompson**  
*Co-chair*

Mark Thompson is chairman and CEO of CNN Worldwide, Chairman of Ancestry.com, an advisor to the Supervisory Board of Axel Springer SE, and a Trustee of the Royal Shakespeare Company. He previously served as president and CEO of The New York Times Company and as director-general of the BBC.



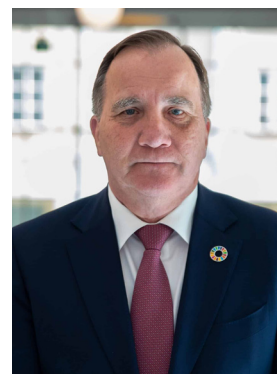
**Gina Chua**  
*Board member*

Gina Chua is executive editor of the digital media start-up Semafor. Chua has extensive experience leading newsrooms, having recently served as the executive editor of Reuters and previously as editor-in-chief of the South China Morning Post and The Asian Wall Street Journal.



**Pascal Lamy**  
*Board member*

Pascal Lamy is vice president of the Paris Peace Forum, former European commissioner for trade, director general of the World Trade Organization, and coordinator of the Jacques Delors Institute (Paris, Berlin, Bruxelles).



**Stefan Löfven**  
*Board member*

Stefan Löfven served as the Prime Minister of Sweden from October 2014 to November 2021. He currently holds several domestic and international positions including as President of PES, which brings together labor and social democratic parties across Europe, and as chair of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).



**Nanjala Nyabola**

*Board member*

Nanjala Nyabola is the founder of the Kiswahili Digital Rights Project, member of the United Nations secretary general's High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, and founding member of the Africa Digital Rights Network.



**Julie Posetti**

*Board member*

Julie Posetti is a multi-award-winning Australian journalist and deputy vice president and global director of research at the International Center for Journalists, where she leads a team producing critical research on the contemporary crises and opportunities within the field of journalism.



**Bettina Tucci Bartsiotas**

*Board member; Chair of the audit and finance committee*

Bettina Tucci Bartsiotas is a former Assistant Secretary-General and Controller of the United Nations and currently serves on boards and committees of a number of international entities, including the UN Federal Credit Union, the World Food Programme, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the Sport Integrity Global Alliance.

# 「Secretariat」



**Nishant Lalwani**

*Chief Executive Officer*

Nishant co-founded the International Fund and led its launch in 2023. He has 20 years of experience in international development, media development, and strategy roles. Prior to joining the International Fund, he was vice president of Global Programmes at Luminate. Nishant earned an MBA from Harvard Business School, where he was a Fulbright Scholar.



**Amélie Baudot**

*Chief Operating Officer*

Amélie oversees fund strategy, operations, finance, legal, governance, and talent. Amélie has over a decade of experience in managing global multi-donor impact funds. She holds a Juris Doctor from New York University School of Law and a master's degree from the Graduate Institute of International and Development studies. Amélie is admitted to practice in New York State and is a solicitor in England and Wales.



**Khadija Patel**

*Journalist-in-Residence*

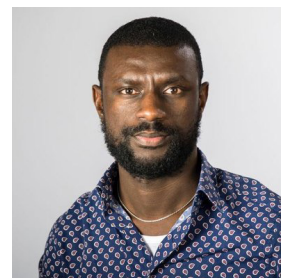
Khadija oversees the International Fund's external voice and helps to lead its engagement with media organizations across its focus regions. Khadija is the former editor-in-chief of the Mail & Guardian in South Africa, a co-founder of the youth-driven, award-winning digital news startup The Daily Vox, and a vice chairperson of the Vienna-based International Press Institute.



**Pierrick Judéaux**

*Director of Portfolio*

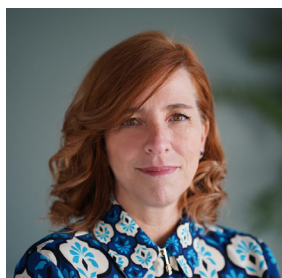
Pierrick spent the first years of his career in advising various media and telecommunications companies in Europe, before embracing an international development career. In the past ten years, Pierrick has been a senior advisor to multiple heads of state across Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe on economic and democratic development, and has led large-scale international development initiatives.



**Makmid Kamara**

*Regional Director for Africa & the Middle East*

Makmid is a Sierra Leonean human rights leader, democracy advocate, and development communications practitioner, with 20 years' experience working with national and international development organizations in Africa and the UK. Makmid started his career as a journalist and has written for several high-profile African and European publications and institutions.



**Vanina Berghella**

*Regional Director for Latin America & the Caribbean*

Vanina started her career in journalism more than 25 years ago and gained extensive experience working in print, radio, and digital media. Vanina previously served as director of Velocidad, the media accelerator of SembraMedia and the International Center for Journalists. Prior to this, she was executive director of the Argentine Journalism Forum and a member of the IFEX-ALC Board.



**Patrik Silborn**

*Director of Partnerships*

Patrik has 20 years of experience in global health and development, leading partnerships, resource mobilization, and grants across Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Patrik spent a decade working at the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in varying roles and also previously led external relations, resource mobilization, and partnerships at the Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance.



**Irene Jay Liu**

*Regional Director for Asia & the Pacific*

Irene works at the intersection of journalism and tech. Before joining the International Fund, Irene led the Google News Lab in the Asia-Pacific region. She was previously a Hong Kong-based investigative reporter and data editor at Thomson Reuters, where she was a 2017 Pulitzer finalist. She is a graduate of Yale University and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



**Maha Taki**

*Director of the 'What Works' Unit*

Maha has 18 years of experience in media and media support with a focus on the Global South. She co-authored the [Feasibility Study](#) that led to the creation of the International Fund. Maha previously worked as senior advisor at BBC Media Action and holds a Ph.D. in Media and Communication from the Communication and Media Research Institute at the University of Westminster.

# Expanding a global coalition

The International Fund unlocked new financial resources in 2023, including from the Government of France, the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Google, and the Government of Estonia, with NED, Google, and Estonia all renewing their initial contributions. In total, the International Fund has mobilized approximately \$52 million USD to support public interest media in low- and middle-income countries.

The International Fund also grew the coalition of governments, philanthropies, and corporate entities providing vital non-financial support to its work and strengthened its partnerships across the media and media development sectors.

## Confirming new financial commitments

- Building on its November 2022 announcement of a commitment of up to 15 million EUR to the International Fund, the Government of France provided additional funding to support the set-up of the International Fund's global headquarters in Paris, which is anticipated to be fully operational by mid-2024.
- The *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* also provided funding to support the continued growth and development of the International Fund and its activities.
- The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which had initially supported the International Fund's start-up phase, made an additional financial commitment to support the set-up and operationalization of the International Fund's 'What Works' Unit, which will guide its research and learning function.
- The Google News Initiative and Government of Estonia also renewed initial commitments to the International Fund to extend their support into this next operational phase.

## Expanding engagement within and across the media and media development sectors

- The International Fund has financially supported and provided substantive input into the **most comprehensive mapping analysis of official development assistance to media** and information environments ever undertaken. The analysis, carried out by the **OECD Development Assistance Committee's Network on Governance (OECD DAC Govnet)**, is expected to be published in April 2024. It will demonstrate how donor support to this area is very small, has remained largely static over the last decade, and that less than 10% of the assistance that is allocated actually reaches media entities in middle- and low-income countries. The analysis bears out the principal arguments and rationale for the International Fund's creation, given growing need and donor recognition of media and information issues: to scale up financial assistance, to target it more directly at media entities, and to work over the long term to generate systemic solutions to market failure.



- Through its Mongolia cohort program, launched in late 2023 with five grant recipients, the International Fund has worked closely with the **Nest Center for Journalism Innovation and Development**, an Ulaanbaatar-based NGO that provides on-the-ground support and guidance to the cohort of six grantees. Through its collaboration with the International Fund as well as **Financial Times Strategies**, which has also supported the program, the Nest Center has developed **context-specific resources that can be refined and scaled** across their other interventions in the Mongolian media ecosystem.



*Members of the Nest Center and FTS with participants at the four-day strategic planning workshop (Photo courtesy of the Nest Center)*

- The International Fund contributed to a variety of **collective efforts on information integrity and media support** throughout 2023, collaborating closely with global partnerships and networks on **research and learning, policy, and advocacy**. This included close coordination with the National Endowment for Democracy's Center for Media Assistance (NED CIMA) and the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD). Both partnerships will continue to grow through NED's financial support for the International Fund's 'What Works' Unit and the observer seat

reserved for GFMD on the International Fund's Council. Additionally, the International Fund participated in the Summit for Democracy media cohort and the Media Freedom Coalition's working group on media development, and collaborated with the Partnership on Information and Democracy and UNESCO.

- The International Fund contributed to a range of **donor coordination efforts at national, regional, and global levels**. For instance, the International Fund participated in the annual donor coordination meeting for the Eastern Partnership convened by the British, Latvian, and Czech ministries of foreign affairs in October 2023. It also scaled up bilateral engagement and coordination with a variety of fellow media funders — including governments and bilateral agencies, NED, the European Endowment for Democracy, Open Society Foundations, and more — and strengthened its collaboration with the OECD DAC, particularly through the DAC's Network on Governance as a platform for policy discussions on donors' media support strategies.
- Finally, the International Fund continued to **strengthen its relationships and collaboration with media development actors**, including through seeking referrals and recommendations for grant recipients and additional partnerships. Throughout 2023, the International Fund engaged with Deutsche Welle Akademie, Free Press Unlimited, International Media Support, Internews, and Canal France International, among others. This engagement is intended to ensure that the International Fund's work **complements existing media development efforts and actors**. The International Fund also engaged closely with actors working on other forms of support to media and freedom of expression including Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the ACOS Alliance, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the Internews-led Media Viability Accelerator.

## Strengthening ecosystem partnerships and convenings

The International Fund invested in supporting its media ecosystem partners throughout 2023, including through sponsoring national and regional convenings to support greater collaboration and knowledge sharing within and from the media and media development sectors.

- In May, the International Fund sponsored the second **Africa Media Convention**, convened by UNESCO in Lusaka, Zambia. The African Media Convention brings together media experts, scholars, students, journalists, journalists' unions and associations, editors, public and private sector, including cooperating partners from across the African continent. Support from the International Fund was used to organize a **half-day event on media viability** and the challenges facing independent media across Africa.
- In July, the Gordon Institute of Business Science, a division of the University of Pretoria, organized "**Big Tech and Journalism: Building a Sustainable Future in the Global South**," a conference bringing together over 60 journalists, academics, activists, publishers, media organizations, and funders from more than 20 countries. The convening had a particular emphasis on low- and middle-income countries that are considering different approaches to rebalancing the relationship between technology platforms and independent media. A key outcome of the conference was a set of principles to guide negotiations between large technology companies and news media publishers, which has already had tremendous impact in Indonesia. As a sponsor, the International Fund also funded the **creation of a research brief to further develop the outcomes** of the conference.
- **Splice Beta**, organized annually in Chiang Mai, Thailand, is a celebration of communities, media creators, and media startup entrepreneurs across Asia. Attendees include media startup

founders, creators, tech folks, investors, journalists, media donors, NGOs, CSOs, product managers, media program managers, academics, and students. The International Fund served as a key sponsor of the festival for the second year running, and Regional Director Irene Jay Liu joined a **session on the landscape for media funding** in the year to come.

- Also in November, the International Fund again served as a sponsor of the **Paris Peace Forum**, an important multilateral convening of world leaders from across a range of sectors, with a shared focus on democracy and governance. As a sponsor, the International Fund organized a panel discussion on how **linked threats to information integrity and the 2030 SDG agenda** can be addressed. In a ceremony following the panel, the Governments of France, Ghana, and Moldova jointly approved the International Fund's Statutes, triggering the formal creation of its Paris headquarters and the appointment of its Board.



*The International Fund's panel discussion at the Paris Peace Forum. From left to right: Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, Minister for Information, Republic of Ghana; Maria Ressa, Nobel laureate and International Fund Board co-chair; Nishant Lalwani, International Fund CEO; Carsten Staur, Chair, Development Assistance Committee, OECD. (Photo courtesy of ©Laurent Hazgui/CAPA Pictures for PPF 2023)*



# **International Fund** for Public Interest Media

## **Annual Report 2023**

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