







Report

Consultation on media viability in Lebanon

A partnership between

Global Forum for Media Development
Maharat Foundation
Samir Kassir Foundation
UNESCO IPDC

June 2023

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Table of Contents

1- Introduction:..... 3
2- Roundtable discussion 1: Media viability: Challenges and Opportunities for the Lebanese media sector..... 5
2.1 Role of the public sector..... 8
2.2 Relations between donors and media organisations..... 9
2.3 Role of the private sector..... 10
2.2.1 Main Takeaways:..... 10
3 - Roundtable 2: Role of non-media stakeholders: donors, Big Tech, and the public sector..... 12
3.1 Coordination between donors..... 12
3.3.1 Main Takeaways:..... 14
4 - Survey Analysis and Description..... 16
5. Recommendations for action and next steps..... 18
5.1 Cross-cutting recommendations for multiple actors:..... 18
5.2 The Lebanese state should:..... 18
5.3 Donors should:..... 19
5.4 Media development agencies and CSOs should:..... 19
5.5 Lebanese media should:..... 20

1. Introduction

Through the International Program for Development and Communication (IPDC), established in 1980, UNESCO has worked to strengthen news media, providing direct support for media development projects worldwide as well as leading initiatives that impact the broader ecosystem. Supported by the IPDC, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Beirut has joined forces with the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), the Samir Kassir Foundation's (SKeyes) Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, and Maharat Foundation to help build momentum and consensus on policy recommendations to promote media viability in Lebanon.

Local stakeholders, donors and public sector representatives were invited to attend a national consultation on January 18, 2023 to identify key problems faced by the national media sector and draft national policy recommendations to explore ways to build an environment in which journalists and independent media organisations can thrive over the long term. This national consultation aimed to draft policy recommendations and identify national mechanisms that can address viability and assess the relevance of recommendations in the international policy briefs produced by UNESCO and their local partners.

This report documents the outcomes of the discussion on media viability, challenges and opportunities for the Lebanese media sector, and the role of non-media stakeholders, including the international donor community, Big Tech, and the public sector.

The outcomes of this discussion were shared at an event on media viability on the side-lines of the second Summit for Democracy meeting in The Hague (29 March). The findings and recommendations from similar meetings held in Namibia, Tunisia, as well as Lebanon were presented to international policymakers, donors, tech representatives, and other stakeholders.

The policy recommendations from the roundtables in Lebanon will also feed into future high-level processes such as:

- The OECD process to renew the principles for effective media development, which has been given non-binding recognition by the IPDC Intergovernmental Council.
- The Media Development Working Group of the Media Freedom Coalition.

2. Roundtable discussion 1: Media viability: Challenges and Opportunities for the Lebanese media sector

The first Roundtable discussion centred around media viability, challenges and opportunities for the Lebanese media sector, drawing on recent research reports from UNESCO, Maharat Foundation, Samir Kassir Foundation, GFMD and others.

UNESCO has been working on media viability challenges and solutions providing direct support and initiatives. Two reports[1] funded by UNESCO confirmed the assumption that media is in danger and that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated declining trends.Indeed, global newspaper advertising revenue has dropped to half in the last five years, and by two-thirds over the last ten years[2].

Through this study and ongoing discussions, UNESCO initiatives continue to highlight the urgent need for new policies and strategies that can address this issue. These include public financing for trustworthy news outlets, enhanced support for genuine public service media and increasing donor support. It also includes increasing philanthropic investment in news production. Understanding the difficulties, context, and potential future at national and organisational levels is crucial for achieving media viability.

Ten national consultations that took place in 2021 found significant common barriers to the media[3]. For example, while digital advertising revenue flows to big firms, advertising markets are frequently dominated by a small number of large traditional channels. Many organisations rely extensively on institutional funders and require greater audience research and business model training. Social media algorithms are a further obstacle to media outlets. While users are moving to the digital sphere, social media algorithms penalise media outlets. Needless to add that the economic crisis plaguing Lebanon has had a disastrous impact on the media sector. Furthermore, freedom of expression, media independence, and access to information must be considered alongside viability.

---

[1] UNESCO. 2022. Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development, Global Report 2021/2022. Paris:UNESCO; https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000038061 8?2
Economic Impact supported by UNESCO. 2022. Breaking news: the economic impact of Covid-19 on the global news media industry.
https://impact.economist.com/perspectives/sites/default/files/breaking_news_the_economic_impact_of_covid-19_on_the_global_news_media_industry.pdf

[2] UNESCO. 2022. Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development, Global Report 2021/2022. Paris:UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000038061 8?2

[3] Free Press Unlimited supported by UNESCO. 2021. National consultations on solutions to promote media viability while preserving media independence.
https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/files/2022/01/fpu_report_national_consultations_unesco_2.pdf

Two 2022 UNESCO publications begin to offer solutions. Action-oriented responses are needed to build stronger media following the pandemic. In the handbook, "After the pandemic, building back a stronger media ", practitioners around the world were interviewed about solutions and innovations. One interview was conducted with the Lebanese newspaper L'Orient-le-jour, which referenced the possibilities of subscriber models and transitioning from print to digital in the Lebanese context.

The report entitled "Finding the funds for journalism to thrive: policy options to support media viability" included several in-context policy recommendations that could pave the way toward greater media viability, such as tax credits, subsidies, and exemptions, requiring Big Tech to pay publishers for the news they disseminate, and establishing a National Commission to investigate and propose solutions.

The findings and recommendations below emerged from a number of studies conducted by Maharat Foundation during the 2020-2022 period[4]:

- A wide range of policies addressing political, legal and regulatory regimes that affect media, free expression, and business operations should be put in place in order to enhance media viability in Lebanon. The Lebanese State should prioritise decriminalising blasphemy, defamation, and insults as well as protecting journalists and their sources. The Lebanese state also has to update media legislation to keep up with technological progress in order to regulate online content while protecting personal data and privacy. In addition, transparency in terms of media ownership and budgets should be increased.
- Incentives should also be developed for media start-ups, such as abolishing licences and registration fees for prints and putting in place tax reductions. Increasing competition in the advertising market also constitutes a priority.
- Capacity-building is also a cornerstone of media viability as adequate business strategies need to be put in place in order to enable media to develop and prosper. Training covering media management and business strategies, entrepreneurship, and organisational structure should be provided to journalists and media practitioners as well as training covering inclusive journalism and quality journalism. Additionally, journalists should receive training in fact-checking methods, audience insight analysis, and creative content formats.

[4] List of Studies conducted published on Maharat Foundation's website:

- Podcasts Initiatives in the Arab World: Opportunities for Viability, https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2112/podcast-study-22-en.pdf, published in March 2022
- Media and Information Landscape in Lebanon, https://maharatfoundation.org/media/1943/internews-final-20-10.pdf (understanding the information flow, dynamics, gaps, needs and to evaluate trust levels towards different information sources), published in October 2021
- Media Trends in Times of Change (Traditional and Alternative Media Discourses Monitoring), https://maharatfoundation.org/studymediatrends2021, published in November 2021
- TV Coverage of parliamentary elections, 2022, https://maharatfoundation.org/TVcoverage_ParliamentaryElections2022
- Study on alternative media platforms in Lebanon, https://maharatfoundation.org/en/alternativemediaeng, published in November 2020
- Media Startups on Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco, https://maharatfoundation.org/en/mediastartup2019, 2020

- Media viability is also indissociable from media literacy, a prerequisite for the audience to regain trust in quality journalism. Media and Information Literacy programs should be incorporated into school curricula and media literacy should be increased among people, especially in underserved communities.

According to a field research report published by SKeyes, “Independent media in Lebanon: an economic outlook”[5], funding remains the number one obstacle to media due to the fact that alternative media[6] platforms rely heavily on irregular, short-term and project-based grants. Grants offer funding and support that can cover a wide range of organisational expenses and requirements while protecting editorial integrity. Alternative media platforms are however trying to diversify their revenue streams through co-creation, sponsored content, small donations, and production services. It is worth noting that most of the alternative media referenced in the study were opposed to setting up paywalls which could compromise and contradict their mission to inform the public. In addition, very few platforms have seriously considered advertisement as a source of financing. There is concern amongst alternative media that advertising might impact users’ perception of the platform’s integrity / independence. There is also a lack of familiarity and the skills to deal with advertisers. Alternative media are rarely included in the media plans of advertising agencies as they are considered too political and could affect a brand’s image.

Supporting independent media to generate additional revenue through the sale of advertising and through marketing is an area of focus for SKeyes. SKeyes together with the Equal Rights and Independent Media (ERIM) organisation, established the Agency for Equality to provide sustainable and tailor-made support to independent media in Lebanon by ensuring their independence and financial stability. The agency aims to promote pluralism, critical thinking and access to quality information, and to ensure high-quality coverage of key issues of public interest in Lebanon.

Following the presentation of these findings, the discussion aimed to be action-driven and identify next steps at the national level, contributing to the existing knowledge base and provide lessons learned from other contexts. Participants debated the definition of media viability, pointing out that it is a holistic concept that encompasses not only financial and economic conditions, but also the socio-political context and the technological dimensions that influence the functioning and quality of news media.

Practical steps needed to achieve media viability were identified by participants. The Lebanese media market is relatively small, and different organisations work to address key issues in the local setting. This highlights the importance of maintaining open lines of communication between donors and media organisations to avoid duplication and take advantage of possible synergies between initiatives. Furthermore, all dimensions of media viability were considered,

[5]https://www.skeyesmedia.org/documents/bo_filemanager/Independent-Media-in-Lebanon-An-Economic-Outlook-REPORT.pdf
[6] Alternative media outlets are not affiliated with the government or any government-related media outlets, and they typically originate from grassroots efforts within the journalism landscape. They have a progressive editorial stance and use innovative publishing formats to present their content. They are sometimes also referred to as independent media because they are independent from large media corporations and they claim complete independence over their editorial policy and financing.

particularly those related to the socio-political and regulatory environment and the creation of new business models.

To address media viability in Lebanon, it was agreed that it is essential to take a holistic approach that engages all local actors. This includes the state, mainstream and alternative media, internet companies, and the private sector. By involving all relevant stakeholders, recommendations that are tailored to the Lebanese context can be developed, and necessary steps can be taken to ensure the sustainability of the media industry.

2.1 Role of the public sector

According to the views expressed by the Ministry of Information (MOI), who were represented at the meeting, the Lebanese state has a crucial role to play in improving media viability. The MOI claimed to be collaborating closely with UN agencies, particularly on legal reforms pertaining to journalist safety. Furthermore, the Lebanese public sector has been working in partnership with members of the private sector and civil society. However, financial limitations restrict the Lebanese state from providing financial support to the Lebanese media. The MOI shared that it has also been involved in the fight against fake news, disinformation and hate speech as well as the preservation of archives from Lebanese government agencies in order that journalists can gain access to them. The Ministry of information also declared that they were involved in the protection of freedom of expression.

Finding funding is a perennial concern for the media. The current political climate has made things more challenging. Indeed, media organisations are competing against one another for funding, and yet are just about surviving. Currently, content is mainly subsidised by donors. It is unclear whether the Lebanese public are prepared to pay for news. Furthermore, Lebanese media's lack of investment in digital marketing undermines media viability. This competence needs to be further developed as it is essential to increase visibility and audience reach. Media outlets should also increase cooperation to avoid competing with each other for audience share and survive in the media ecosystem.

2.2 Relations between donors and media organisations

Currently, donors tend to favour small, non-profit, and independent media over traditional media. This was attributed to a trend towards funding alternative media. It was discussed that funders have a bias toward social media influencers and alternative media that seem to be contributing to a counter-narrative. Few donors support the media sector as a whole, including traditional or mainstream media . Mainstream media such as television are considered to be highly politicised and corrupt. The experiences shared in the roundtable suggested that supporting mainstream media could compromise efforts and give very mixed messages. For example, during the last parliamentary elections in May 2022, mainstream media did not provide significant coverage for independent candidates[7]. The mainstream media are also known to have been supported by commercial organisations such as banks with investments mainly in

[7] Maharat Foundation. 2022. The electoral media performance during the parliamentary elections 2022. https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2288/100322-en_final-tv-monitoring-report.pdf

television platforms which compromise their ability to report independently on the Lebanese banking system.[8] Indeed, it was discussed that media organisations should take into account considerations such as transparency and professional values in order to access funding from institutional donors. As suggested by UNESCO at the roundtable, donors should support the creation of a code of conduct among Lebanese media professionals and journalists which can promote transparency and professionalism.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that even small media outlets that place a high value on independence rely heavily on donor funding which isa consideration for true media independence.

Donors must also consider other players in the Lebanese media scene, such as freelance journalists who are not protected under current media laws which need to be revisited to include recognition and protection of the rights of freelance journalists. Public media also require support from donors as they are perceived to be more “neutral” compared to private media who are viewed as highly politicised and polarised.

2.3 Role of the private sector

The issue of monopoly in the advertisement industry must also be addressed. The Lebanese advertisement market is small and unable to finance the entire Lebanese media landscape. Traditional media currently receive the lion’s share of advertising revenue at the expense of alternative media. In response, some alternative media platforms have established revenue models that can complement traditional journalism or content creation by offering third-party services, for example consultancy services. Ethical advertising agencies can also constitute a solution. This can be illustrated through the example of developing an advertising agency that pools together resources from investors and directs these resources toward credible, independent Lebanese media organisations.

Lebanon's economic meltdown had a severe impact on the Lebanese media sector, notably as emigration led to a shortage of talent in the media profession. Alternative media have begun to seek individuals who possess multiple skills, including content creation and political knowledge. This profile is becoming increasingly rare in Lebanon. In terms of innovation and leadership, the education system still lags behind. While capacity building and training workshops for media professionals are important, this cannot replace structural reforms in the education system to support the training of new generations of journalists and media professionals in Lebanon.

Bringing media legislation in line with international standards is also crucial to guarantee freedom of expression. The parliament should decriminalise defamation, blasphemy, and insults. Multiple stakeholders have been involved in this reform process, including the Ministry of Information (MOI), UNESCO and civil society organisations such as SKeyes and Maharat Foundation.

[8] The Policy Initiative. 2022. Buying the narrative: How Lebanese banks exploited the media to influence public opinion. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/178/buying-the-narrative-how-lebanese-banks-exploited-the-media-to-influence-public-opinion

In addition, further reflection is necessary to understand the role that donors can play in light of their increasing investment in the media sector and growing recognition of the critical role that media plays in upholding democracy and fighting propaganda.

2.2.1 Main Takeaways:

- It is necessary to work to reform national policies to enhance freedom of expression and decriminalise defamation.
- Media reform policies should include an economic perspective and provide incentives for media start-ups. Antitrust legislation should address monopoly in advertising and support alternative media platforms to increase their market share .
- Policies should ensure that journalists, including freelancers, and their sources are protected. A holistic approach to the protection of journalists should be at the heart of media viability programs as they should be able to operate securely without facing physical, digital or psychological threats (including harassment).
- Access to information should be enhanced.
- Support more capacity building programs, including in areas related to innovation and media management.
- Explore ways to improve journalism education.
- Reform should take place at the level of the association of journalists to better support journalists to face socioeconomic challenges and prevent brain drain.
- Support more audience research.
- Donors should invest in media as part of their democracy support programs.

3. Roundtable 2: Role of non-media stakeholders: donors, Big Tech, and the public sector

The second roundtable took the form of an open discussion between donors, media support organisations, media organisations, tech industry representatives, and government institutions.

The second roundtable started with a presentation based on GFMD and SKF's report titled "Review of the Funding Landscape for Media Development Actors in Lebanon", which presented the shortcomings of donor funding programmes for media. Some recurring concerns have been raised regarding the grant program, notably regarding the modest size of the grants, the associated high administrative costs, and the ambitious nature of short-term projects. In addition to the perceived donor bias in favour of supporting international organisations to a larger extent that experienced and well-qualified Lebanese actors within what is already a very competitive field, restrictive eligibility requirements make it hard for newcomers to access funding. Additionally, it was felt that donors' agenda were not fully aligned with the priorities of the media they are trying to support.

3.1 Coordination between donors

Key international donors in Lebanon include the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), European Commission (EC), European Endowment for Democracy (EED), United National Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), USAID, the German Foreign Ministry, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through l'Agence française du développement (AFD), the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the Embassy of the Netherlands.

Donors were seen to focus increasingly on the following themes: (1) media viability or sustainability; (2) developing new business models, (3) fighting disinformation, (4) restoring public trust in journalism and in accountable government, (5) coordination between civil society and media, (6) media and gender and (7) conflict sensitive reporting and fighting hate speech.

Currently, a project funded by the AFD and Canal France International (CFI) focuses on training and mentorship as fundamental tools to support media viability, thereby acting as a media incubator. The US Department of State tends to support programming related to the rule of law and works toward reinforcing democratic institutions.

The EU Commission launched a regional grant for which Lebanon is eligible.[9] The grant aims to support independent, public interest media in the Southern Neighbourhood region, by providing core support to media.[10] One of the expected outcomes of this programme is to support the financial viability of independent media by exploring, developing and implementing new business models, and new sources for revenue-generation .

SKeyes and other associations like Maharat are also working on various projects around reforming the legal ecosystem in Lebanon while ensuring transparency, freedom of speech and promoting intercultural dialogue.

In order to prevent overlap, duplication, and competition across these various projects, it was discussed that it is imperative to address the overarching issue of coordination. Indeed, the appropriate combination or pooling of resources would amplify the overall impact. It is beneficial for donors to reconsider their priorities and strategies in order to enhance coordination efforts. In order to do so, it is advisable that donors define their individual strengths to establish clear boundaries and avoid duplication of efforts.

It was also proffered that a structured dialogue should be launched based on a clear agenda involving diverse stakeholders including donors, implementing partners, mainstream media, alternative media, and the advertising market. This dialogue could be structured around key priority areas such as training and capacity building, protection and safety of journalists. Each donor should be made responsible for a definite priority area with a view toward harmonising efforts.

Bridging the urban-rural divide by involving media from rural areas in this dialogue is also a pivotal element of coordination since it will allow donors to communicate with the widest possible range of media actors.

Local actors should present donors with a "menu of priorities" in order to favour a more bottom-up approach that would address the needs of local actors more efficiently. Furthermore, donors should conduct a locally driven joint needs assessment of the Lebanese media industry as a whole rather than only concentrating on the needs of specific media organisations in order to ensure complementarity across projects while rationalising efforts.

In addition, it was discussed that new methods of evaluation should be developed, relying less on quantitative indicators and more on key performance indicators in order to measure the impact of projects on the local media ecosystem more accurately.

Since the publication of the report titled "Coordinating media assistance and journalism support efforts" in November 2022, some progress has been made toward enhancing coordination

[9] "Core Support for Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood" https://south.euneighbours.eu/project/core-support-for-independent-media-in-the-southern-neighbourhood/

[10] In addition to Lebanon, the Southern Neighbourhood Partnership countries include others in the Mediterranean basin, North Africa, and the Levant: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/southern-neighbourhood_en

between implementing partners. This can be exemplified by the cooperation between SKF and Maharat. Furthermore, quality journalism is expanding in Lebanon and independent media platforms would gain from being supported further as they are eager to practise innovative journalism.

Hence the importance of a structured dialogue that can allow local media support organisations, development agencies, and other actors to exchange meaningfully with donors, thereby enhancing coordination and information-sharing, was emphasised at the roundtable.

3.3.1 Main Takeaways:

- Coordination should be strategic. Local actors should clearly identify priorities at micro and macro levels in order to enable donors to respond to their needs.
- This dialogue should be clearly structured with an agenda that engages a wide range of stakeholders including public sector actors, private sector actors and a wide variety of media representatives, to shape the future of the media industry.
- Lebanon is establishing a good model of cooperation between donors, civil society, and media outlets.
- A common “menu of needs” should be prepared by the media sector to guide donors to fund relevant topics which address local needs .
- Resources are scarce, both in terms of time and money. However, they can be nurtured. Medium- and long-term priorities should be set by local actors and should be practical, actionable and responsive to the rapidly evolving media ecosystem.
- Assessment of the effectiveness and quality of delivered projects should become essential components of donor-funded projects. Beneficiaries can provide qualitative feedback and look at the holistic performance of projects.This will shift monitoring and evaluation away from its overreliance on quantitative indicators to measure the effectiveness and quality of delivered projects.
- Strategic coordination does not mean eliminating competition.
- It is important to prioritise support for alternative, independent discourse in media coverage.

.

[11]

4. Survey analysis and description

Based on the responses to a survey shared with participants ahead of the consultation,[12] the need for state-led or public sector reforms to proactively support Lebanese media and journalism figured at the top of the agenda. This includes creating incentives for whistleblowing which exposes tax evasion or misuse of public funds, and systemically rewarding and incentivizing journalism institutions that help governments recover stolen resources.

Pursuing **antitrust cases and competition policies** that address monopolistic behaviour in advertising markets was also found to be relevant to the Lebanese context. Regarding program design, the recommendation claiming that the donor should continue to base calls for proposals on the results of needs assessments, introduce monitoring frameworks that take their cue from adaptive management techniques, and explore ways of apportioning responsibilities and tasks within the donor community, was considered relevant or very relevant by the majority of respondents.

As for recommendations addressing the role of media and journalists, almost 90% of the respondents agreed with the recommendation on the necessity of exploring new funding models based on subscriptions through paywalls and voluntary donations.

On coordination, 90% of respondents considered that **developing networks both within Lebanon and across the MENA region** for sharing ideas, experiences, and expertise regarding media business problems is very relevant or relevant to the Lebanese context. Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents believed that a stronger focus on the advertisement market in the region, and at the international level, as well as expanding editorial independence from sources outside of Lebanon is relevant or very relevant to the Lebanese context. Finally, 9 out of 10 participants considered that media and information literacy programs should be integrated into school curricula and that adult media and information literacy programs are very relevant or relevant to the Lebanese context.

The recommendation on the relevance of building partnerships and bridges between traditional and alternative media to the Lebanese context as well as the recommendation suggesting that lawmakers should begin exploring how the media licensing process might be used to reduce the number of media organisations in the market to a sustainable level, were found to be the least relevant to the Lebanese context.

[11] According to a 2021 study by Maharat Foundation, "Media trends in times of change "

[12] The pre-event survey was conducted with participants in the lead up to the national consultation in Lebanon. The survey questions and policy recommendations are based on UNESCO's research on media viability. The results of this survey are in the annex below.

5. Recommendations for action and next steps

The following set of recommendations are proposed for stakeholders who wish to support media viability in Lebanon. They are based on the discussion that took place in the roundtables in addition to presentations which were made at a side event at the Summit for Democracy. Recommendations for short-term versus long-term action are also highlighted where applicable.

5.1 Cross-cutting recommendations for multiple actors:

- There is an immediate need to enhance the understanding of the "Media Viability" concept among all stakeholders in order to adopt a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to viability. Stakeholders should then work towards a common understanding of media viability that addresses local and relevant needs.
- Mainstream viability should become an immediate priority for donor programming and media support organisations who are active in the Lebanese media landscape.
- There is a need for collaboration between stakeholders including governments, international organisations, civil society, and private sector actors to enable and facilitate better conditions for media viability. Multi-stakeholder dialogue that includes local media development agencies/actors, alternative media, mainstream media and state actors for better coordination and information-sharing should take place.

5.2 The Lebanese state should:

- Immediately take steps to ensure the physical, digital, and psychological safety as well as the protection of journalists;
- Bring media laws in line with international standards including decriminalising defamation and blasphemy in collaboration with international organisations and civil society actors;
- Enhance collaboration with various stakeholders including international organisations, civil society actors and private sector actors to support public media;
- Engage more effectively in the fight against fake news, disinformation and hate speech;
- Create a favourable regulatory, legal and taxation environment which can provide financial incentives for media organisations.

5.3 Donors should:

- Provide small, independent, and alternative media with long-term and stable, pluriannual funding;
- Invest in projects aimed at reducing the condition of precarity among independent and freelance journalists;
- Increase networking between donors in order to improve coordination, thereby avoiding duplication and overlapping of projects;
- Invest in locally driven needs assessments, rationalising efforts and ensuring greater complementarity;
- Strengthen networking and mutual cooperation among small, independent, alternative media organisations to build their resilience to compete with larger and mainstream media.

5.4 Media development agencies and CSOs should:

- Engage with international actors to exert international pressure on the Lebanese state to adopt the necessary reforms needed to foster an enabling environment for independent journalism and freedom of expression;
- Engage in advocacy efforts using a media sustainability lens to push forward a media viability agenda which take into account the lack of political will to engage in reforms related to freedom of expression;
- Build regional coalitions that will identify the needs and consolidate the priorities of media organisations in the MENA region in order to enhance coordination and dialogue with donors;
- Provide journalists with capacity-building, including on access to information, understanding their professional rights and legal and psychosocial protection;
- Support alternative media in developing viable business models including increasing visibility and audience reach;
- Implement projects to update the media curriculum in Lebanon, incorporating fact-checking and investigative journalism.

5.5 Lebanese media should:

- Alternative media platforms should consider the application of commercial models over the medium and long term; it should be noted that in the short term, independent media cannot become competitive by adopting commercial models.
- Explore collaborations between human rights groups and media platforms, especially those that cover human rights issues in Lebanon.