

Multi Annual Strategy Paper

2018-2022

Free Press Unlimited



getting things done

“Press Freedom is a democratic anchor.

When the anchor is pulled, democracy drifts into the rocks.¹”

¹ Michael Ignatieff in a lecture at De Balie, Amsterdam – September 2017

Executive Summary

This Multi Annual Strategy Paper aims to review the contextual relevance of the work of Free Press Unlimited by investigating global trends in society, politics, economics, technology and how this might affect the work field of the organization. It provides recommendations and strategic direction for the organization in order to harness the strength and resilience of the organization so it's fit to face the challenges ahead and continue to serve its staff, partners and supporters.

This document investigates Free Press Unlimited's own needs to adapt to the radically changing world of news, media and information in terms of income generation, technology transition and the increased need for assistance to save press freedom and freedom of expression. It serves to inform the organization and its friends, partners and supporters about the strategic choices for the coming period that is likely to be heavily volatile.

In *the Story So Far* we examine the story of Free Press unlimited so far. Started in 2011, Free Press Unlimited has established itself as the to-go-to Media Development organization in the Netherlands. In the past years Free Press Unlimited developed a theory of change, underpinned its vision, mission and strategy with core values. We continue to opt for strategic cooperation and locally embedded work methods to achieve progress for independent media and quality journalism. And this has resulted in growth and increased results of the organization.

The changing context we work in examines the challenges ahead for the organization and its partners. The lack of trust caused by deliberate polarization and media capture have resulted in the marginalization of quality journalism and efforts are needed to save pluralism. The digital-data revolution has added to that trend by eroding the income models of media houses. Development policies are shifting from investments in information ecosystems towards steering content. Intense research and experimentation is needed to save the critical function of a free press.

Journalists and media are not always as trusted as they should be and Free Press Unlimited – as well as media and journalists around the world – need to do a better job to serve the public. But the world of journalism is responding and public trust in quality information is in higher demand. The increased awareness of the relevance of independent quality journalism has led to better acknowledgement of independent journalism as a pillar of democracy and provides opportunity for social development.

Free Press Unlimited in the years ahead will expand activities to guarantee a free and independent press in Europe. Our thematic focus will build on the current qualities in gender, safety and accountability. More focus is needed on income generation, knowledge sharing and making audience intelligence available to small and medium sized quality media houses. Innovation and the development of toolkits to learn, share and compare are indispensable in that effort.

To curb the current negative trends, a lot depends on changing the political will to invest in and protect the information ecosystem. To achieve that we need better cooperation with like minded organizations and more attention to advocacy for policy change. That will help us to get things done in order to remain a partner for sustainable development, human rights and social justice.

All of us at Free Press Unlimited are adamant to play a part in that fight.

Leon Willems & Ruth Kronenburg – January 2019

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1. Free Press Unlimited – the story so far

In 2011 a bold and risky decision was made to create a new organization with the name Free Press Unlimited and the aim to enhance the meaningful contribution to the world of press freedom and independent media development from the Netherlands. The newborn organization wanted to contribute to freedom of expression, independent journalism and social development, standing on the shoulders of the work of its predecessors² from which it inherited its experience in media support for independent media partners in fragile and repressive countries as well as transitioning and developing democracies. The new organization - specialized in project implementation and technical assistance - aimed to increase its scope of work to encompass innovation, knowledge building and policy development and advocacy for increased media freedom throughout the world, offline and online.

Deeply rooted in Dutch constitutional values of principle equality of people³ and the desire of the Dutch to contribute to and support international law⁴, human rights and socio-economic development, Free Press Unlimited curated its brand and built a press freedom organization that enables the proliferation of independent quality journalism and fosters the awareness and crucial importance of freedom of expression especially in areas where socio-political challenges hamper peoples access to information.

1.1 Vision, mission, strategy and core values

Everybody deserves access to independent information. The basic thought behind this *vision* is article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

For most people in the world access to reliable and timely information is not a given. Yet every person needs independent information to judge his or her situation and influence decisions made by them, on behalf of them or over their heads. If people do not know what is going on around them that have an impact on their lives, prospects and opportunities, how can one make autonomous decisions?

Free Press Unlimited's mission is to make independent news and information available to people and keep access to that open to everyone, especially to those people living in countries where limited access to information and press freedom exists.

This mission is strategically operationalised by supporting local media professionals and journalists in order to contribute that all people keep access to the information needed for survival and development. Free Press Unlimited strives to create and enlarge Freedom of Expression, promote press freedom and media diversity. Its focus is to work on projects with local partners in developing countries, transitioning democracies as well as repressive and fragile countries.

In its operations Free Press Unlimited maintains the following core values:

- Independence
- Inspiration
- Creativity
- Dedication
- Customized solutions

2 Free Voice and Press Now

3 Article 1 Dutch Constitution: “All who are in the Netherlands are treated equally in similar cases. Discrimination on grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race, gender or on any ground whatsoever is not permitted.”

4 Article 90 Dutch Constitution: “The government promotes the development of the international rule of law.”

5 Universal Declaration of Human Rights – United Nations, 1948

1.2 Theory of Change and Long Term Objectives

In 2014, a combined effort started to develop a comprehensive *Theory of Change* for the organization. This effort aimed to develop a more refined set of objectives, intermediate outcomes and intervention strategies as well as contribute to policy and advocacy development for change⁶ together forming the pathway to change and to achieve our *Long Term Objective*:

Media and journalists, as independent players in civil society, constitute a diverse and professional media landscape and act as change catalysts on citizens behalf.

To achieve this Long Term Objective we defined three intermediate outcomes:

1. An enabling environment for independent media results in respect and acknowledgement of the role of independent media and access to information in society
2. Civil Society supports and embraces independent media and journalists act as a watchdog on behalf of the public
3. Media and journalists operate professionally and have access to knowledge and resources to play their role as sustainable actors in the media landscape

This comprehensive organizational pathway to change serves as Free Press Unlimited to develop meaningful and impactful strategies to fulfill its mission and serve its partners and beneficiaries⁷.

1.3 The choice for cooperative and locally embedded work-methods

In its approach, analysis and implementation, Free Press Unlimited bases itself intentionally on co-creation with local partners and individual journalists from the field and in the target countries. Free Press Unlimited undertakes scoping missions to talk with and hear from the people on the ground what needs are deepest felt and which form of assistance would be appreciated.

In more complex situations Free Press Unlimited works with the beneficiaries of its work by using different methodologies to determine where action is required and what kind of problems need to be addressed. Free Press Unlimited also researches what other international actors are doing and thereby aims to bring added value to the country, region, outlet or individual.

The organization is also quite adamant in its choice for locally owned and executed implementation of work and activities. Recognizing the risk of overbearing ideas from 'the West' and aware of the power dynamics involved in development aid relations, we try to factor in true partnership in all our work, from conceptualization to institutional learning. We also believe there is a lot to learn from experiences partners have and convene workshops and sessions with local and regional partners from different parts of the world to learn from each other. Free Press Unlimited therefore cherishes the fact that it has a high standing with its partners in the world, as is shown by the annual partner satisfaction surveys. As such, Free Press Unlimited wants to bring added value and resilience to her partners, the country they work in and to the changing role they play for their region.

Results show successful support and the creation of independent media serving audiences in South Sudan, Sudan, Iraq, Syria and the Russian Language Area. Grass root media initiatives to strengthen communities were built in DR Congo, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Colombia. Internet Freedom became a media development priority and safety of journalists became an increased focus area of investment. Free Press Unlimited also built policy and intervention strategies to improve gender equity in the media.

In the international arena, Free Press Unlimited has built a strong reputation in the global fora of media development through influencing global actors such as the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), the International Program for Development and Communication (IPDC, part of Unesco) as well as being involved in the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) and the struggle for the Sustainable Development Goals agreed by the member states of the United Nations.

6 No News is Bad News – a theory of change for Free Press Unlimited, August 2014

7 No News is Bad News - 2014

1.4 Financial resources and key figures

Free Press Unlimited aims to raise funds for the objectives and activities through subsidies and donations of private supporters, governments as well as institutional funders. The Dutch government is a key donor for FPU and we are happy to acknowledge the shared belief in promoting independent journalism and freedom of expression as a key objective of its Human Rights Strategy. Also the Dutch Postcode Lottery is a key asset that supported our work in the past years with increasing enthusiasm and resources. These two key supporters are now part of a growing family of friends, donors, supporters and partners that enable our work.

Over the last years Free Press Unlimited has managed to diversify her donors and therefore decreased the dependency of the biggest back donor. Growth figures since its creation also indicate the success of staff and leadership of Free Press Unlimited in achieving the objectives of the 2013 Multi Annual Strategy Plan.

	2011	2017
Income	11.077.000	14.082.197
Spent on goals/Income	92.6%	94.5%
Spent on goals/Costs	95.4%	94.6%
Costs/Income fundraising	5.6%	2.2%
Management costs/expenses	3.2%	3.2%
Non-MFA funds	44%	55%
Donations	42.858	51.208
Equity	866.909	2.233.407
Staff (fte's)	26,5	56,1

Summing up this look over the shoulder, one can conclude that the creation of Free Press Unlimited helped build a successful, resilient and multifaceted organization that created meaningful partnerships with scores of independent media and journalists around the world⁸. That indicates that in the past four years we have jointly helped develop the infrastructure and capacity of the organization to address most of the challenges that existed when the first Multi Annual Strategy Plan started in 2013⁹.

If we would now say that we are 'ready and finished' it would be folly. Now is the time to prepare for the next challenges that are set out in an ever more complex and constantly changing environment for independent media, journalists and audiences all over the world, including at home.

⁸ For a list of our projects [here](#)

⁹ Free Press Unlimited – [Multi Annual Strategy Paper 2013-2017](#)

2. The changing context we work in

2.1 Sociopolitical trust

The political context in the countries that are traditional supporters of press freedom and media development seems to be shifting rapidly. Several developments have put this in motion, such as the Brexit and the ensuing pressure on the EU, the presidential election of Donald Trump and the rise of fear of migration and terrorist attacks among the general public that dominates the political debates.

Conflicts and rising tension at the eastern flank of Europe, in the Middle East and the Sahara region cause migration to places in Western countries where these people are no longer welcome. The remains of the financial crisis since 2008 and the growing sense of insecurity related to job perspectives due to AI (artificial intelligence) solutions have enhanced uncertainty in many throughout the world. Growing financial economic inequality throughout is also a cause for stability concerns in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

These two political phenomena together – economic insecurity and instability as well as political polarization and extremism – have a profound impact on the global 'public state of mind'. Where just a couple of decades ago the majority of the Western world relied on the 4 pillars of democracy (legislature, executive, judiciary and independent journalism). These **four pillars** play an important role in effective **democracy** of a country but are more and more under attack and not taken for granted anymore. Democracy is suffering from erosion and is undermined.

Pluralism under siege

Much of this debate about the future of our societies also touches on the news and information infrastructure, and especially on the consumers' trust and the reliability of the media industry. Polarization has become the new normal in Turkey, Indonesia, Philippines, Brazil, Nigeria and Myanmar and some media are victim of a hostile take-over (by government or media moguls) or are being shaped into instruments of polarization and electoral fraud, resulting in a misinformed public. We see this global trend unfolding with the new US president as a prominent new member of the choir of strong men on the global stage who deliberately attack media and journalists and despise the accountability function of a diverse and pluralistic media landscape.

Closer to home European countries like Russia and Ukraine see increased levels of oppression against independent media. But also in EU member states like Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, the independent news and information media fall victim to media capture by political interest groups. Debate shows presenting polarized opinions have developed in the last twenty years to the mainstay of journalist activity. In some countries the trust crisis and the polarization of media outlets and their audiences has reached levels where political segments of audiences no longer consume the same content and are isolated into separate opposing bubbles. War Mongers inflame and incite the public with growing levels of hate speech and fake news.

The EU political institutions seem unable or inapt to provide enough leverage to curb these trends and as a result the *information instability* is also gripping formerly prosperous and stable democratic societies.

Independent media and journalists under threat

In synchronicity, international press freedom indicators show freedom of the press in decline. In the last ten years killing, arbitrary detention, kidnapping and torture of journalists have increased. Local journalists and freelancers are most at risk. Female journalists suffer from hate speech and targeted attacks through the social networks, that require special preventive training, risk mitigation and protection strategies. On top of already known threats in war zones and closed societies, investigative journalists are becoming a target even in democracies. This trend is in stark contrast with the international normative framework for safety of journalists, boosted by security councils resolutions and the adoption of target 16.10 in the SDG framework.

The effective impact on the ground is not felt yet and invisible in the statistics but journalists exercise self censorship, leave the profession of their country or stay silent. That is why more collaboration and

solidarity within the media industry, the media development community and civil society is needed to reverse the trend. And at both local and global level, advocacy and judicial action to end impunity for violence against journalists is needed. The trust crisis combined with increased attack require a re-think to change political will in favor of quality journalism and end impunity for violence against journalists.

Fact checking and audience engagement

Legacy print media are making commendable efforts to invest more in fact checking of statements of politicians and fake news articles that have captured and manipulated audiences. The problem is that current research findings do not demonstrate that these efforts are enough to address this problem.¹⁰ Fake news articles on Facebook remain more popular than the articles that refute them according to research during elections in Sub Sahara Africa¹¹.

This indicates a larger socio-psychological problem. It is not just the financial crisis or the repressive environment for journalists in many countries, it is also the audience and its perceptions that seem to be at the core of the problem and the center of the dispute around the function and role of the media and its relevance for society.

Digital literacy, media wisdom and audience resilience to extremism are new phenomena that require the attention of Free Press Unlimited and other media actors active in quality journalism and curriculum development. Audience intelligence through scraping of audience data has become an income generator for data firms, but they are inaccessible or unaffordable to small and medium sized quality journalism outfits. Investment is needed in access to open source intelligence and knowledge for toolkit development for the benefit of our partners.

This will require innovation and research and development in areas closely connected to what Free Press Unlimited calls digital news and information literacy, focused on the capacity of audiences to differentiate between false and true, right and wrong, manipulated and genuine Information.

2.2 Digital data revolution and Market pressures

The financial conundrum

Threats to independent journalism are unfortunately not confined to repressive measures and media capture policies. Also the financial sustainability and enabling environment for media is at risk. In most countries media ownership is concentrated and for profit policies have superseded journalism and information ethics in an alarmingly growing number of countries¹². Existing income generation models based on subscriptions and advertisements in a competing pluralist media market, has been largely destroyed and replaced by the new digital platforms.

Publishers are responding with newsroom 'efficiency cuts' targeting and resulting in the disappearance of local media houses especially.¹³ Traditionally, the local media scene is the breeding ground and talent school for top journalism. Local media have the closest connections between audiences and journalists. So democracy is losing a lot because of the demise of local media. It is a trend that proves difficult to reverse or replace with new digital substitutes.

Revolution is Mobile

The imminent digital transition is picking up fast and changes the world we used to know at a pace that many in older generations find hard to address or live with, creating deep divisions between generations in terms of media use and consumption. According to a *Statista* report¹⁴, more than one third of the total world's population owned a smart phone by 2017. The Global Web Index¹⁵ found 2.7 billion people globally active on social media. The delivery of freely accessible internet has leveraged unprecedented options for free speech to previously neglected voices. Freedom of Expression spurred

¹⁰ [Research Study University of Amsterdam](#) 2017, Richard Rogers and others, shows that those that believe fake or unreliable news are not susceptible to read and consume the content that is produced by the verification efforts of quality media.

¹¹ [Africa Check](#) tries to respond to the spread of fake news which is rampant in Africa as highlighted in [this study](#).

¹² [Media Capture Study](#) published by CIMA, August 2017

¹³ Several articles and sources including [Dutch](#), [UK](#) and [USA](#) demonstrate the erosion of democracy related to this phenomenon.

¹⁴ Statista 2017 report

¹⁵ Global Web Index 2017

the dignity revolts in the Arab World and set the stage to transition. In Africa, the youth are using their mobile and the internet to demand change in stagnated societies with authoritarian rule.

But the digital-data revolution also presents the media industry each year with new disruptive trends that pose serious challenges to content producers, audiences and policy makers. The audiences are shifting to on-demand platforms. In Asian countries, Whatsapp emerges as the most preferable platform for sharing news and information. Even in “slow developing” countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, this fundamentally changes the way stories are consumed. It shifts habits, format & content preferences of the public and the mainstream media does not yet have the answer to this trend.

Hyper-segmentation and audience access

The surge in innovation, diminishing costs of the technological infrastructure and the exponential growth of social media interaction lead to a very clear trend: hyper-localization and micro-segmentation of content shape the new global advertisement and income revenue model. Whether one is from Jakarta, Baghdad or San Salvador, one still lives in the micro-world of family, friends and children's schools. Personalized content is more effective than traditional means – subscription based advertisement – to reach the hearts and minds of the audience, their locations and preferences. In principle micro targeting through digital technology can benefit local and underserved audience segments. Small and medium sized quality journalism outfits engage on multiple platforms simultaneously but they lack access to technology for segregated audience data to generate income.

Successful independent media (local or not) therefore need the power of data analytics and audience research – an area of attention also for regulators – to reach audiences and enable flexibility and quick adjustment. Independent media need to reinvent themselves as content curation managers with a nose for business and for required information by the public. Innovative models and experimentation are needed to ensure and maintain the critical function of the press in society. A perfect role to play for Free Press Unlimited.

Corporate accountability and transparency

The Big Four digital platforms – Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple – are the undisputed content dissemination leaders with more than 50% of worldwide digital time spent on their platforms. But whilst acknowledging the ground breaking role the platforms have played for leveraging Freedom of Speech and citizen journalists, the monopolized position of the platforms is also increasing the dependency of independent journalists and media from them. Experiments of Facebook to restrict the circulation of content to friends and family only, resulted in a 90% decrease in dissemination of digital news services in Serbia. This impacts independent small and medium sized quality journalism players – Free Press Unlimited's partners – who are challenged to spread their content and reach audiences otherwise. Facebook simply has a better proposition to dominate distribution.

The resilience of independent media working in the service of the public and acting as a watchdog on their behalf is tested. These intended or unintended results of the digital data revolution does not ensure a dynamic, diverse and creative independent media sector that guarantees access to information and freedom for all. More transparency and publicly accessible research is needed how networks favor negative and bad content over fact based journalism. Responsible corporate policies should even investigate and innovate the creation of technology and algorithms that benefit journalism rather than bad content and fake news.

Currently most governments are considering content regulation as a weapon of choice against 'bad' content.¹⁶ But this will increase the risk of government censorship . Self regulation would be preferable but the global nature of the Internet makes that an almost impossible task for the digital domain. The information ecosystem is better served with smart market regulation that ensures diversity and counters the threat of uniformity of information. Systems that have worked well in the broadcast domain could be considered for the digital ecosystem. Eventually this will also be a better guarantee for the benefit of Freedom of Expression. Intense policy and advocacy will be needed to hold the bigger Social Media companies accountable, prevent Government mass-censorship abilities and at the same time address the negative impact of disinformation, hate speech and ensure access to quality information markets.

¹⁶ See Freedom of the Net – Freedom House concludes restrictive regulation is on the rise

2.3 Changing development policies

Despite the challenges and trends described, we believe there is an enormous potential for independent media to facilitate inclusive dialogue, especially in conflict areas. Quality journalism can also play an important role in holding governments and other power-holders accountable for their policies and overall national development practices. This is confirmed by a study of the Dutch government which states: *“Development Aid might become even more poverty reducing when it would actively stimulate Civic Activism, which means in particular by supporting free press ... Access to and use of (independent) news media ... will support the accountability of government...”*. Also the Human Development Report of the World Bank underwrites the critical importance of the media and access to information in their latest report¹⁷.

Investment in media development

The belief in the institutional development of resilient and ethical quality media that serve public interest and provide a space for public debate is still firm but nevertheless is no longer an automatic priority for development funders¹⁸. In fact the government actors that invest in media and information invest more in thematic short term solutions by targeting a specific problem, for example in Countering Violent Extremism or countering propaganda. Media development actors as Free Press Unlimited see these funding streams for targeted content as risky. It might add to already existing skepticism about 'western editorial intervention' and political biased media. In our point of view a more coherent approach is necessary from the side of funders, regulators and governments.

Donors change their views

In the last few years, especially in fragile contexts and countries at war, content production subsidies are more popular with donors, both at the side of government donors¹⁹ and private foundations. Governments spend huge amounts of money trying to win the hearts and minds of populations in countries through expensive international broadcasting.

On the private and corporate donor market a similar trend is notable. When foundations 10 years ago generously funded broad based media development strategies through direct support or by way of intermediary organizations, today most foundations have very targeted impact objectives. OSF, Knight and Omidyar support investigative journalism by choice. Ford, Gates Foundation and many others work on global public goods and social accountability by preference. MacArthur, Humanity United and several other funders focus on genocide prevention.

As such, there are few funders (or programs) that take – or can take – a genuinely ecosystem approach. They tend instead to narrow their focus on specific slices of the field, focus countries or a particular challenge facing the field.²⁰

Shifting donor priorities present challenges for independent newsrooms

Media as a sector for development investments, exists basically since the end of the cold war. The priority then was to support journalism training, organizational development of media houses and ecosystem development. In other words priorities were to build local capacity and help the media landscape in transition to pluralistic sustainable information landscapes that serve the local population and is owned, managed and dedicated to support the local population.

This generous support for media for media's sake as a pillar of democracy building is currently less prominent: on the one hand donors try to direct media efforts towards what they conceive as public goods or want to see achieved. This view of media as an instrument for achieving desired impact is gaining ground. Rather than addressing the need to build sustainable independent media as a pillar for democratic transition in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan, donors have given support to specific content topics like health programming for example.

It gets more damaging when government donors actually try to steer media content to serve the interests of the donor governments rather than the needs of the target populations. In the discussion

17 Human Development Report 2017 – World Bank pages 82-92

18 CIMA study examines aid flows to media development as 0.3 % of total development aid

19 Ibid

20 According to Sameer Padania in [this study](#)

about countering Russia's propaganda to destabilize its neighbors and the approaches to counter violent extremism (religious and ethnic hate propaganda), the desire to influence content is becoming problematic. It actually demonstrates the same political desire to sit on the chair of editors as the original culprits and erodes the trust in independent media.

Significant amounts of media grants these days favor environmental programming, health, peace building or clean water. Whilst some of these objectives coincide strongly with generic development needs of the countries and are an effort to serve public goods creation, it does create dependencies of fragile newsrooms in these contexts that interfere in editorial decision making. It is of course legitimate to protect ones population against manipulative hate content, but governments should not decide what content is admissible. It challenges agreed standards of Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom. Together with its partners, Free Press Unlimited sees the struggle of independent quality newsrooms to refrain from taking easy earmarked money and insist on journalism ethics and forms of regulation of the information market that ensure quality journalism.

Donors need better awareness of potential disruption caused by their funding strategies. The landscape for getting media work funded is vast but becomes more complex and demanding. Given the funding trends, it is likely that there will be more persuasion efforts needed to keep donors interested in independent media development. Currently only Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Germany invest most of their media support in the integrity of the media landscape and independent journalism ecosystem. The effort to sustain operations for independent journalism support become more challenging and will require more advocacy efforts from Free Press Unlimited in its discussions with bilateral, multilateral and private funders.

2.4 Opportunities looking forward

Notwithstanding the challenges above there also positive developments that provide anchors for policy engagement to benefit independent media development and quality journalism.

Positive trends in quality journalism

Investigative Journalism is developing new strength especially with small independent collectives researching malpractices in most countries of the world. Cross border collaboration has become the answer to the globalization of corporate power as exemplified by the publication of the Panama and Paradise Papers. Journalists are holding corporations and governments to account on corruption, tax evasion and violations of human rights and still have impact. Investigative journalism still is widely trusted and recognized as indispensable by its audiences and in developed countries manage to get funding from the public. Whilst investigative journalism is under siege in broadcast media, private foundations step in to support these investigative journalism collectives as a contribution to produce quality content.

Gender equality in the media is also a growing field that sends a positive message to the world. More focus on promoting female leadership in media and successful strategies for the production of female centered content better serve the audiences. Free Press Unlimited has recognized these challenges and developed strategies to address the gender gaps in the media world. We expect that this trend will be irreversible and will require a lot more attention in the near future.

Safety and protection of journalists are a *conditio sine qua non* for quality independent journalism to blossom. Civil society organizations and the UN system have jointly put the issue of impunity for violence against journalists higher on the worlds agenda. Multilateral policy change and advocacy with the EU and UN agencies – UNESCO & OHCHR – has resulted in EU Freedom of Expression guidelines, better whistle blower and source protection. And there is a growing realization that misogyny and hate and abuse towards women requires more appropriate attention and redress from media distributors and social media platforms.

At the local level, Free Press Unlimited works with media partners on emergency support, legal defense and training for risk mitigation and protection of journalists. At individual level we developed integrated

security training modules to help journalists stay safe. Legal and judicial action to end impunity had some result and we also invested in media production to explain the importance of journalist safety to the larger public. But more is needed to bend the curve of impunity.

Understanding challenges to quality media

Trust in the media sector and journalism is not solved by digital technology and hopes should also not originate from belief in investigative journalism alone. A more comprehensive understanding of media capture, media ownership and business models that provide resilience against monopolies and hostile take over is needed. Especially small and medium sized media houses suffer from lack of access to knowledge and research gets higher on the priority list of all in the promotion and creation of quality journalism.

Research on income generation for quality journalism, produced by Adessium²¹ and other actors show that new ways of using technology for audience intelligence can generate new income models. MDIF research shows that ways to make money from journalism currently comes down to selling the data of users, sell goods to users, new membership models or sell research and information. With these examples in hand, innovation and business strategies for smaller cooperative media projects can be developed. Free Press Unlimited should grow its work in this field.

Digital news dissemination requires policy action and innovation to address the problems related to the skewed social media monopolies. The world urgently needs more transparency and policy action to provide fair and equal sharing of revenue streams deriving from journalistic content. So far social media giants have not been willing to do more than open up some funding for social responsibility programs. Innovative open source technology for self owned distribution and income generation may provide also alternative models for small and medium sized media operations throughout the world.

Algorithms that benefit fake news over quality information should be exposed and changed. It seems unavoidable that regulation and accountability of social media firms increases. Free Press Unlimited has spend a good part of 2017 to investigate the strategies required to combat disinformation and the increasing manipulation and hate speech, especially in the social media domain. This will be a central focus for the policy and advocacy efforts of the organization in the coming years.

Access to Information is a key to the Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations global agenda for development that was adopted in 2015, contains a shortlist of goals that the nations of this world have signed on to. They include aspects that support open inclusive societies, including universal, safe, affordable Internet access for economic development or the rule of law, good governance and public access to information within international agreements (SDG 16.10). The development agenda cannot be implemented in the new global information society without access to quality information. The debate about local and country based priorities for development require inclusion and engagement of the population. They present opportunities for journalists and FPU to make their mark and serve the population.

For example, fifty percent of the world's population is younger than twenty years old. Several of the goals of the UN SDG agenda are concerned with including the youth, for example universal access to education and increased attention and focus on gender equality and providing opportunity to girls, leveraging much more the potential of half the worlds population for change and development for the good. There is promise and opportunity there and a perspective for dynamism and development. The future lies with them and Free Pres Unlimited should be on their side.

21 Research on income generation for quality journalism, Adessium 2016

3. Free Press Unlimited in the years ahead

3. 1 Generic recommendations

Since its inception Free Press Unlimited has grown into an international renowned press freedom organization. That growth has been made possible by the tremendous dedication and hard work of its staff and of course the support of its back donors. The professional development of FPU from a *Dutch Media Support Organization* towards a full service *International Press Freedom Developer* in terms of geographical scope, thematic specialization and workforce have all contributed to the organization standing out in the international arena with the reputation *for getting things done*.

As we saw in chapter one, Free Press Unlimited has successfully developed media initiatives in fragile and repressive societies, it has developed strategies to promote gender equality in the media and has gone the extra mile for journalist safety and protection. Partners have brought about change by increasing government accountability through investigative journalism work, contributed to the development of societies with unique work on gender equality, youthful audiences, safety and the promotion of ethical standards in the media.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny that Free Press Unlimited's growth is also the result of tremendous challenges that independent journalism and quality media are facing. The work of Free Press Unlimited is in high demand in even more countries and fields. Maybe that is logical given the ever more pervasive information society we live in.

Vision, Mission Strategy

The vision, mission and strategy as original formulated should be maintained and reinforced. The core values of the organization especially are as relevant today as they were 7 years ago. Creative inspiration and dedication to develop customized solutions to preserve independent ethical quality journalism are in high demand.

The grassroots based approach of Free Press Unlimited with its partners to develop locally owned and implemented solutions based on an integrated and coordinated problem analysis also stands out as a cornerstone of Free Press Unlimited's fame and reputation.

But Free Press Unlimited can only stay relevant and provide added value to its partners if and when it is constantly innovating and adapting new ideas and technologies into its work. Therefore the organization should strengthen and expand its Theory of Change and underpin the effect and impact of the intervention strategies that Free Press Unlimited promotes with evidence based research and knowledge.

Cooperation, partnership and networks

Free Press Unlimited has been able to build on a number of important partnerships throughout its existence and it should seek to maintain those relationships as much as possible. As a core funder of Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression – and an active proponent of such in the international arena – the Dutch Government remains an important strategic backer for the work of Free Press Unlimited. It is a critical relationship for the organization.

In a time where journalism is under threat and funding is shrinking, international solidarity and cooperation is needed to change the political parameters for the media development sector and ensure more support. Even more than in the past, Free Press Unlimited's organizational intent should be shaped by an active and welcoming attitude towards strategic cooperation with like-minded organizations or even by engaging in joint ventures with them.

3.2 Program development

Dialogue and Dissent in the developing world

Free Press Unlimited's work in the developing world is well served with maintaining the current engagement under the Strategic Partnership program with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Free Press Unlimited should strive to maintain that framework after 2020, when the current program ends. That entails a continuation of engagement in thematic and regional work in South East Asia, Sub Sahara Africa, the Middle East and Central Latin America.

Many try to frame 'the Media' as a culprit and producer of instability by using the term 'Fake News'. Research shows however that many actors, be they governments that do not live up to their international agreements, corporate interest groups or warring factions and polarizing politicians are mostly responsible for untruth aimed at manufacturing consent. Research also shows that fact based quality journalism has public trust.

International solidarity does not always come natural for journalists and independent media. They are too busy 'doing their job'²² as Martin Baron of the Washington Post once said. But it is undoubtedly true that cooperation, international solidarity and joint action helps independent media and journalists to maintain resilient in the face of the threats around them and helps them to keep civic space open for dialogue and dissent. That is why peaceful debate and dissent helps audiences around the world to shape their opinions and develop healthy and thriving societies. Assisting this international solidarity is a natural role for Free Press Unlimited. It comes with more focus for advocacy and policy change in the local and regional work as well as the international arena.

Europe new focus area for Free Press Unlimited

Throughout Central and South Eastern Europe state control and capture of the media sector by corporate actors aimed at limiting civic space and the ability for public dissent are on the rise. This has to a large extent destroyed a lot of work in support of independent journalism in (South) Eastern Europe where the optimism of developing new democracies has stagnated. Attempts to curb free expression online and insufficient support for a healthy level playing field for a diverse, independent media system are also a problem elsewhere in Europe.

Free Press Unlimited should increase its efforts to curb these negative trends in Europe. It should also be prepared and extend its knowledge and other cooperative approaches to support new requests from partners. With the Russian Language News Exchange network and Free Press Unlimited's impressive track record in fragile societies and local media and youth engagement combined, these societies can be assisted with effective media development strategies. New partnerships with like minded organizations in other European countries will be sought in order to address these challenges.

Thematic focus areas for program development

Since Free Press Unlimited created a team focused on *Gender, Safety and Accountability*, more strategic emphasis has been given to thematic focus in its support work. Free Press Unlimited has increased its work in safety and is achieving results in gender equality in the media field. The success stimulates the organization to develop knowledge and expertise in more thematic areas and develop them into specialized programs.

Gender & Media

Since the development of its Gender Policy, Free Press Unlimited has generated better models for engagement with partners on Gender in its development work. This increased knowledge has resulted in improvements for women journalists in Asia and Africa both in terms of female centered content as well as their leadership and an equal position in the media sector. Similarly, the focus on downward accountability and safety of media and journalists has improved their ability to play their role as resilient *Civil Society Actors* in many countries.

Free Press Unlimited should maintain this strategic focus and keep building on its work in those fields. The aim is to set up a specialized program for gender equality and equity in the media domain.

²² <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/martyr-baron-says-journalists-work-not-war/>

Digital news and information literacy

To help audiences differentiate fact from fiction seem more vital than ever, especially for youthful audiences who grow up accustomed to a world polarized between like and dislike. Nuance and moderation in information sharing and the understanding of complexities are not just a focus for journalists, they have become necessary educational tools for audiences and FPU should assist in this effort and combine strength with other actors in this field both in the Netherlands and abroad.

Ethical Journalism

Free Press Unlimited has developed signature media projects serving local disadvantaged populations in media dark areas with partners working from exile but with strong local ties and embedding. Radio Dabanga, Tribal News Network Pakistan and the Syria work are examples of Free Press Unlimited's capacity to design targeted and locally embedded and relevant media projects in support of access to information and independent journalism.

Free Press Unlimited may expect new requests coming its way and - within capacity and if and when necessary pre-conditions for local ownership are guaranteed - Free Press Unlimited should not refrain to build on this quality of the organization.

Ethical journalism in conflict areas has always been pivotal to Free Press Unlimited operations to support independent media. This period in history is sometimes defined as the 'post-truth era'. Free Press Unlimited therefore must insist and continue to work on promoting a culture of truth, which appears to be also in decline in western democracies. This includes support to investigative journalism for transparency and social accountability. But it also means investing more in knowledge and quality about audience resilience against manipulation and strategic business development models for independent media.

3.3 Organizational development

Knowledge and Quality

Free Press Unlimited already invested heavily in knowledge and quality because it is important to know if our Theory of Change, intervention strategies, regional programs and thematic programs are evidence based and to ensure efficiency, accountability and transparency. The mission of the K&Q department is to organize knowledge in such a way that it contributes to innovation, increased relevance, higher impact, better recognition and good donor relations, other words contribute to the quality of FPU and its partners. Therefore, Free Press Unlimited will continue to strengthen its knowledge management and develop and implement its research agenda on relevant developments to inform the international community and expert organizations. Where needed the knowledge and quality department will expand its cooperation with like minded organizations and academia regarding the most pressing issues in the media development sector mentioned in this paper: the enabling environment, digital transition, income generation, accountability, gender and safety.

Innovation and open source toolkit development

Free Press Unlimited invested heavily in the safety of her own staff but also on digital safety for journalists by developing tools such as the NetAidKit, leak platforms for whistle blowers, a storytelling app etc. This was not always successful, we are obviously not a technology developer. But we do know how to translate (digital) needs into tools. This strength is in our opinion a way forward for innovation: to translate the needs on the ground into an efficient and useful program, tool, advocacy etc. In the coming years we need to put even more focus on innovation, as it is vital for our sustainability as an organization. We need to invest in audience intelligence, open source toolkits that are easy to use by our partners and research that gives insights on both context-sensitive implementation of projects and knowledge on the existing audiences. Using data for the good is not only a threat, but also opens up better service delivery and quality of media actors and offers verification, grouping and explanation of and opportunities for participation in complex problems to the public.

Advocacy and the policy change

In the years ahead there are many turning points for the preservation of quality journalism and independent media. That requires more attention to detail when addressing phenomena like disinformation, manipulative government agenda's and criminal attack against the media.

Press Freedom is a pillar and anchor of democracy. Free Press Unlimited will have to step up its advocacy efforts to protect the core values of inclusive freedom of expression, the need for dissent and pluralism as a means to develop societies.

Policy change is needed to support journalism that serves the people who deserve to know.

Leon Willems & Ruth Kronenburg, January 2019