Freedom of opinion and the media in German development policy
“Fair development opportunities for all will only exist if minimum standards are upheld in social interaction. The human rights to freedom of expression and of access to information are such minimum standards.”
Dear readers,

Our modern media have brought everyone in the world closer together. Information and ideas can travel round the globe in a matter of seconds. And yet, in many countries, public opinion is subject to all kinds of restrictions. Germany’s development policymakers, however, regard the right to freedom of opinion as a vital prerequisite for development. People can assert their rights and take part in shaping the society in which they live only if they have the right to express their opinions and inform themselves freely. A priority area of our work is to enable disadvantaged groups in particular to have access to information and independent media. This brochure describes what we do to foster freedom of expression and access to information, and how we do it.

No one should be denied the right to access information freely or to exercise without fear their right to freedom of expression. The exercise of these rights is not only of key importance for sustainable development. It is also a question of human dignity and personal development.

Dr. Gerd Müller, Member of the German Parliament
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development
Freedom of expression as a human right

Every person has the right to seek out and disseminate information and to freely express his or her own opinion. Although almost every country on this planet has committed itself to uphold and promote these rights, freedom of opinion is still actively restricted in many countries.

Key role for development

When people are able to access information and express their opinions freely and without fear, then they will also be able to assert other human rights, such as the rights to food, education and health. Therefore, freedom of opinion and of access to information are not only cornerstones of a functioning democracy and economic progress. They also have a key role to play in fostering sustainable, human development.
Empowerment of disadvantaged groups

In many countries, public opinion is controlled by political and economic elites. Disadvantaged groups seldom have access to information that they can understand or to independent, unbiased media. These groups would benefit from media services that are offered in local languages or dialects and are therefore accessible, as well as from citizens’ media and greater ‘media literacy’. The rights to freedom of expression and of access to information provide the secure platform from which marginalised people can have their say in public and make their voices heard by decision-makers. Sections of the population that may be marginalised can include women from rural areas, young people living in poverty, ethnic, sexual or religious minorities, or people with disabilities.

Media as a platform for dialogue

Whether we are looking at newspapers, television, blog sites, citizens’ radio stations or social networks – people use media in different ways. They may use them to seek out news or entertainment; to contact other people; to express desires, thoughts or political ideas; or to make demands. In a ‘best case scenario’, media serve as a broad platform for dialogue within societies. Free and equal access to, and the active use of, media are therefore important means of promoting freedom of opinion. An independent and productive media landscape is an essential part of democratic public life.
TAKE LATIN AMERICA, FOR EXAMPLE: In Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia, the BMZ is supporting the development of sustainable business models for local broadcasters. Its activities there are helping radio stations broadcasting in rural areas to offer programmes that can be understood by, and are relevant to, the lives of the local population – programmes in which listeners can have a say.
TAKE THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES, FOR EXAMPLE: Young people living in the Palestinian territories are often excluded from having a say in political decision-making. The BMZ supports them in their efforts to use new media in order to make their voices heard.
The dynamism of the digital age

Digital transformation is giving people all around the world new opportunities to make their voices heard and to access information. Citizens are publishing news, photos and videos in social networks; they are using online platforms to interact with public authorities; they are networking worldwide and appealing to others to protest against human rights violations.

Notwithstanding these benefits, digitalisation also bears dangers. For instance, surveillance technologies threaten people’s privacy and facilitate comprehensive censorship of online content. The digital divide between rich and poor, urban and rural areas, women and men as well as old and young is creating new forms of exclusion.

With the aim of mitigating these challenges, we help to improve people’s media and data literacy, as well as to provide non-discriminatory access to the internet. The political and legal frameworks that protect people’s privacy and foster freedom of opinion and access to information must be adapted to reflect new developments in the technological field.
Freedom of opinion and media development in German development policy

What we are doing:

→ We work to strengthen the rights of freedom of expression and of access to information in a broad-based way.

We help people living in developing countries to find out about their rights of freedom of expression and of access to information, and then help them to assert these rights effectively and put them into practice. We want disadvantaged groups in particular to have unfettered access to information and to be able to publicly articulate their needs and hopes. Helping us to achieve these aims are partners from civil society and the media who want to foster a diversity of public opinion, promote political dialogue and strengthen free media. Furthermore, we provide capacity building support to help state authorities fulfil their roles as duty-bearers. It is their duty to respect, protect and enforce the right of all to freedom of expression and of access to information.
TAKE NAMIBIA, FOR EXAMPLE: In southern Africa, the BMZ is working to strengthen a network of civil society organisations. These non-governmental organisations are active in Namibia, Zambia and Botswana, where they campaign for the rights of media workers, for fairer legislation to govern the media and for compliance with human rights standards.
We work specifically to enhance capacity building at both institutional and structural level.

We provide advice on how to draft and implement laws that meet human rights standards, so that the political and legal frameworks in our partner countries improve. To complement this task, we also provide support to non-governmental organisations fighting for freedom of opinion and working to defend media workers and human rights activists.

Journalists need to have proper qualifications if they are to produce quality work that is relevant to society. Therefore, we help our partners devise training and advanced training programmes, modernise curricula and upgrade the skills of teaching staff, and we strive to ensure that these measures are closely geared to the needs of actual professional practice.

We help develop viable schemes to fund independent journalism in order to enhance the professionalism and long-term financial independence of the media sector. We work with professional associations, press councils, regional networks and media organisations.

We also work to enhance the participation in society of disadvantaged groups. To this end, we are particularly active in supporting women and girls in rural areas, young people living on the fringes of cities, and ethnic minorities, so that their voices are heard too.
Our strategic approach

- Political and legal frameworks
- Participation in society
- Professionalism and economic viability of the media sector
- Right to freedom of expression and of access to information

digital transformation
We incorporate human rights standards and principles in the measures we implement.

Human rights and development are mutual prerequisites. That is why, in our work, we aim to realise the rights of freedom of opinion and freedom to express one’s opinions, in keeping with the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All projects that we fund must be based on the following principles – in their planning and implementation as well as assessment: non-discrimination and equal opportunities, participation and empowerment, and transparency and accountability. When advising our partner countries, we base our advice on international standards such as the model law on freedom of information drafted by the African Human Rights Commission.

TAKE GHANA, FOR EXAMPLE: The media and civil society there need information from public sources so that they are better able to hold the state accountable for its actions. The BMZ is enhancing the capacity of an alliance in Ghana that is campaigning for freedom of information. In addition, it is helping civil society and people working in the media to assert their rights.
TAKE MYANMAR, FOR EXAMPLE:
Myanmar’s media market is opening up. As a result, there is a huge demand for properly qualified journalists. The BMZ is supporting the setting up of a Myanmar Journalism Institute, so that the country’s people will have access to information provided by professional journalists doing quality work.
TAKE UGANDA, FOR EXAMPLE: Young people there often have very few opportunities to access information. Therefore, in Uganda, the BMZ is supporting organisations that offer young people fora, either on radio or via digital technology, where they can get information and exchange views. With the help of these fora, young people can have a say in their communities.
The BMZ is engaged in strategic collaboration with the DW Akademie in order to promote the right of freedom of expression and access to information in developing countries. The DW Akademie is the arm of the Deutsche Welle public service broadcaster responsible for development cooperation work.

Moreover, the BMZ works with non-governmental organisations which campaign for the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Other important actors in this field are political foundations and church aid organisations. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) also implements measures to strengthen the right to freedom of expression and of access to information in its bilateral development cooperation work.
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, regardless of frontiers.

→ **DID YOU KNOW?** In the internationally binding Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (also known as the “civil rights covenant”), the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information is also enshrined there in Article 19. This civil rights covenant has been ratified by 168 countries so far. The convention on the rights of children, which gives children the right to freedom of expression and of access to information, has been ratified by 193 countries.
“Freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are indispensable conditions for the full development of the person. These are essential for any society.”

Quoted from a session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/GC/34)