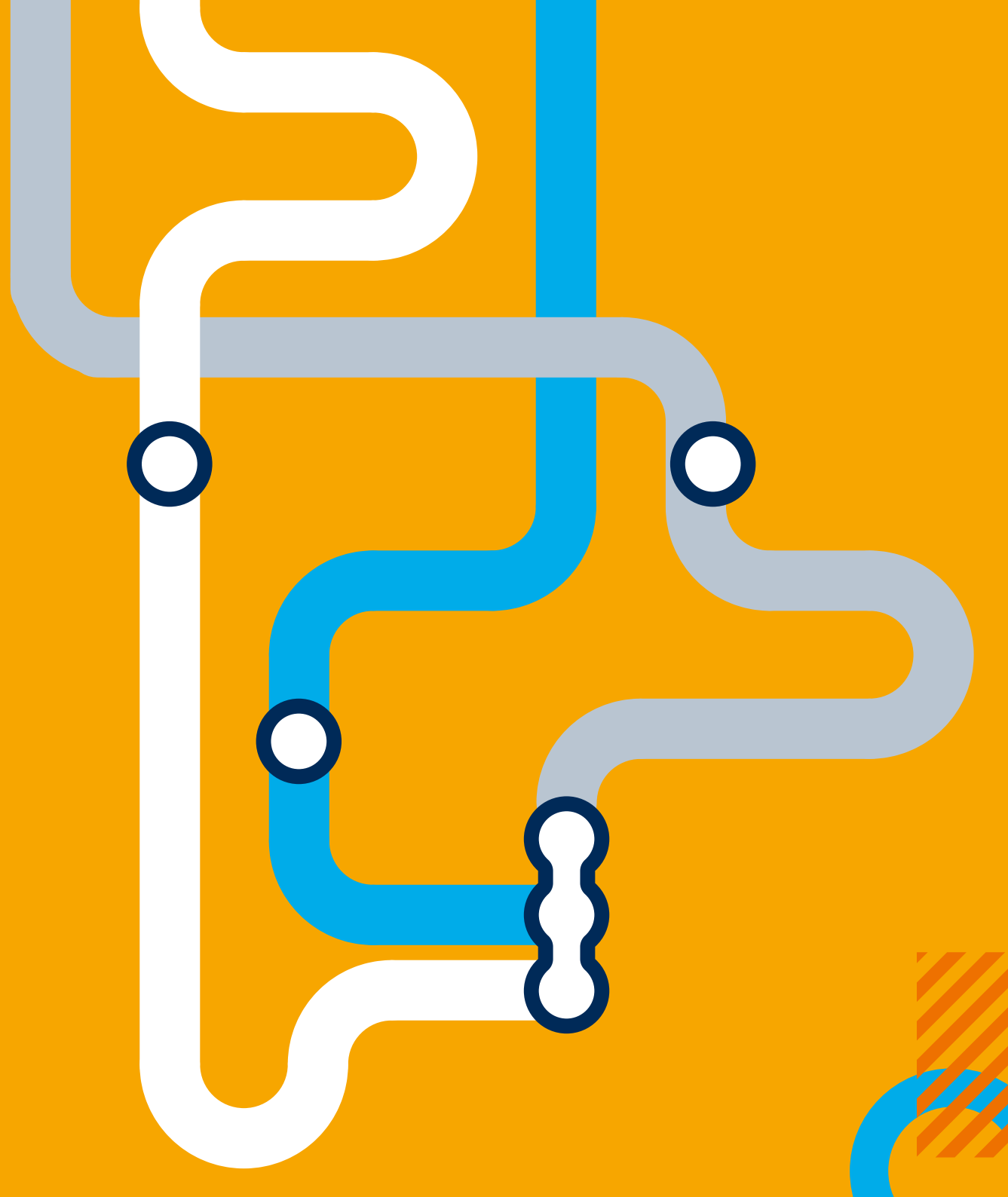


Mapping out regional consultations

A practical orientation to organizing consultations





Your step-by-step guide to regional consultations

What is this guide for?

Carrying out regional consultations with multiple stakeholders can help establish a shared understanding of major challenges and build consensus about promising paths forward. They are particularly useful in complex environments with many different actors. This guide provides some practical guidance on how to organize consultative processes on a regional scale in the field of media development. It should serve as a hands-on toolbox for practitioners working to advance media freedom and is based on an approach first developed and implemented by DW Akademie and the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) in 2015. We aim to make this method available for international organizations carrying out consultations, as well as regional and local organizations who would like to do so. Consultations can take place in-person, online or in hybrid form.

The **three essential considerations** of regional consultations are:

1. An **interactive, participant-driven agenda** which ensures that themes and priorities truly reflect the needs and demands of local actors.
2. **Themes and priorities should emerge during the process**, rather than being predetermined by the organizers.
3. And finally, having a **diverse range of participants** ensures that all perspectives are included and that the end results are credible.

READ MORE ABOUT THE FORMAT

Since 2015, DW Akademie and CIMA along with many other partners in the field, have been organizing regional consultations that bring together a wide range of stakeholders. The aim of these exercises is to identify key challenges facing independent media and to come up with regional approaches to address them. Consultations have been held in Latin America, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans and South Asia. Bearing in mind the complex nature of media systems, these consultations typically include representatives of a wide range of actors, including journalist associations, regulators, legal groups, human rights organizations, policymakers and media experts. The consultations are intended to help partners to strengthen political support for independent media, improve media methodologies, and define clearer, better articulated ideas for policy reform.

More information is available here: <https://www.cima.ned.org/themes/regional-consultations>



1. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

LOCAL PARTNER ORGANIZATION: HOW TO CREATE OWNERSHIP

PARTICIPANTS: MAKING SURE ALL VOICES ARE HEARD

INPUT REPORT: SETTING THE SCENE

1. Laying the groundwork

1.1 Local partner organization: How to create ownership

Ownership of the consultation process should lie with an organization based in the region where the consultations are taking place. This helps ensure:

- Stronger credibility with regional actors and organizations
- Knowledge of relevant regional actors and networks
- Awareness of interpersonal and interorganizational dynamics that might influence the success of the consultations
- Support for implementing potential follow-up activities

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1.2 Participants: Making sure all voices are heard

Consultations should bring a mix of different actors to the table. Participants may well be used to discussing media topics and challenges within their respective stakeholder groups, but conversations between representatives of different groups tend to be rarer. Facilitating such dialogue can help push forward the sector as a whole. With this in mind, stakeholders might include:

- **Media:** Journalists, media practitioners, media development professionals
- **Science:** Researchers and academics
- **Law:** Legal experts, media regulators
- **Associations:** Human rights defenders, advocacy groups and established networks
- **Institutions:** Representatives from the government and multilateral organizations

It is crucial that women and members of marginalized communities are brought into consultations. Including them leads to better, more comprehensive conclusions, and ensures diverse perspectives, experiences, and needs are considered. Leaving out such voices risks perpetuating existing biases and power imbalances.

Involving a broad range of stakeholders helps to:

- **Establish a common language** around the most pressing issues, which is especially important in very diverse regions
- **Build trust and provide opportunities** to exchange experiences and viewpoints in a constructive manner with a view to finding common ground
- Enhance **credibility** due to the participation of local players
- Stimulate **fresh dialogue** about priorities and strategies of work
- **Create dynamics and momentum** for cooperation and change

BIGGER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER

We advise limiting participation to 30–40 persons. A larger number makes it difficult to keep a meeting constructive and focused. In a good consultation exercise, all the participants should interact with each other. The bigger the group, the harder this gets.

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1.3 Input report: Setting the scene

To get an overview of the current state of the sector in a given region, we have found that it is helpful to produce a short “scene-setter” on local media freedom. The report can be based on desk research and/or pre-consultation interviews with prospective participants and media stakeholders in the region. We also suggest sharing the report with the participants as a common reference point ahead of the meeting.

The input report helps to:

- Provide an **overview of the main issues and priorities** as identified by the participants
- Develop a **shared understanding of the context** (historical background, networks, stakeholders, etc.) the consultations will take place in
- **Establishing trust and familiarity** among participants through questionnaires or shared interviews ahead of the consultations
- Encouraging **participants to engage** with the process

Carrying out interviews for the input report enhances findings, especially in contexts where desk research is hampered due to lack of resources or information.

Two **major advantages** are:

- **Increased sense of ownership:** Participants are more motivated to contribute because they are actively involved in the process from the start.
- Once the consultations start, participants are prepared to move to discussions more quickly since they have already been listened to. This **helps reduce lengthy monologues** at the beginning of a meeting, keeping things tighter.

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We also suggest thinking about the following:

- **Group interviews vs. individual interviews:** Group interviews help participants get acquainted with each other before consultations, which builds trust and fosters a spirit of collaboration. Individual interviews offer more space for each participant to elaborate on their point of view.
- The interviews should be conducted by someone who is **familiar with the region**, its political intricacies and media ecology. A local partner might be best suited.
- Make sure to conduct the interviews in a **language that is accessible to all interviewees**. If there are language barriers, consider using interpreters.

At the same time, **conducting interviews is resource-intensive**. Consultation organizers will need to weigh up the potential costs and benefits.

Before selecting interview partners, the organizing institution should decide whether all interviewees will be invited to the consultations themselves. In the interest of transparency, the decision should be communicated to all interview partners beforehand.

The input report could provide information on:

- The media sector in the region (historical evolution, gains and setbacks)
- Stakeholders and regional networks supporting independent media in the region
- Factors that actively enable or hinder viable media ecosystems
- Potential entry points for regional and sectoral collaborations

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Helpful key questions that could guide the report as well as the interviews:

- *What are the main obstacles to ensuring pluralistic independent media ecosystems in the region?*
- *Do national networks in the region cooperate across borders to strengthen political support for independent media in the region?*
- *Do they actively strive to move forward and learn from each other?*
- *What is the role of civil society organizations in advancing media freedom?*
- *How do networks and civil society groups engage with the government? And with regional institutions and bodies?*



2. PLANNING THE EVENT

MEETING MODE: IN-PERSON, ONLINE, OR HYBRID

2. Planning the event

2.1 Meeting mode: In-person, online, or hybrid

Online meetings and events allow people in remote regions or countries to participate when traveling is complicated or risky. But remote meetings are not necessarily the best for building personal relationships, which are key to ensure momentum continues after the event.

Here are a few of the main pros and cons of in-person, online and hybrid consultations with multiple stakeholders.

MEETING MODE	PROS	CONS
In-person consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – creates a dynamic and collaborative group atmosphere, complemented by off-the-record and coffee-break conversations – easier to create a safe environment for discussions about controversial and delicate topics – supports the building of networks and personal relationships that increase the chances of follow-up meetings and concrete action-plans – fewer distractions, since participants are not on their computers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – much more expensive, as costs for flights, visas and event location need to be factored in – stakeholders may be excluded from participating due to political, safety or visa reasons



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MEETING MODE	PROS	CONS
Online consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased accessibility for participants in remote regions (if internet connection is not an issue) - online platforms and tools for virtual meetings offer a wide range of possibilities for facilitation and collaboration - cheaper, since no expenses will be paid for travel, hotel, visas, etc. - no problems with visas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can be subject to technical issues such as poor internet connection, hardware problems, and software incompatibility, which can disrupt the flow of the meeting and reduce effective participation from people in remote areas - creating a collaborative group atmosphere is more challenging - pre-consultative interviews might be necessary to establish trust among participants - bonding and relationship-building may be less likely due to lack of personal interactions - creating momentum for follow-up activities may be more challenging because it might be harder to build networks and personal relationships - participants may be subject to distractions that could affect their engagement in the meeting

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Hybrid consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enable remote participants to take part in meetings that they would otherwise be unable to attend due to distance or schedule conflicts - can save costs as travel and accommodation expenses are reduced or eliminated for remote participants - allow for improved collaboration between in-person and remote participants through the use of digital tools such as screen sharing and video conferencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can be subject to technical issues such as poor internet connection, hardware problems, and software incompatibility, which can disrupt the flow of the meeting and reduce effective participation from people in remote areas - requires a very good audio and video setup, otherwise remote participants cannot see/hear and will feel excluded - reduced social interaction between in-person participants and remote participants - require effective time management to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to participate and that the meeting stays on schedule - remote participants may be subject to distractions that could affect their engagement in the meeting

TAKE YOUR CONSULTATIONS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Connecting the consultations with another event in the region can leverage specific actors and expertise to enhance discussions.

For instance, DW Akademie and CIMA organized consultations in Durban in 2017, which took place in the aftermath of a meeting of the Pan-African Lawyers Union conference. Given that independent media require a supportive legal environment in which to operate, it was extremely powerful to tie the regional consultation to a meeting of lawyers and judges. As principal players in building and safeguarding laws that protect journalists and media outlets, the legal community is a critical stakeholder in conversations about media systems and efforts to improve them at national and regional level.

3. COMING TOGETHER

FACILITATION: WHO AND HOW

AGENDA: INTERACTIVE AND PARTICIPANT-DRIVEN

3. Coming together

3.1. Facilitation: Who and how

We recommend working with an outside facilitator unaffiliated to any of the organizations and groups present. Their role is to prepare and moderate the sessions, ensure that all perspectives are considered, drive the discussion forward and compile the results.

Some aspects to consider when **selecting a facilitator**:

- Able to bring a **neutral perspective** to the table
- Possibly from **another region** to ensure impartiality
- Not affiliated with any of the groups represented
- **Experienced in facilitating** larger groups of diverse actors
- Familiar with participatory group moderation methods

The outcome of the consultations remains entirely the responsibility of the participants. The facilitator's responsibility is to manage the process, which includes creating the agenda, encouraging collaboration and joint problem-solving (instead of going over the same problems again and again) as well as time-keeping.

Another important role of the facilitator is to ensure that **every participant, regardless of their background, feels safe to speak up**—again underlining the importance of impartiality. This is particularly important when it comes to making space for the voices of women and members of marginalized groups, who are often ignored or not taken seriously. In regions where participants may harbor a wide range of viewpoints, interests, and political convictions, this impartiality helps to focus on commonalities and possible solutions at hand, rather than getting caught up in political or ethical disagreements.

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In the interest of trust and confidentiality, participants should be asked to follow the Chatham House Rule, which reads as follows:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.¹

Pinning this rule at a visible spot in the meeting room helps to underline the spirit of the consultations. If the consultations take place online, the rule can be pasted on slides as a sticky note or shown at the beginning of presentations.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS!

More tips to enhance trust and participation:

- Agree that **no photos** will be taken during the event. If photos have to be taken for some reason, they could avoid showing the faces of the participants.
- **Encourage active listening** and avoid interruptions, distractions, or side conversations. Participants can take turns to speak and to ask questions if they need further clarifications.
- Agree on a **nonverbal sign** (like waving a hand) which signals approval. The sign can be used during discussions — it helps to create a collaborative atmosphere and keeps the flow of the discussion going without verbal interruptions. In online consultations, participants can use the thumbs-up sign of the platform they are using (Zoom or similar).
- After the meeting, the facilitator should **follow up with participants** for whom some things might still be unclear. This ensures that everyone is satisfied with the outcomes and to address any lingering concerns or issues that may have come up during the meeting.

¹ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule#:~:text=The%20Rule%20reads%20as%20follows,other%20participant%2C%20may%20be%20revealed.>



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3.2 Agenda: Interactive and participant-driven

The agenda should provide structure to the consultation process without predetermining its trajectory or outcome. The focus is on collaboration amongst participants in order to find creative and possibly new solutions to previously identified challenges. Discussions can evolve according to the priorities and interests of the group. This allows participants to drive the process.

Allowing participants to drive the agenda may prompt skepticism. It is an unusual method that many have not encountered before. Yet, our experience shows that people who were originally skeptical were convinced and appreciative of the process.

Despite an open, participant-driven agenda, facilitation can support collective action and coalition-building—two vital components for building political will towards change.²

² <https://mediainpactfund.org/coalition-building-as-an-approach-to-media-development/>
<https://www.comminit.com/media-development/content/coalitions-change-collective-action-better-media-ecosystems>



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Past consultations facilitated by DW Akademie and CIMA aimed to:

- Identify and acknowledge **positive and promising initiatives** that already exist in the region.
- Understand and account for any **context peculiarities** that inform current media development efforts at national and regional levels.
- Identify gaps and **define priorities** for future media development activities in the region.
- Develop **solution ideas** and **identify possible allies** to implement them.

Here is a sample (online) consultation agenda:

SESSION	OBJECTIVE	METHODOLOGY
Challenges to tackle	Getting to know each other (icebreaker)	Participants are prompted to form pairs and introduce each other to the big group, e.g. in which country are you based? To which professional group or sector do you belong (e.g. journalists, Non-governmental Organizations (NGO), lawyers, policymakers)? How do you assess the situation of freedom of expression in your country? 45 min
	Identifying challenges and barriers to action: A participatory session, followed by a facilitated discussion	1. Presentation of pre-consultation input report. 15 min 2. Participants identify challenges and barriers to collaboration between civil society, media actors and potentially government reformers. 45 min

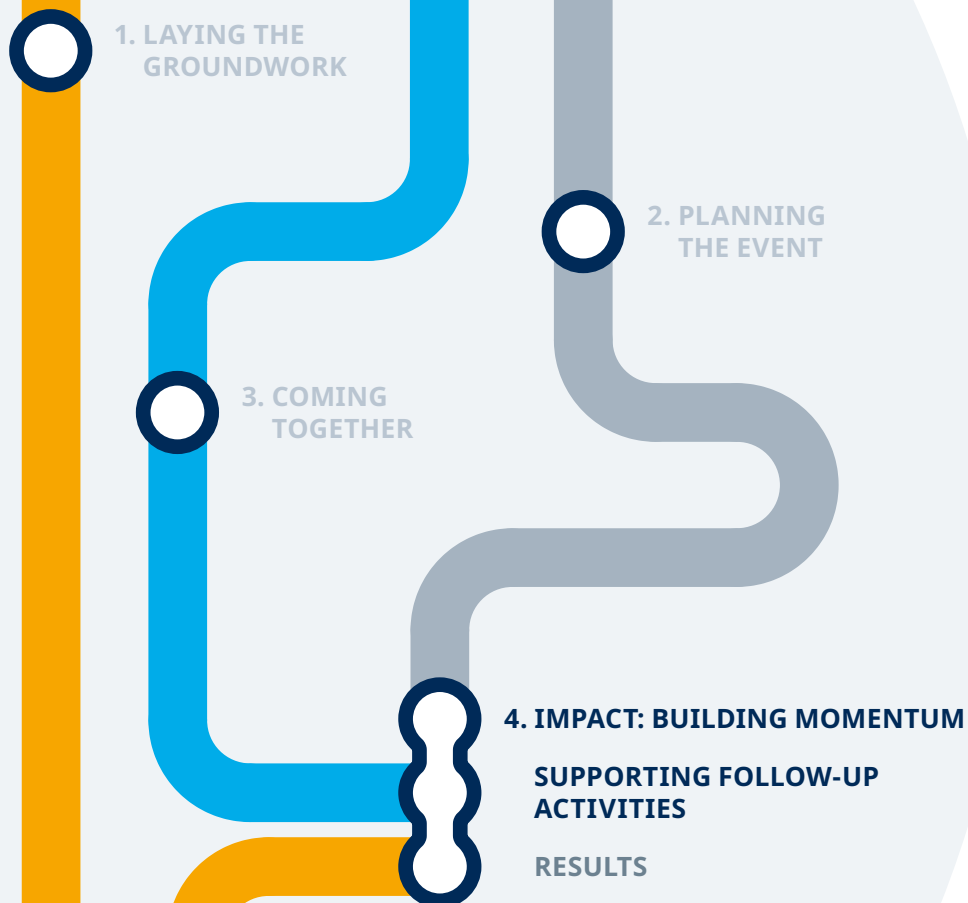


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SESSION	OBJECTIVE	METHODOLOGY
Opportunities and entry points	Identify issues with potential for joint action	<p>Break-out groups (by clusters based on “barriers to action” identified above)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rapporteur with a laptop and screen visible to all facilitates the drafting of a statement on opportunities for collaboration by the group. The statement should be concise as it will be shared in plenary with all participants afterwards. It might help to ask the group to rank the top issues in the media sector where greater cooperation is possible and there is good potential for action. 2. Identify issues that unify media, NGOs, and potentially government reformers, as well as existing networks and initiatives that can be built upon. What would change look like? 3. In plenary: Groups read their statements. What can we learn from the similarities and differences in our statements? <p>60 min</p>
Building a vision of change	Charting a path towards change	<p>Interactive panel Pre-selected participants who can touch on some key initiatives and efforts in the region.</p> <p>45 min</p> <p>Break-out groups</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on each of the issues identified earlier, what would a change process look like? What would the short and medium term look like? 2. Participants look at pinboards by the other break-out groups to see different visions of change and get ready to discuss them. 3. Plenary: Moderators summarize visions, feedback and comments. <p>120 min</p>



4. Impact: Building momentum

4.1. Supporting follow-up activities

We suggest considering the follow-up phase of the event right from the beginning. To support possible follow-up activities and initiatives, these aspects are key:

- Organizers should **clearly communicate** the aim of the consultations from the beginning. Make it transparent whether funds are available to support follow-up activities, such as network-building activities and organizing working group meetings. This is crucial to **manage expectations**.
- The sustainability of potential follow-up activities also depends on existing regional media and human rights frameworks and other organizations promoting regional exchange. Depending on the regional context, it may be useful to include **policymakers and/or representatives of the donor community** in the discussions. They can share valuable knowledge, i.e. on how to generate funding for network or project activities. Furthermore, they will hear firsthand about the challenges of the media sector and barriers to reforms. This needs to be weighed up against the risk that participants do not feel comfortable speaking freely with donors in the room.
- When inviting politicians, it is important to consider the possible effects on civil society actors. It is **important that activists feel safe to speak out freely**. One option is to invite policymakers only for specific sessions and not the whole process.
- To stop follow-up activities from falling on only a few shoulders, the consultations can be **embedded in a broader regional or country strategy** of donor organizations, local NGOs or international organizations. Consultations could be one project activity within a larger strategy to support the regional media sector, which helps to ensure funding and administrative support.

ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

Some outcomes of the consultations may be difficult to measure, i.e. a better understanding of the commonalities among countries in a region. If funds are available, an evaluation in the aftermath of the meetings can be helpful to assess the impact and to find out what else is needed to achieve tangible outcomes.

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2. PLANNING THE EVENT

3. COMING TOGETHER

4. IMPACT: BUILDING MOMENTUM

SUPPORTING FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

RESULTS

4.2 Results

The following examples **summarize some of the results** that were achieved through the regional consultations facilitated by DW Akademie and CIMA in partnership with local organizations:

- In 2015 consultations were conducted in Bogota, Colombia. Participants who were used to working at the policy level took away the conclusions from the meeting and successfully integrated them into their own work. The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights took media concentration as a priority area for research and action in its strategic plan. Moreover, UNESCO Latin America used the results as a reference point for its advocacy work.
- In 2019 consultations were held in Beirut, Lebanon with experts from 13 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). While acknowledging the complexity of the regional media crisis and the diversity of experiences, the group identified paramount challenges that could provide the basis for greater cross-border collaboration to support independent media. The participants also identified further steps to begin establishing trust and mechanisms for coordination and cooperation among media stakeholders, such as:
 - Coordinating to document media ownership patterns in the MENA region
 - Broadening the community that actively supports media freedom in the region by reaching out to passive allies
 - Coordinating through existing membership groups and networks to better communicate a MENA position on global agendas
 - Building opportunities for regional exchange on peer-to-peer learning about self-regulation and regulation
- In 2022 online consultations were held with more than 50 media professionals, activists, and experts from South Asia. The focus was on improving journalistic reporting on migration and displacement in their respective countries. Participants agreed that there was an urgent need for more training and networking among journalists in the region. The consultations were also the first step towards the creation of the South Asia Network for Communication, Displacement and Migration (SAN-CDM), which was formally launched in early 2023.

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DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 70 developing countries and emerging economies.

Imprint

PUBLISHER
Deutsche Welle
53110 Bonn
Germany

PUBLISHED
August 2023

LAYOUT
Jorge Loureiro

RESPONSIBLE
Carsten von Nahmen

AUTHORS
Judith Liesenfeld
Miriam Küller

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