

SOMALIA:

COALITION BUILDING FOR PRESS FREEDOM



BACKGROUND

The Somalia Programme of Free Press Unlimited described in this briefing paper was part of a larger international 5-year programme funded by the Dutch Government (2016-2020). The programme was called “No News Is Bad News” (NNIBN).

The outcome of the 2017 elections opened new perspectives for a more stable, resilient and accountable Somalia, in which media and civil society organizations (CSOs) could play a significant role in the process of development and social change. The election of a new president with cross-clan support, the emergence of a youthful and reform-minded parliament, and renewed international interest presented a genuine opportunity to promote the necessary political, social and security reforms. Free Press Unlimited (FPU) and its Somali partners decided to seize this crucial momentum in order to support Somali media and CSOs to create sustainable collaboration.

LOCAL PARTNERS

1. Media Association Puntland (MAP)
2. Media Ink (Somaliland)
3. Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA)
4. National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders in Somalia’s (NCHRD-SS)

THEORY OF CHANGE

The existence of an enabling environment is a precondition for civil society to perform their role as advocates for inclusive and sustainable growth and development. Access to information, independent media, and freedom of expression should therefore be an integral part of any development policy that aims to foster the strength of civil society and increase people’s participation in achieving poverty reduction and more equitable societies.

The NNIBN five-year program, therefore, aimed that:

Media and journalists, as independent players in civil society, constitute a diverse and professional information landscape and function as catalysts for change.

This was set to achieve through three intermediate outcomes:

1. Establishing an enabling environment for the media, conducive to freedom of expression (IO1)
2. Media serving the interests of the public and acting as a watchdog on their behalf (IO2)
3. Journalists and media actors working professionally, effectively and sustainably (IO3)

ACTIVITIES

In Somalia, FPU engaged with local media organisations in order to improve the capacities of individual journalists and media organisations. Additionally, FPU aimed to create synergies between different stakeholders, such as the media-house and journalists associations and CSOs, in order to implement local advocacy strategies for a legal framework and for gender equality.

Coalition building among media and CSOs took place mainly within IO1. Strong focus was put on advocacy, targeting government actors, including the judiciary and law enforcement, but also media owners. This was done through joint advocacy, but also advocacy by individual partners.

The activity types that corresponded with this entailed engaging and influencing, direct advocacy and information sharing. Engaging and influencing was also used as an activity towards media organisations in order for them to change and create capacity development opportunities for female media professionals to contribute to gender equality in Somalian media landscape.

2016: Baseline Workshop

The baseline workshop proved instrumental in fostering mutual trust between the program partners. From this workshop onwards, partners started to cooperate on issues of joint concern for the first time.

Held in 2016, the workshop focused on coalition building and capacity development. They also served to raise general awareness for the need for advocacy for an enabling environment for the media in Somalia.

For the development of specific capacities for advocacy, the event has helped to identify the gaps and learning needs. Participants learned to manage concrete instruments that enable the work of the media for advocacy, such as Stakeholder Analysis and the Gender Media Content Monitoring instrument. Implementation of those tools started immediately in 2016.

Capacity development part of the workshop focused on creating the preconditions for media to hold power holders to account (citizen journalism, investigative journalism) and on sustainable and professional media (digital and physical safety, financial sustainability).

The baseline workshop, which advanced coalition building among program partners and improved their capacity in various ways, also led to the successful organization of the first ever media summit, held by media and CSOs together, which was attended and addressed by the president of Somaliland.

2017: Common Advocacy Strategies

In 2017, the program progressed on helping the media organizations and CSOs to develop common advocacy strategies, and implement them targeting various stakeholders.

NCHRD-SS and the national labour union representing over 500 of Somalia's 900 journalists, developed a 3 year media advocacy strategic plan for Somalia – including an advocacy strategy for media law amendment based on a broad consultation of CSOs and media stakeholders.

Furthermore:

- 20 media and 5 civil society organisations brought together by FPU collaborated and **negotiated with the government about the amendment of the new media law**. 14 provisions out of 18 have been agreed upon as a result of the negotiations.
- In Somaliland partners organised **discussions between media stakeholders and the police**. As a result, the number of illegal arrests by police has dropped from 31 cases between January and July to 4 cases between August and November.
- In Puntland partners lobbied with the ministries, judges and media outlets to have a joint workshop on the new Media Law. As a result of this workshop 40 participating judges and journalists from five media organizations signed **a joint declaration on the safety of journalists**.
- Also, media houses from all over Somalia sent female journalists to the training of our partner Media INK. As a result, **8 radio stations promoted 9 female journalists to higher positions** such as directors and Somaliland and Somalia. editor-in-chief within their organizations in
- FPU supported the development of a journalism curriculum for both degree and diploma programs based on the **UNESCO Journalism Curriculum Manual**, adapted to the Somali context. 5 out of 10 universities based in Somalia and Somaliland have started using the curriculum.
- Campaigns against brown-envelope journalism (Sharur/Qabax) were supported by the program partners.

2018: Advocacy targeting various stakeholders

Media Advocacy Strategy workshop: Partner SOLJA organised a Media Advocacy Strategy workshop in which 40 participants attended. The objective of the workshop was to bring together civil society organisations, lawyers, media organisations, human rights defenders and activists, and produce a joint declaration and media safety advocacy strategy. A total of 80 media actors attended another (capacity building) workshop about media laws and media code of ethics.

Peace Councils: 2 regional advocacy meetings were organised and were attended by a total of 100 people. The peace talk approach was highlighted by UNESCO as one of the working national mechanisms for journalist's safety. During the Peace Councils all parties concerned spoke about a safer working environment for journalists. Based on case studies, the participants discussed which challenges journalists are facing and why a safe working environment is so important. The Peace Councils proved to be a **success outside the sessions too**. In six cases, the police commissioner, who had been ordered by a politician to arrest a journalist, called MAP first. This shows that the police understood that this arrest warrant was unlawful. MAP managed to resolve the issues through dialogue.

Committee for the protection of journalists: significant results were achieved in Puntland. The participants established a committee for the protection of journalists, with representatives from media, police and civil society organisations, like the Puntland Women Lawyers Association. They also set up two **helplines**, one for male and one for female journalists who are in danger.

Cooperation with Police: The media and police drew up a **step-by-step plan** broadening their cooperation to increase the safety of journalists.

In Somaliland and Puntland, partners Media INK and MAP increased collaboration between Somali journalists and CSOs in holding decision-makers accountable for their actions or omissions, through **investigative reporting and storytelling**.

Journalists, CSO and bloggers created synergies in order to hold power holders to account. They **co-produce two weekly radio shows** (Somalia and Puntland) that investigate relevant issues, based on the daily needs of the audiences.

SOLJA organised a "Women in Media Conference" on March 8th, 2018. In Puntland, MAP organised the **Men4Women March** on the same day (picture below).



Men marching for gender equality in the media in celebration of International Women's Day, in Puntland, by partner organization MAP, March 2018 (Photo by MAP)

2019: Advocacy targeting various stakeholders

In 2019, a repressive media law was approved by both branches of Parliament and awaited the signature of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo" to become effective. A coalition of media partners and other national and international CSOs and human rights groups conducted **intensive advocacy to improve this piece of legislation** with the provision of an arrest warrant, issued by the judiciary, as a necessary requirement for the arrest and detention of journalists. The efforts of the coalition focused on persuading the President not to sign the bill, which still contained draconian provisions.

Peace Councils: FPU and its partners improved the awareness among Somali security forces on the rights and existing laws that protect journalists in Somalia through 8 regional advocacy meetings between all stakeholders on media law and freedom of expression. In March, as a result of the Council of Peace gatherings, the Somali justice acted against impunity of violence against journalists and **decided to investigate** a police raid against the privately-owned Universal TV office in Mogadishu. Government officials confirmed they will share the outcome of the investigations. Furthermore, **two soldiers were arrested and discharged** from the army for tying up two journalists and leaving them in the sun. This is unprecedented in Somalia.

FPU and partner Media INK facilitated increased collaboration between Somali journalists and CSOs for holding decision makers accountable through **investigative reporting and storytelling**.

In 2020: Advocacy targeting various stakeholders

FPU and its partners continued to improve awareness among Somali security forces on the rights and existing laws that protect journalists in Somalia through more successful **Peace Councils**, in line with UNESCO's National Mechanism for Safety of Journalists.

In Puntland, FPU partner Media Association of Puntland (MAP), and other civil society stakeholders, collaborated successfully for the **release of journalists** on bail.

In August, FPU partner Media INK conducted **2 weeks-long training** in Hargeisa for 15 participants from CSOs, citizen journalists from different media outlets, self-employed journalists and bloggers. Topics covered were in-depth investigative stories, improving the quality of storytelling, and fact-checking.

With FPU's support, partners SOLJA and MAP successfully collaborated to deliver a **media content monitoring report** covering Somaliland, Puntland and south-central Somalia. They presented the findings of the 35-day media monitoring to the media executives and owners through a conference; the aim was to inform them on the areas for improvement. The findings were used to inform on capacity building for journalists from Somalia/Somaliland.



Distribution of PPE materials against Covid-19 to journalists in Somalia, March 2020 (Photo by SOLJA)

OUTCOMES

Partners have described outcomes that indicate strengthened capacities for advocacy. These included:

- strengthened relationships between Free Press Unlimited program partners, media outlets and different type of government actors, including the judiciary and law enforcement and security forces;
- information sharing between media stakeholders;
- obtained mandates to issue press cards and to enter into negotiations with government actors.

Within the FPU's outcome harvesting, the partners have underlined the importance of the following concrete outputs achieved by the program:

- 10 selected and mandated members from the media and civil society in Somalia started negotiating with the Parliamentary Committee on Media and Telecommunication towards the amendment of Media Law.
- 20 HRDs and 20 Media worked together to finalize the first-ever three years advocacy strategies for common strategic planning concerning freedom of speech and press freedom in Somalia (NCHRD-SS).
- 20 media and 5 civil society organisations agreed in Mogadishu for the first time on a common approach for the negotiations with the Federal Somali government, with regards to the amendment of the new Federal Somali media law.
- The Minister of Constitutional Affairs of Somalia has stopped public attacks against Media groups and their intention to amend the Media Law after the joint appeal of 20 October 2017.
- By including the Civil Society as strategic partner, the coalition achieved in only three months time (Aug – OCT 2017) 70% of intended changes with regards to the Media Law. 14 provisions out of 18 had been agreed on with negotiating with the Federal Government of Somalia' (internal outcome statement).
- FPU inspired the coalition in the approach of including civil society to do the strategic thinking by facilitating the encounters between Media and CSOs'.
- Since 2017, SOLJA coordinates between media and other stakeholders or institutions to improve their media relations since it started registering journalists in Somaliland in a database.
- Partner SOLJA organised and implemented regional meetings in six regions where they met and registered and all professional journalists.
- SOLJA also organised information sessions on professional journalism practices. Free Press Unlimited co-designed and financed this project.
- The Somaliland government includes MEDIA INK systematically in all international media related discussions.

LESSONS LEARNED

FPU contributed to coalition building between the partners through giving strategic and policy advice, co-design of projects and through networking internationally. FPU's role to bring partners together had a lasting effect. The baseline workshop in 2016, as well as the outcome harvesting workshop in 2017, have helped to build trust and relationships between the partners from the beginning of the program.

On International Women's day (March 8, 2018), Somali partners jointly organised simultaneous Men4Women marches across Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland. According to the Somalia Program Coordinator, this happened without any coordinating or guiding role from FPU, and was a direct result of the strengthened relationships that were built during the Outcome Harvesting workshop in Nairobi. Further lessons were drawn from the mid-term evaluation regarding advocacy:

- There is a strong emphasis on building bridges among local civil society organisations and media organisations (both media outlets and media development organisations) as a first step before engaging with government actors. The outcomes indicate that the **partners have been successful in creating trust and collaboration**. Two examples stand out:
 - Elaboration of a joint advocacy strategy among media actors, CSOs and human rights defenders,
 - The success to agree and then select and mandate a representation of media actors and CSOs to negotiate with the Parliamentary Committee on Media and Telecommunication.
- The coalition of CSOs and media, as well as individual partner organisations, have been successful in entering into a dialogue with various stakeholders, such as the government, judicial and security sector actors and members of parliament. There are multiple examples in the harvested outcomes that indicate that these relationships were previously not existing and that the relationship has produced positive results.
 - For instance, one partner received a mandate from the Ministry of Information to accredit journalists and issue press cards after successfully lobbying the Ministry.
 - Another example is the moment where a coalition of judges and journalists signed a joint declaration on the safety of journalists.
- Regarding the Free Press Unlimited themes Gender and Safety, we can see that partners have a strong focus on gender equality:
 - One partner has had some success in getting acknowledgement from media owners for improving the working position of women in media outlets. Although organisations are lacking the means to materialise this, advocating for the equal rights of women journalists and getting acknowledgement is an important first step towards this goal. The partner stressed the cultural importance of media owners giving their word to achieve this goal.
 - In Puntland, MAP successfully advocated at the level of the Ministry of Women Affairs for the harmonisation of gender policies for media organisations.