

Implemented by **Free Press Unlimited** and
 **European Journalism Centre**

Executive Summary

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Colophon

April 2021

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Executive Summary

Overall Conclusion and Discussion

No News Is Bad News (NNIBN) was an excellent programme in terms of effort, on the part of Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the European Journalism Centre (EJC) and all their partners. The programme has supported courageous, committed, energetic and initiative-taking partners who have promoted rights to access to information, investigative journalism, gender equality, media literacy, content and reach in and for media dark areas, and more. The international programme has achieved some significant milestones around safety of journalists.

“UNESCO DG does annual reports about when journalists get murdered. FPU developed a kind of path on how we can push on a higher response rate to these cases – so that’s a really good example of the international programme linking with the local efforts of partners. FPU makes the connections between local and international aspects”, says a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (MFA).

Most of the partners report increased capacity, stronger organisations and progress on key quality, advocacy and gender goals. Many are more sustainable than before the programme started. FPU has become a learning organisation with strong skills in research, advocacy and M&E. Thanks to NNIBN, FPU has also become a leading advocacy organisation for media freedom that plays a big role in shaping international networks and initiatives.

However, as evaluators we face a conundrum – on the one hand almost all the activities went well, the partners are satisfied, the funders are happy and colleagues in other agencies are, generally, admiring of FPU and EJC. Yet on the other hand, we see few clear decisive impacts at the national level – i.e. ‘a diverse and professional media landscape’ – which is the ‘impact statement’ in the Theory of Change. So why is it difficult to say what it amounted to? Firstly, the programme was probably too thinly spread across too many countries (some with only one or two partners) to really show an impact at the media landscape level as a whole. Which means that the ultimate objective of the Theory of Change is still out of reach in most regions and countries in the programme.

Secondly, advocacy and human rights work in general is a slow process, requires working in coalitions (which FPU/EJC do), often invisible, too, and that when there is a breakthrough it is hardly ever acknowledged.

Finally, it is also a matter of knowing what to look for and how. The outcomes of the NNIBN get buried in the wealth of words in both the partner reports and the Annual Reports and they are not always sufficiently contextualised. In the report we offer some suggestions about wider strategy and about how to measure and capture impacts better.

Relevance of the NNIBN programme

We conclude that, overall, the NNIBN programme was relevant and necessary. It was a relatively large programme, in terms of budget, but it opted for small spends across many countries and partners. NNIBN was not a brand and few partners had a strong sense of being part of a special programme, with the possible exception of EJC's partners. NNIBN had a strong emphasis on advocacy at the international level, good coordination with other international agencies and investment in research and learning, especially in building up the Knowledge and Quality team at FPU in Amsterdam.

Generally, FPU and EJC have been pragmatic and, when the grant began, they built the TOC (Theory of Change) to fit onto existing work with existing partners. This approach was appropriate but we find the TOC somewhat ambiguous in terms of wording. In particular it appears from the TOC that the NNIBN intended to influence the whole media landscape in each target country, not just FPU/EJC's partners, which made the whole NNIBN programme probably over-ambitious, and made the impacts in the TOC mostly beyond reach. Social media and online journalistic activity (e.g. blogging) should have been made more explicit in the TOC. Our findings point to the need for individual TOCs per country.

FPU/EJC always try to prioritise partners' needs and the feedback from partners is excellent. But what these 'needs' are, and the degree to which they are truly met is governed and constrained by the wider aid system and the inherently unequal power dynamics between funders and recipients.

The comments received from partners were almost all glowing. For example:

*"We are well-aligned with EJC's values",
"FPU came in at the most critical time",
"They supported the most relevant issues such as COVID-19 crisis reporting",
"We propose our needs and get listened to"
"Before any project and programme we have had discussions with FPU based on our needs and priorities."
"FPU has an approach that I appreciate a lot. They always ask about our real needs first."*

*"We wouldn't have been able to do the bulk of interventions without FPU support",
"EJC have kept the doors open for discussion and allowed us as an organisation to determine our priorities."*

"FPU helped just when we needed to put our newspaper online."

It is clear that FPU and EJC understand the contexts of the countries in which they are working. They applied that understanding during implementation of the NNIBN programme, in direct consultation with partners, especially in agreeing changes and adaptations to interventions and objectives. More pertinently, partners led the way to a large extent in shaping their strategies and activities according to their contexts; FPU and EJC only intervened strongly where necessary (e.g., for weak or less innovative partners) and this was decided on a case-by-case basis. Normally country programmes had a balanced portfolio of stronger and weaker/less experienced partners, so each FPU and EJC project coordinator was not too overloaded. Relatively little attention was paid to economic factors at the outset but this was remedied to some extent later in the programme.

"If you are part of MFA you are bound to know FPU. FPU is more activist than [our] Embassy so it can do things we can't" (representative of Netherlands Embassy, Indonesia).

The international advocacy led by FPU from HQ in Amsterdam has benefited from being grounded in the realities of country programmes, but partners are more invested in local and national advocacy issues than international ones. National stakeholders, especially media outlets, still have problems understanding that implementation of international standards basically

depends on their own work and initiatives, not those coming from international organizations. Strategies need to be tailored carefully to different contexts.

As former chair of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Leon Willems drove the process for getting Access to Information (ATI) and media freedom into the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – this was a significant success: “

When Leon was in GFMD – he really championed getting these indicators (on SDG16.10.1 and 2) into the system – if it wasn't for this, I don't think UNESCO alone would have been able to get these indicators in” – (UNESCO representative).

COVID-19 has been a shock to partners but, generally, they have adapted and have been well supported by FPU/EJC who demonstrated significant flexibility and responsiveness (see 'innovation box' on 'Flexing and Adapting' in the Annexes). Some partners have pivoted activities and sourced extra donor money.

Kirkuk Now (Iraq):

“FPU has supported us by all means to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19. This means financial support, consultancy and building a network around the topic of the pandemic.”

The economic consequences of the global pandemic will be more profound and how this will affect the long-term sustainability of partners is impossible to predict. Lobbying for external subsidies and state aid at the national and international level remains key and something many partners and FPU/EJC are actively engaged in.

Efficiency of the NNIBN programme

We looked at value for money in terms of economy (cost of inputs), efficiency (relationship between inputs and outputs), effectiveness (the relationship between outputs and outcomes), and equity (the fair distribution of benefits). And then we analysed how relations between EJC/FPU and partners affected efficiency and how relations with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and its embassies influenced efficiency.

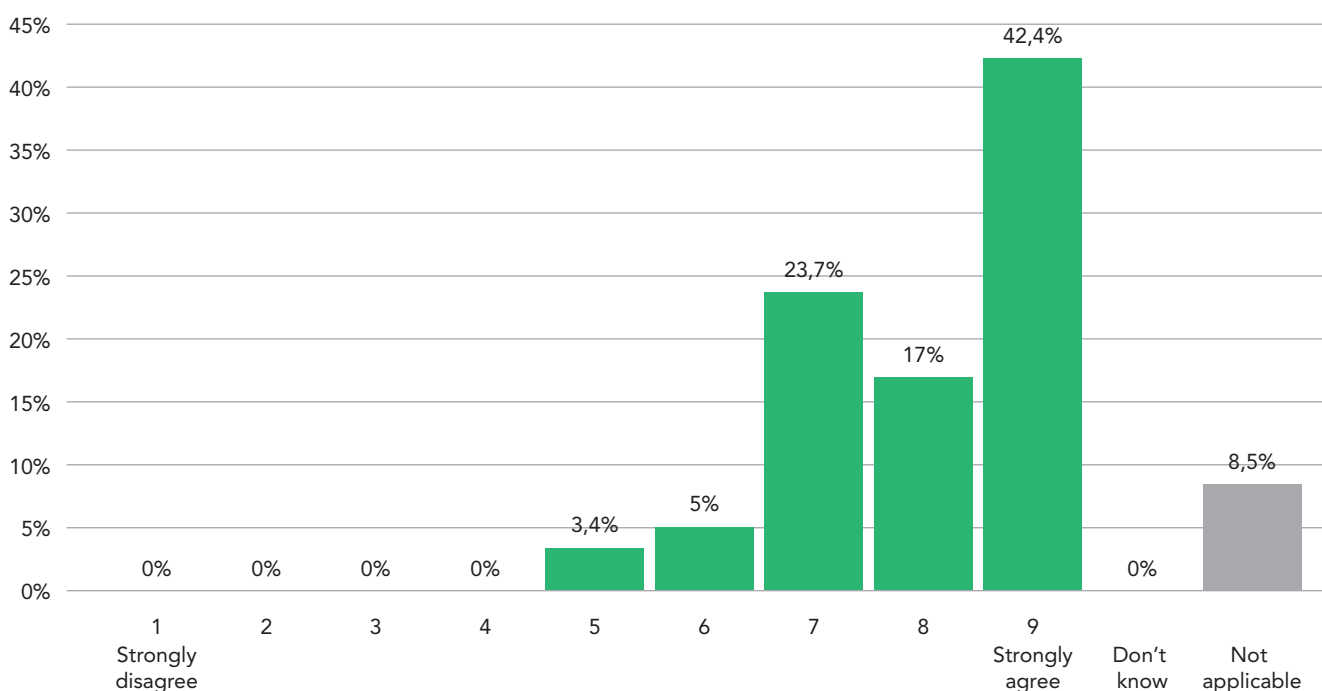
We are satisfied that in terms of economy and, to a large extent, efficiency, the NNIBN has delivered Value for Money (VFM). Equity considerations are taken into account though not reported on systematically. More granular and higher level analysis of VFM would require changes to measurement of success/results with some kind of threshold or target setting, as well as inputs of staff time.

Partners report in many cases that their efficiency has increased as a result of the NNIBN and support from FPU and EJC and particularly from the responsible

programme staff. The one-year project cycle imposed by the annual MFA funding commitment created inefficiencies for FPU/EJC and partners due to the frequent burden of proposal writing, reporting and approvals. This was exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the potential that existed to budget for higher, longer term, ceiling amounts. It also created insecurity amongst partners especially amongst those more reliant on NNIBN funding and required them to 'projectise' their mission and activities when core support would have been more flexible. Compliance with IATI (International Aid Transparency Initiative) reporting requirements was time-consuming especially for the K&Q team, skewed the M&E system somewhat and thus inhibited efficiency.

Although FPU has pushed partners to do more on equity it has tried to retain a hands-off non-directive role in order to allow partners to take the lead, which may mean that gender equity hasn't always been as aggressively pursued as it might have been. There are indications that it costs more (time, energy,

Time, money and staff are better managed and better organised today in my organisation, compared to 2016 (n = 59)



recruitment process) to find female participants or female staff members (similarly for candidates from rural, marginalized groups). The partners FPU chooses to work with are to some extent based on reasons of expediency and editorial independence and not necessarily because they have already shown a commitment to gender equality and airing women's voices.

On balance we believe the decision not to have country offices is the right strategy because it devolves power and decision-making to partners and signals how EJC and FPU are evolving a different model of development partnership, as facilitators of capacity-building and learning, rather than implementers. Part of this role is supporting south to south exchange, which EJC did more successfully than FPU. For both organisations the lack of a constant presence in the country requires consistent communication and should involve building relationships between the organisations and not just key individuals within them.

The relationship between EJC and FPU does not appear to have added significant value to either side as they kept their management and M&E processes largely separate except when collaborating on the Mid Term Review. There was a lost opportunity to create efficiencies and greater effectiveness through more exchanges around reporting and K&Q, more shared learning and by combining communications around success stories.

The relationships with MFA and Embassies have been mostly positive but require constant maintenance and centre on human rights issues rather than media development per se.

FPU added value in connecting partners to other organisations around the world and sharing experiences:

“Regret that POV has not funded FPU because it is very close to what we do and carries more value than other organisations - could be a lot of Embassies are unhappy about the decision.” (Representative of Dutch Embassy, Indonesia)

Effectiveness of the NNIBN programme

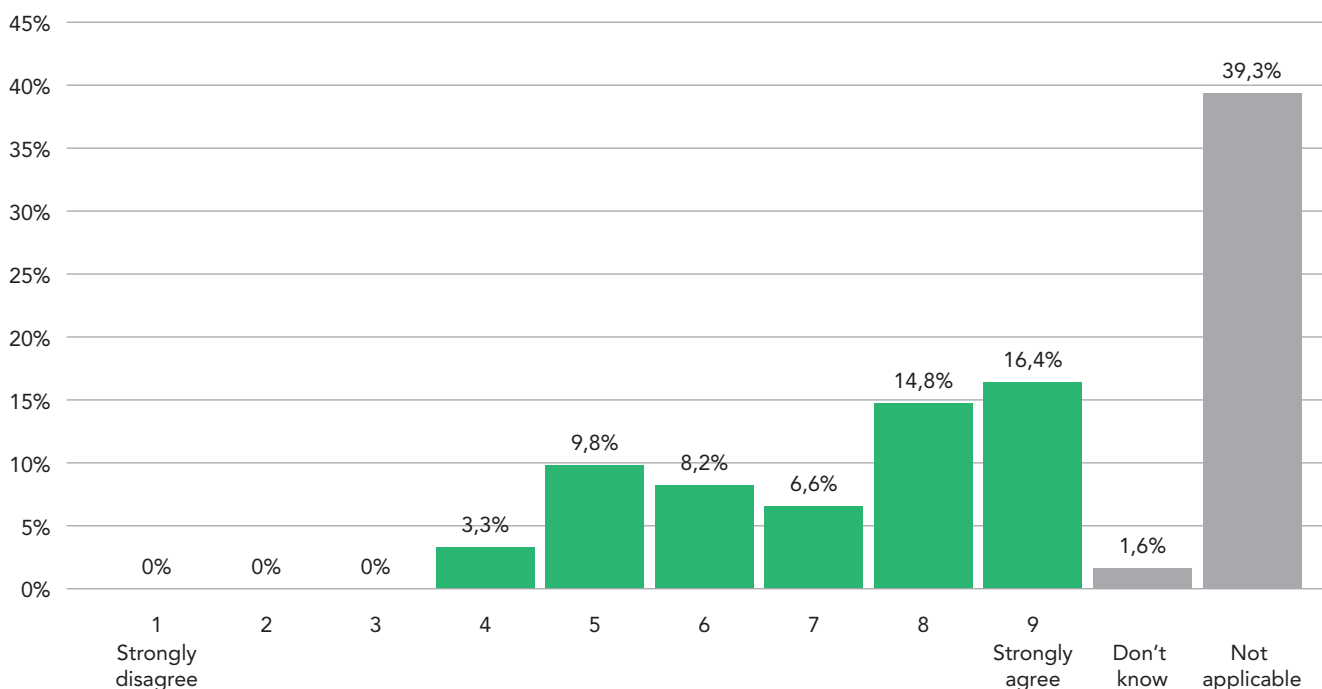
Partners report that their capacities and skills have markedly improved during the course of the NNIBN programme. Journalists' capacity to deliver quality content was especially improved by the programme. There has also been very positive progress in terms of organisational capacity, from partners' point of view.

The NNIBN programme enabled FPU to ramp up its monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) function. Overall, the MEAL function and the K&Q team themselves have been appreciated within FPU and among partners, although the management information system called 'PROMIS' does not meet all potential needs and the IATI reporting process is time-consuming and of questionable value. Outcome Harvesting has probably been the best M&E technique, as it has shown positive outcomes in a relatively objective manner (i.e. through workshops in-country with partners' outcomes being evaluated by their peers (other partners)). (See our 'innovation box' on Outcome Harvesting in Annexes). But overall, NNIBN

has had challenges measuring change successfully. We understand that the original M&E framework for NNIBN was discarded to some extent, and has been replaced by databases of output indicators and outcomes derived from partner reporting. The quality of partner reports is patchy and would benefit from direct support on M&E from the K&Q team. The outcomes of the NNIBN get buried in the wealth of words in reports and they are not always sufficiently contextualised to assess their significance, or linked to a baseline for comparison, or indeed aggregated across countries and regions to get a sense of the scale and direction of movement of NNIBN results.

NNIBN partners overwhelmingly feel that FPU and EJC have provided significant added value to their work. In some cases, NNIBN has been important because it was the first or major source of support to partners. FPU/EJC are appreciated for supporting work that other agencies are not interested in or which do not fit donors' predetermined agendas. Partners feel that

[Media outlets only] Capacity building, (i.e. trainings, mentoring, fellowships, workshops) with or supported by FPU/EJC is the main reason why my organisation is currently able to deliver quality content (n = 61)



their relationships with FPU and EJC are qualitatively different and closer than with other INGOs and donors. Both EJC and FPU have always allowed partners the freedom to choose where to invest the grants and how to go about designing their work. The perceived added value of FPU and EJC has multiple dimensions: long-term institutional support; links to other organisations in-country and internationally for advocacy, fundraising, collaboration/coordination, exchange and learning; capacity-building.

In DRC, JED said: “Working with FPU is less stressful than working with other partners like Internews because once we agree on the activities they just let us go ahead.”

In Indonesia: “Through intensive comms with FPU, there is a lot of understanding Tempo has...the independence and freedom to explain what’s going on and how to respond to situations.”

A key feature of the relationships frequently cited by both partners and programme staff is the trust generated over time, which enables openness and honesty:

“We can talk to FPU frankly about our strengths and weaknesses and will not be judged if we are being honest. Every year we have requested major changes to the project and they have accepted them. Shows a level of confidence in both of us. Another strength is they have challenged us on weaknesses we don’t see – ‘hold our feet to the fire’.”
(FPU partner, Pakistan)

When it comes to journalist safety, we judge that a substantial effort has been made. Journalists’ safety has been a major focus of the NNIBN. EJC and FPU have worked hard on safety issues, across the entire programme, combining international advocacy and training on the ground (i.e. prevention) with actual response in the shape of Reporters Respond, which is unique because of its flexibility and because of its impressive achievements. In terms of impact, the global picture is still bleak – most countries are still hostile environments for journalists – **but we can only conclude that it could be much worse without EJC/FPU and their partners’ efforts.**

On how innovation has been addressed, we conclude that the NNIBN innovation funds have been strategic and convenient and have allowed for new ideas and experiments to be tried and tested. But there has been little systematic reporting on the outcomes of these small, pilot innovation projects.

Gender

Gender equality considerations have been integrated across the NNIBN programme: there is almost no area of the programme where gender and the role of women in the media has not been included. From supporting partner organisations to develop and implement gender policies, to acknowledging and to some extent addressing the specific threats to safety that women face, to the gender disaggregation of data and gender focused reports and research outputs, to the balanced representation of women in photos featured in the annual reports, the NNIBN has been exemplary. This is to be commended.

Participating organizations frequently pointed to the M4W campaign as an important event, and an activity that makes them feel part of something bigger. It has recognition from Ministry respondents as well: “Men4Women was a visible part of NNIBN” and “FPU has done a very good campaign highlighting the role women in media” – said respondents from the MFA.

The contribution of the NNIBN to achieving gender equality is inevitably harder to evidence but a number of outcomes show some changes both in the wider media sector as a result of gender media monitoring and research, and from institutionalisation of gender equality within partner organisation’ policies and practices.

However, in future, more attention needs to be paid to systematically collecting data from partners about gender equality within their organisation, and about the gender dimensions and categories of outputs and outcomes, to be able to understand and ultimately interrogate progress. Self-reports have limited use so harder indicators of capacity should be developed, and gender media monitoring reports and gender sensitive content should be assessed and tracked by partners and FPU to understand changes over time. Aggregation or listing/mapping of results by partner/country would generate a clearer picture of achievements especially for lower-level results which can be compared with targets.

“Editors from Nayapatrika, Republica, and The Rising Nepal newspapers have stated that they now assign reporters to search for at least one female news source. Following an interface meeting in which one female journalist said it was difficult to report on issues due to the insecurity of working late at night, Republica newspaper started a pick-and-drop service for its female journalist.”
(Freedom Forum Nepal)

My organisation dedicates sufficient resources to implementing a gender policy	
FPU's Baseline 2016 (n = 14)	36%
FPU's Midline 2018 (n = 14)	71%
Our endline 2020 (n = 56)	71%

Impact

When it comes to assessing high-level impacts - which means assessing the big picture issues such as whether or not NNIBN has established 'an enabling environment for media' - we have given scores that are generally 'good' or 'excellent' for effort but we can only discern 'some' or 'little' progress towards long-term impacts. This is not necessarily because there are no outcomes or impacts but mainly because NNIBN established few metrics to measure progress towards them, so they are very hard to see/capture. We have found very few unintended/negative outcomes. The five years 2016 to 2020 (the period of the NNIBN) has probably been the most devastating period for media freedom and public

interest media since World War II (due to the rise of strong-men/populist politics, impunity/authoritarianism, fake news, COVID-19, business-model failure, etc.) so the big picture is one of push-back against the major trends, rather than resounding breakthroughs. But there have been a lot of small wins and positives for NNIBN, both at the national and international level, and, as emphasised, the level of effort has been largely excellent. This means that, on the whole, all evidence gathered points to a very large quantity and quality of time and expertise spent as well as consistent and well-planned strategies implemented.

Table 1 Intermediate Outcomes: our assessment

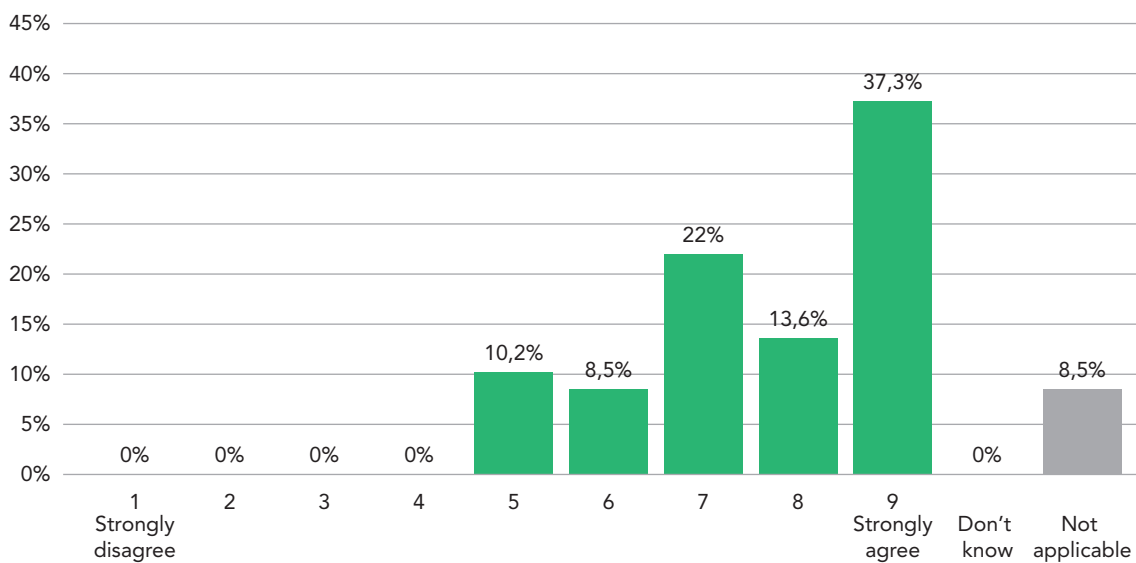
Intermediate Outcomes	Effort	IMPACT	Reasons
IO1. An enabling environment for media is established, conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity	dark green = excellent effort	orange = very little progress towards impact	A positive enabling environment is the hardest outcome to attain as it is largely beyond the control of the NNIBN stakeholders. However, there have certainly been excellent efforts towards that goal and the global situation on media freedom and on media economics would probably be worse without FPU/EJC and their partners' courageous work.
IO2. Media serve interests of their public and act as watchdog on their behalf	dark green = excellent effort	yellow = some progress towards impact	A huge effort has been made on this but, in most NNIBN countries, progress towards achieving landscapes where public interest media hold power to account, has been painstaking and slow, with few breakthroughs.
IO3. Journalists and media actors work professionally and are effective and sustainable	dark green = excellent effort	yellow = some progress towards impact	Again, a massive effort has been made and media outlets that the programme has direct relationships with have definitely improved but how this adds up to a whole landscape where all journalists work professionally and are sustainable is difficult to see.

Sustainability

Whilst we cannot say that all media partners are now sustainable and all-round viable, nevertheless most of the media outlets supported by the NNIBN have increased their chances of sustainability over the last five years, and appear optimistic about their all-round viability in future. Sustaining certain activities without

FPU/EJC help will be difficult, especially advocacy work. COVID-19 continues to be a huge test for independent media, mainly because it has exacerbated the much bigger challenge of finding sustainable business models, but FPU/EJC are serious about tackling these challenges and are beginning to find some solutions.

My organisation is more all-round viable and resilient today compared to 2016 (n = 59)



My organisation has been able to mobilise more financial resources and is more financially independent now than 5 years ago (n = 61)

