Enabling People to Be Seen and Heard

Contents

Executive Summary

Communication rights – from freedom of opinion and expression to accessing information in the public interest and communicating in one's mother tongue – underpin many other human rights. People can only be active and informed participants in their societies if they can freely exercise those communication rights.

This is why communication – as a right, as a practice, as a skill, and as a profession – should be integral to planning and implementing actions aimed at achieving sustainable development and genuine social progress.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) says "*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*".

In direct contravention of these words, however, communication rights are often ignored or undermined, deepening inequalities and reinforcing social exclusion. People and communities throughout the world effectively become socially invisible. They experience *communication and information poverty* or *poverty of voice*. This kind of marginalisation is often unseen by development actors and policy makers.

Unless this invisibility is addressed, other structural barriers cannot be overcome.

In this context, the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) enables people to be seen and heard. It promotes the practice of communication rights in order to advance social justice by challenging discriminatory political, sociocultural, and economic structures.

In WACC's view, **recognising people's communication rights is a vital step towards enabling them to change their lives for the better**.

> WACC is uniquely placed to promote communication rights. With its extensive networks – from grassroots to international forums, faith-based to human rights organisations, academia to media agencies – WACC maintains an unwavering commitment to strengthening the rights of those who have the ability but lack the freedom or resources to make themselves heard.

WACC works through four main strategies:

♦ Building the capacity of grassroots communities to access, use, and promote communication in order for them to claim rights and entitlements;
♦ Monitoring media representation of women, migrants and marginalized groups to advocate for fair and balanced coverage;
♦ Analysing media and communication trends from the perspectives and realities of communities in developing and developed countries;
♦ Leveraging its local to international network in advocating for communication rights.

WACC focuses on five programme areas:

Digital Communication Rights	Migrants, Refugees and Communication Rights	Communication Rights and Indigenous Rights
Communication Rights and Climate Change		Gender and Communication Rights

Communication is Essential to Human Society

Communication between human beings is so "normal" it is taken for granted. Communication (encompassing speech, writing, pictures, gestures, expressions through all means) plays an essential role in the development and maintenance of individuals, families, communities, and nations. **The need to communicate is intrinsic to human nature**. In this regard, open and truthful communication is pivotal for people's genuine participation in society, for communities to exist, to organize for change, and to enable a healthy democracy.

Precisely because communication is fundamental to human life, **those who control the means of communication can control people**. The long history of communication is both one of freedom and of repression.

Free and open communication has contributed to scientific and social progress, to religious diversity and to great artistic and cultural achievements. It is integral to the history of people's struggles to speak out, to be heard, and to have their views and concerns taken seriously in the public sphere. On the other side, denial of communication rights has led to the persecution of "heretics", the silencing of "freethinkers", the incarceration of "dissidents" in psychiatric wards or prisons, and the promotion of ignorance, prejudice, and violence.

Traditional state and private media – newspapers, radio, television – have always claimed to serve the public interest. This is true in many cases, but they have also often served autocratic governments or private interests. In this context, independent investigative journalism (e.g. *The Guardian, The New York Times, Washington Post, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Al Arabia, Página 12*) and public service broadcasting (e.g. the BBC in the United Kingdom, ARD and ZDF in Germany, the Korean Broadcasting System) were – and in some cases still are – the models for balanced reporting and for enabling the public to hold governments to account.

That situation has changed drastically with the rise of digital communication platforms and the resulting fragmentation of the media landscape. Many traditional media outlets have become the victims of outdated business models, while new global digital media and advertising corporations have arisen, largely free of public accountability. In addition, the ability of less democratic governments to control access to information and knowledge has increased. However, in the midst of these dynamic changes in media wealth and power, digital communication platforms offer new ways for individuals as well as marginalized peoples and communities to voice opinions and concerns that might otherwise be ignored.

There are international covenants and national laws covering issues of freedom of expression and opinion, and global bodies that regulate the use of radio frequencies, intellectual property rights or the Internet's naming system. However, the application of international covenants and the implementation of national legislation has been uneven and opaque, often leading to growing power among leading digital companies at the expense of the public good and of the rights of everyday citizens. As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression noted in his report to the Thirty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council (18 June – 6 July 2018):

> Although the Internet remains history's greatest tool for global access to information, such online evangelism is hard to find today. The public sees hate, abuse and disinformation in the content users generate.

Governments see terrorist recruitment or discomfiting dissent and opposition. Civil society organizations see the outsourcing of public functions, like protection of freedom of expression, to unaccountable private actors. Despite taking steps to illuminate their rules and government interactions, the companies remain enigmatic regulators, establishing a kind of 'platform law' in which clarity, consistency, accountability and remedy are elusive. The United Nations, regional organizations and treaty bodies have affirmed that offline rights apply equally online, but it is not always clear that the companies protect the rights of their users or that States give companies legal incentives to do so.[1]

WACC works to empower those left out of media/digital structures and to reform media/digital landscapes in ways that promote democracy and social justice. We raise important questions about media ownership and control, about who has access to information and knowledge, and how to achieve equitable and democratic access to communication platforms.

Traditional mass media, social media, and digital platforms can contribute to the creation of new public spaces for voices to challenge the social, economic and political structures that exclude vulnerable people and communities. They can also enable civic participation, relationships based on mutual accountability and trust, pluralism, and community empowerment.

When communication rights are respected and guaranteed, sustainable development and societies are possible.

> Taking a communication rights-based approach means giving priority to people who are marginalized and "least served", and to reducing inequalities and hate speech so that a diversity of voices can be heard and make positive contributions in the public sphere. It means making media and communication technologies more accessible to, and affordable by, communities and vulnerable groups. It means enabling people to participate in decision-making processes, and it means monitoring progress in realizing communication rights in order to hold governments and gatekeepers to account.

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[1] https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/096/72/PDF/G1809672.pdf?OpenElement
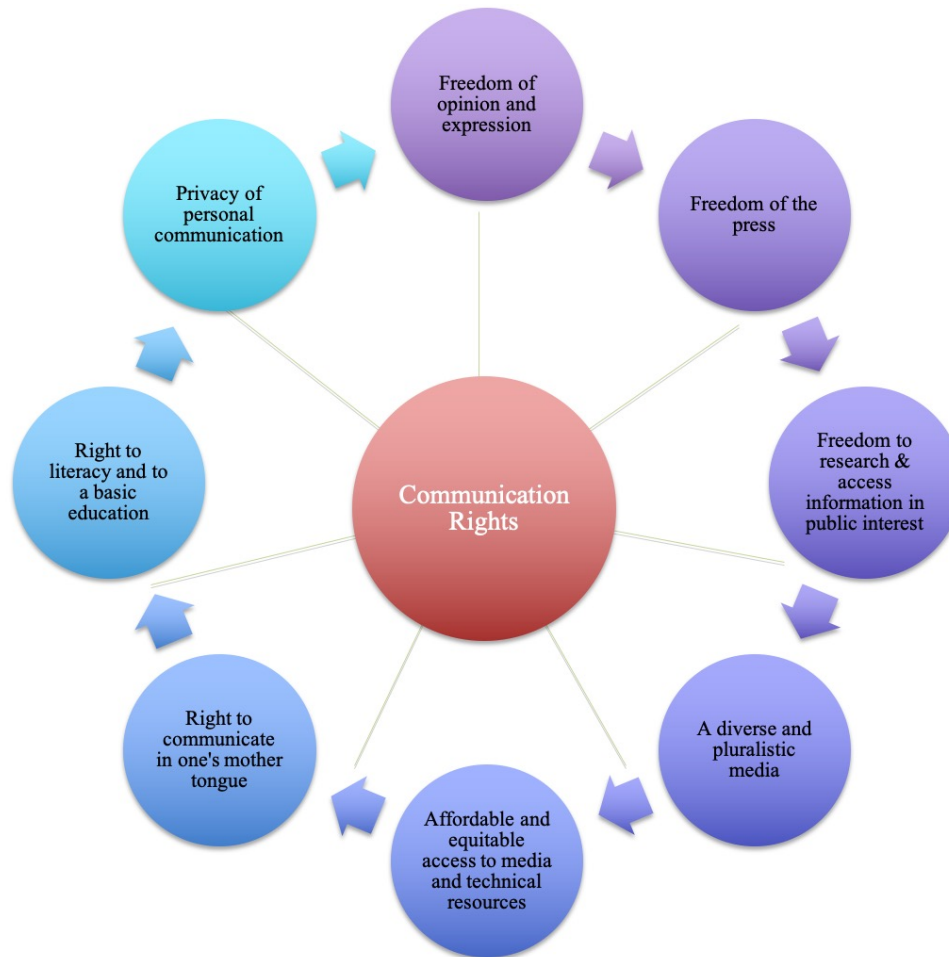
The dynamics of communication rights. WACC's programmes focus on creating positive impact on today's key challenges in realising these rights, enabling people to be seen and heard for full inclusion and participation in sustainable development.

Sustainable Development, Communication Rights, and WACC

Millions of people on every continent lack access to communication platforms, are underrepresented or misrepresented in the media, have low levels of media literacy, have restricted access to relevant and accurate information and knowledge, are excluded from participation in decision-making processes, and live in contexts with limited media freedom. In other words, people are experiencing communication and information poverty, a form of poverty that contributes their sense of powerlessness and inability to make themselves heard. A landmark 2000 World Bank study called it one of the most prevalent manifestations of poverty.[2] As such, communication and information poverty is a critical dimension of poverty in all its forms.

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2 Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera K. Shah, Patti Petesch. 2000. *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*. World Bank. New York: Oxford University Press.

Addressing communication and information poverty is critical to achieving the vision of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).3 This is because such poverty impedes people's full participation in development, especially the poorest and most marginalized. This belief echoes a 2013 report published by the UN Development Group, which found that people want to have a public voice in decisions concerning development and calls for "putting people – their rights, aspirations and opportunities – at the centre of development".4

For example, it is difficult to imagine that universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (SDG 3, Target 3.7) can be achieved unless women and girls have access to accurate knowledge about reproductive health and are able to participate in decision-making processes about healthcare priorities. Similarly, reducing corruption and bribery (SDG 16, Target 5) will be difficult to achieve unless journalists have the necessary freedom and protection to investigate and shed light on cases of bribery.

Unfortunately, tackling communication and information poverty is not always part of development agendas set by donor partners, international institutions, and national governments. This can partly be attributed to the fact that such issues are often less tangible than other development priorities, such as food security or access to life-saving medication. Nevertheless, information and communication initiatives must be part of development agendas. They are crucial to achieving a range of development objectives and the long-term sustainability of some outcomes, such as health-related behavioural change.

WACC believes that the vision of Agenda 2030 cannot be fully realised unless communication and information systems and structures enable people to participate in decision-making related to sustainable development. In this light, through its award-winning programmatic work, WACC advocates and encourages the integration of communication rights into practical programmes aimed at advancing a number of the Goals.

> "The long history and ongoing relevance of these topics underscore one thing: WACC is important, and if this network with its ideas, impulses, prescience and special focus on vulnerable groups did not yet exist, we certainly would have to invent it. The emancipative approach that flows from a Christian identity is compatible with any approach, initiative or organization that cares about the protection of human rights and human dignity and that dignifies those whose voices are not heard or acknowledged."
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> Dr Ellen Ueberschär, Co-President of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, from her keynote address at a symposium celebrating WACC's 50th Anniversary in Hamburg, Germany, May 2018.

WACC has fifty years of experience advocating for the democratization of communication and media reform. **It promotes communication rights as a strategy to advance sustainable development, to alleviate poverty, and to promote gender justice.** By doing so, it also

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3 Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. 2015. Sustainable Development Goals
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs.
4 United Nations Development Group. 2013. A Million Voices: The World We Want. A Sustainable Future with Dignity For all.

advocates peace. Speaking at the international Congress on "Communication is Peace – Building Viable Communities", Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu paid tribute to the long involvement that WACC and its partners have had with those working for justice and liberation:

> "Over its history, WACC has sought to defend, expand and entrench people's right to communicate... The struggle for justice, dignity and peace will always demand such commitment for as long as our communities remain divided, unviable and wracked by violence."

WACC advocates policy change at the global level (in bodies such as the United Nations, UNESCO, UN Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, the World Bank, ITU, FAO, and at non-governmental gatherings such as the World Social Forum and the Parliament of the World's Religions); at the regional level (in continent-wide fora in Latin America, Africa, and Asia); and at the national level (in initiatives aimed at policy-change in relation to media legislation on issues of ownership and control and access to information and knowledge).

> WACC is a principled voice for equality, diversity, and plurality. It promotes the role that communication rights play in tackling the social and economic inequities that beset the world in order to bring greater stability and peace to people and communities of all faiths and none. Without discrimination, it promotes its vision of "Communication for All".

Five Major Programmes

WACC realizes its aims through community capacity building, media monitoring for education and advocacy, comprehensive analysis of media trends from local to international perspectives, and advocacy through a diverse network of activists, educators, media professionals and policy makers. These strategies are applied in five focus areas.

1. Digital Communication Rights

With digital communication growing rapidly and policymakers in many countries developing digital infrastructure and governance models, WACC believes that it is critical to move beyond the issue of access in order to address structural and social justice concerns.

Sustainable Development Goals 9 and 17 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda recognize the need to enable people everywhere to benefit from access to the Internet and to mobile telephony. However, questions about ownership, regulation, privacy, and surveillance of civil society actors must be central elements of the conversation about ICTs in development. Access alone will not contribute to sustainable development.

Furthermore, existing communication rights that should ensure freedom of expression, linguistic rights, gender equality, media diversity and more need to be applied in a digital communication sphere impacted by disinformation, hate speech and growing media monopolies.

In partnership with the Just Net Coalition, WACC is working with community organisations to increase digital media literacy and to promote a more democratic approach to today's digital transformations.

WACC is also engaging with practitioners, academics, media and other partners to reflect critically on the fundamental issues of accessibility, affordability, accountability, participation, equality/equity, diversity and connectedness. Digital tools must be developed and promoted in such a way that communities which are often excluded can properly participate and push governments to implement public policies that contribute to greater equity and inclusion.

The use of digital platforms must occur within a framework of communication rights that help generate genuine opportunities for free and informed participation to promote true sustainable development. This is crucial amid the alarming trend of **shrinking space for civil society**, which often manifests itself online, as well in the form of online surveillance and Internet shutdowns.

For example, a WACC project in Palestine worked with vulnerable women to enable them to exercise their communication rights. It helped them build up their capacity to understand, access, evaluate, and analyse different types and sources of online information as well as to communicate on digital media platforms to promote their rights.

2. Migrants, Refugees and Communication Rights

All over the world, the numbers of people forced to migrate continue to grow at an alarming pace. Globally, according to the UN Refugee Agency, there are almost 80 million forcibly displaced people.[5] Of this number, some 46 million are internally displaced people, 26 million are refugees, and 4.2 million are asylum seekers. A host of concerns for people on the move need to be addressed: access to information, media representation, sharing their own news and participating in new communities and societies – all in an increasingly complex political, cultural, and digital communication landscape.

As forced migration and displacement of people has increased, so has media coverage. Some coverage has led to increased hostility towards migrants. And, in an age of rampant misinformation and disinformation, migration has become a lightning rod for xenophobic groups seeking to undermine trust in public institutions, including the media. Now more than ever, migrants' rights and communication rights advocates must work together to help migrants and refugees gain greater access to information and to communication platforms in order to have their voices heard, develop media literacy skills, and challenge dominant narratives about migration.

The ability of migrants and refugees to make themselves heard in their host societies and to contribute to public discourse on migration is severely curtailed by linguistic, cultural, economic, and political factors. The absence of their voices, in turn, impoverishes public debate. In most cases, migrants have next to no avenues to contribute to public conversations on migration, despite being at the centre of it.

Efforts to help migrants and refugees exercise their communication rights to access information and to freedom of expression include enhancing the capacity of migrant groups to engage in advocacy, build relationships with media houses, and produce evidence to help raise public awareness about the issues they face. Three examples of such efforts are the research and

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[5] https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html

advocacy by WACC Europe on "[Changing the Narrative: Media Representation of Refugees and Migrants in Europe](#)", WACC Africa on [media reporting and portrayal of internally displaced persons in the region](#), and the citizen journalist network [Among Neighbours: Network of Colombian and Venezuelan Citizen Journalists.](#)

Projects supported under this theme align with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, as well as with the UN's 2030 Agenda. It also aligns with the goals of the **UN Global Compact for Migration**, particularly objective 17, "Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration."

3. Communication Rights and Indigenous Rights

Media and communications are essential tools to create spaces for the expression of Indigenous voices and to share stories about the diversity of cultures, languages, and histories. Information, communication, and media have a power to educate, inform, and change society. Media can include and strengthen Indigenous voices, revitalize Indigenous languages, and educate Indigenous children.

The ability of Indigenous people to claim their communication rights is critical to realizing the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).** In particular, the right to access Indigenous community media, especially community radio, is essential for Indigenous people to be able to exercise their broader human rights, to guarantee their distinct political, economic, social and cultural development, and to help shape other sustainable development agendas.

WACC-supported projects focus on supporting the establishment of Indigenous community radio stations in areas with limited access to other media; enhancing the participation of women in Indigenous community media at all levels; promoting the development of Indigenous community media networks and movements; and enabling advocacy efforts aimed at democratizing media structures in ways that benefit Indigenous communities.

An example of this work is the [community radio set up in Guatemala](#) by Asociación de Grupo de Mujeres Tejedoras Ixiles Q'imb'al.

4. Communication Rights and Climate Change

The climate crisis is exacerbating existing inequalities within and among communities and is having a disproportionate effect on marginalized and isolated communities, particularly those whose lifestyle is directly linked to nature and who depend on local or traditional knowledge for subsistence and survival.

In many developing countries, a gendered division of labour, restricted access to land, capital, technologies, and other financial resources, as well as limited access to political decision-making spheres, have also hindered women from playing a full role in tackling climate change and other environmental challenges.

A report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the impacts of global warming has warned about the risk of environmental catastrophe unless societies around the

world radically change their ways of life.[6] Effective responses partly depend on the extent to which climate-related issues receive public attention, particularly in terms of media content. Scientific knowledge also needs to be communicated in local languages by trusted sources. Furthermore, given that the effects of climate change have a disproportionate impact on people and communities in vulnerable situations, enabling those communities to put their communication rights into practice is essential if they are to tell their own stories, organize for change, and advance their own solutions to the climate crisis.

Currently, in partnership with FAO's Communication for Development Unit, WACC is working to enable communities at the grassroots level to harness traditional ecological knowledge and to support networks of environmental citizen journalists. WACC is also supporting a multi-year project in partnership with the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF), to promote the protection of sensitive ecosystems in Colombia.

Projects supported under this theme align with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, SDG 13-on Climate Action, and the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

5. Gender and Communication Rights

WACC promotes women's communication rights and advances **gender equality** in and through the media. Partners apply gender-focussed news media monitoring to generate the evidence needed to support education, awareness, training, advocacy, and engagement with media professionals about media policy and practice. Gender-focussed media monitoring has a significant role to play in building the evidence to advance gender equality and empower all women and girls.

However, progress in closing the gender gap in media content remains extremely slow. Growing violence against women on digital platforms continues to impede women's communication and other rights online. Gender inequality perpetuated in and through the media complicates efforts to address discrimination against girls and women in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Biases, stereotyping, and unbalanced reporting from a gender perspective normalize and further entrench the unequal gender power relations that are at the root of discriminatory attitudes and practices. Such practices often silence women through fear of speaking up and stigmatization.

WACC advocates the right of women and girls to full and equal participation in public communication so that their multiple and complex interests, experiences and realities become part of the public agenda. It also supports civil society evidence-building on media and marginalized sectors of society in order to advance social justice goals for all in and through the media. Projects supported align with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality, and SDG 16 on Justice, Peace, and Strong Institutions. They also align with the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, especially section J- Women and the Media.

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[6] https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/

In addition, a major WACC enterprise is the **Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)**, the largest and longest-running research and advocacy initiative on gender in the world's news media. Every five years since 1995, GMMP research has taken the pulse of selected indicators of gender in the news media, including women's presence in relation to men, gender bias and stereotypes in news stories and other content. In 2015, data was gathered and analysed in 114 countries. The sixth research in the series is taking place in 2020.

GMMP data has shown that news paints a picture of a world in which women and girls are virtually invisible. Women are dramatically under-represented in the news, constituting only 24% of news subjects and sources.

GMMP findings are important because they reveal the extent to which women's communication rights are ignored, denied or diminished. These findings provide the evidence that gender and communication groups at all levels can use to urge policy change in media houses around the world. They have also been an important tool in national and international advocacy work for gender equality and women's rights. Activists throughout the world use GMMP research reports and toolkits.

GMMP findings are integrated into journalism training curricula to build gender awareness of media professionals and in media literacy programmes targeting general audiences.

One recent example comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina where the GMMP national report was used to build the **critical media literacy** of audiences to enable them to engage with gender issues, as well as targeted **media advocacy** aimed at addressing gender issues in journalistic output. Women's groups discussed the importance of gender equality among female and male journalists and urged all journalists to tackle existing gender stereotypes. Another outcome was the establishment of a platform for future cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina media and civil society organizations.

The United Nations has officially recognized the relevance of the GMMP media monitoring.

> "For gender equality advocates the GMMP data provide important material for conversations, both about and with the media industry... Women and girls are half of humanity. Giving equal time and weight to their stories is an important part of creating a better, freer world for all of us."
>
> UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

WACC carries out this work in partnership with UN Women, UNESCO, and the Global Alliance on Gender and Media (GAMAG). The GMMP reports and media monitoring tools are available at www.whomakesthenews.org.

incorporated charitable organisation (number 83970 9524 RR0001) with its offices at 308 Main Street, Toronto ON, M4C 4X7.

www.waccglobal.org

Appendix 1: WACC's Theory of Change

Impact
Societies where all people are able to engage in transparent, informed, and democratic dialogue, in order to affirm human rights and dignity

Outcome 1: Greater access to information and communication enables locally-led, rights-based development

Outcome 2: Fair and balanced representation and inclusion of women, disadvantaged and marginalised groups in media content and structures

Outcome 3: Social justice movements challenge undemocratic media and communications at local, national and global levels

Output 1: Disadvantaged and marginalised communities have improved ICT and communication capacity

Output 1: Data and evidence collected and applied to support fair and balanced media representation and inclusion

Output 1: Media and communication trends monitored, analysed and disseminated

Output 2: Young people, women and others have the communication tools and skills to amplify their voices

Output 2: Tools and analyses developed and applied for critical media literacy

Output 2: Strategic advocacy and training in support of more democratic media and communication structures

Output 3: Disadvantaged and marginalised communities achieve legislative and policy change

Output 3: Positive changes in policy and practice in media organisations and among professionals

Output 3: Interactions between local, regional and global networks leveraged for media reform and transparency