



Strategic Plan

Media Foundation
for West Africa

2025 - 2029



The Context & Approach

This strategic plan has been developed to provide clear programmatic and operational directions for the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) over the next five years (January 2025 –December 2029). Informed by the prevailing context and emerging issues, the plan is framed to help the organisation appropriately respond to the Freedom of Expression (FOE), governance and development challenges in the West Africa region. The plan will also guide the organisation to channel resources and staff efforts towards clear agreed outcomes and targets.

This strategy is a product of extensive consultations with partners, experts and other relevant stakeholders that contributed to a deeper analysis and broader understanding of the contextual environment, as well as enabled comprehensive overview of the organisation's mission, vision and programming in order to effectively respond to prevailing regional challenges.

After nearly three decades of burgeoning democracies in nearly all the 16 countries in the region, West Africa is experiencing, perhaps, the fastest recession in democratic conditions in the world. Support for democracy is on the decline while anti-democratic narratives are on the rise amidst proliferation of mis/disinformation that seem to glorify military takeovers. Four countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Guinea) are already under military regimes with fears that more countries may likely experience coups in the coming years if the context remains the same.

ECOWAS, once regarded as the most vibrant regional intergovernmental group on the continent, is currently going through challenges, including the withdrawal of three Member States (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) from the regional bloc. Regional stability continues to be severely threatened by growing extremists and terrorists' activities and affective polarisation that increasingly makes it difficult to build consensus among groups and to find common grounds for solutions to national and regional problems. Accompanying the political turbulence and challenges of instability is a shrinking civic space and repressive media environment that stifles critical voices and incapacitates independent media. The region also faces severe climate crises.

These conditions, together with a growing youth bulge and rising unemployment rates, represent an insidious threat to political stability and peace; as disaffected youths become disposed towards extremist ideologies and susceptible to recruitment by militant groups. The proliferation of misinformation online can further accentuate these challenges as young people, often active on social media platforms, encounter and disseminate misleading information with the potential to fuel polarization and incite conflict.

While the scale and spate of digital uptake has been instrumental in democratising the public sphere and enabling popular participation and greater transparency within the governance realm, there are also significant challenges. Weaponisation of cybercrime laws to muzzle and criminalise expression even in countries where criminal libel has been expunged from legal statutes; inadequate digital skills and online gender-based violence limiting women's meaningful access and use of the internet and digital spaces; and the spread of mis/disinformation which distort public discourse; continue to impinge adversely upon democratic values in the region. The recent deployment of AI and digital tools and platforms towards valorising coup regimes within the region is a particularly telling threat to democratic integrity and the promotion of media and free expression rights.

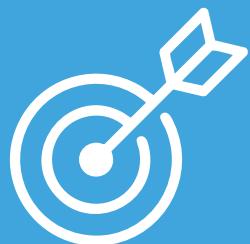
The inadequate representation, and even misrepresentation, of women's voices and views in media and public discourse continues to perpetuate gender biases, limit the diversity of perspectives, and diminish the accountability of leaders and institutions to all citizens. In a region that is highly patriarchal, and in which cultural and systemic barriers stand in the way of women's participation in media and public discourses, there is a continuing need for affirmative advocacy towards a governance architecture that is more representative, more responsive, and more equitable.

Additionally, the growing culture of nationalism and unilateralism by western partner countries are leading to reductions in funding support and posing practical challenges for effective project implementation by partners. The context and conditions above thus come at a time when the global rights order is in a state of flux, with a withdrawal of political and financial support from key actors.



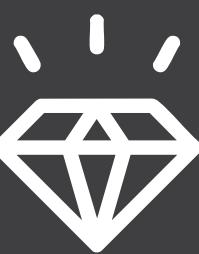
Vision

A peaceful West Africa in which media freedom is fully exercised and all persons are able to express themselves and participate in governance processes without fear, threat or intimidation.



Mission

To empower, promote and defend media and civic voices for good governance and democratic development in West Africa.



Values

- Equality, liberty, and social justice, irrespective of belief, race, ethnicity or sex
- Independence, non-partisanship, and non-sectarianism
- Excellence and professionalism
- Resilience
- Digital inclusion
- Accountability, transparency, and good stewardship
- Teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, partnership, and solidarity

Strategic Focus

Advancing freedom of expression, media freedom and professionalism, and a rights-based deployment of digital technologies to foster the respect of rights and freedoms; trust in the media and democratic institutions; and participatory, responsive and accountable governance in West Africa.

Overall Strategic Goal

Media and civic voices are respected and defended in West Africa; and trust in democratic institutions and the media are restored through professional journalism and empowered civic voices that hold power to account.

Programmatic Response

Under the four pillars set out below, MFWA will respond to contextual challenges through strategic interventions to meet the overall strategic goal.

Freedom of Expression

Securing the enabling environment for independent journalism and activism

1

Tech and Digital Rights

Promoting and defending rights online, especially women's rights online; and promoting safe and rights-respecting digital and tech policies across the region

2

Cross-cutting Theme
Women empowerment

Media for Democracy and Good Governance

strengthening the media to facilitate participation, responsiveness, transparency and accountability in governance

3

Media for Peace and Social Cohesion

engaging with the media to address extremism, polarisation, mis/disinformation and promote conflict prevention

4

Freedom of expression

Outcome

- Improved freedom of expression environment reflected through timely and efficient redress mechanisms by governments and state security agencies, ECOWAS and civil society actors

Specific Objectives

- To increase responsiveness on the part of state and non-state actors against violations and to promote media self-regulatory mechanisms to improve professionalism
- To improve the safety of female journalists in West Africa
- To enhance collaboration with ECOWAS and engage in advocacy for Member States to improve conditions of FOE and safety of journalists

Strategic Issues to be Addressed

- Promoting media freedom & professionalism
- Enhancing safety of journalists
- Countering Impunity
- Defending civic expression

Tech and Digital Rights

Outcome

- Increased public awareness on digital rights and public demand for safe, rights-respecting and inclusive digital and tech policies

Specific Objectives

- To increase public awareness on DPI/DPGs issues and to foster a DPI/DPGs eco-system that is inclusive, participatory and rights-respecting across West Africa
- To increase public awareness and knowledge on digital rights issues and promote inclusive and rights-respecting digital policies
- To increase public awareness and advocacy against online gender-based violence

Focal Areas

- DPI Ecosystem enablement
- Women's rights online
- Internet Freedom

Media for Democracy and Good Governance

Outcomes

- Increased citizens (especially women) participation in governance and public discourse through media
- Strengthened media capacity for public-interest journalism that advances transparency and accountability in governance
- Strengthened collaboration with ECOWAS for advancing democratic values, norms and practices in West Africa

Specific Objectives

- To increase citizen's (especially women) participation in governance processes and public discourse through the media
- To strengthen the media's capacity to undertake investigative and public-interest journalism that improves transparency and accountability in governance processes
- To improve democratic values, norms and practices in West Africa through collaborative initiatives with ECOWAS

Focal Areas

- Citizens' participation in governance
- Independent journalism and media sustainability
- Investigative journalism

Media for Peace and Social Cohesion

Outcomes

- Improved collaboration with ECOWAS in the promotion of the principles of the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework
- Increased capacity of the media in peace and conflict-sensitive journalism
- Increased public awareness of extremism and polarisation; and mobilisation of action to confront their impacts

Specific Objectives

1. To strengthen collaboration with ECOWAS to promote the principles of the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework through the media
2. To improve the capacity of the media in contributing to regional peace and stability efforts through peace and conflict-sensitive journalism
3. To counter mis/disinformation, extremist and polarising narratives and mobilise stakeholders to address polarisation

Focal Areas

- Countering mis/disinformation
- Countering polarisation and extremist narratives
- Peace journalism
- Climate change

Crosscutting Pillar - Institutional Development

The four programme areas will be supported by the crosscutting pillar – institutional development



Strategies and Tools

MFWA has a number of strategies and tools which it will employ to deliver its strategy over the next 5 years. These come from its partner network, connections to regional and international stakeholders and its inhouse expertise and activities.

1. Strategic partnerships, coalition building and collaborations
2. Cross regional interventions
3. Campaigns and advocacy
4. Capacity strengthening of journalists, media organisations and media support organisations
5. Research, documentation and knowledge sharing
6. Adapting, responding and taking advantage of new developments and emerging issues
7. Prioritisation and mainstreaming of women empowerment in all operations

Assumptions

- That there will be political stability that enables engagements and interventions
- That state and non-state actors will be committed to addressing media and FOE challenges
- That there will be public support for advocacy against FOE and media rights violations
- That there will be an increased commitment of journalists to do professional investigative reporting
- That state institutions will be more responsive to making information available
- That media support organisations in the region and beyond will contribute to efforts to improve press freedom and freedom of expression
- That there would be a safer and more tolerant environment for critical investigative journalism
- That there will not be public health crises that will significantly disrupt operations and implementation of work

Theory of Change



Logical Framework

Freedom of Expression

Outcome:

Improved freedom of expression environment reflected through timely and efficient redress mechanisms by governments and state security agencies, ECOWAS and civil society actors.

Specific Objective	Specific Objective	Specific Objective			
Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target
To increase responsiveness on the part of state and non-state actors against violations and to promote media self-regulatory mechanisms to improve professionalism	To improve the safety of female journalists in West Africa	To enhance collaboration with ECOWAS and advocacy for ECOWAS Member States to improve conditions of FOE and safety of journalists			
Number of FOE violations and redress actions by authorities	At least 30% of reported cases of violations are responded to by state and non-state actors by way of redress	Number of female journalists trained on safety mechanisms	At least 200 female journalists trained on safety issues	Number of joint/collaborative actions undertaken with ECOWAS to help improve conditions of FOE and safety of journalists	At least 20 joint/collaborative actions undertaken during the strategy period
Number of media self-regulatory mechanisms initiated or supported	At least 5 self-regulatory mechanisms initiated or supported	Number of policy interventions undertaken to improve safety conditions for female journalists	At least 5 policy interventions introduced and/or implemented by state and non-state actors	Number of redress actions taken by ECOWAS and/or Member States to fight impunity and expand civic spaces for expression and activism	At least 30 redress actions taken by ECOWAS and/or Member States, AU and/or UN

Tech & Digital Rights

Outcome:

Increased public awareness on digital rights and public demand for safe, rights-respecting and inclusive digital and tech policies

Specific Objective		Specific Objective		Specific Objective	
Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target
Number of journalists trained and number of publications produced about DPI and DPGs	At least 300 journalists (with at least 30% female journalists) trained; and at least 400 stories produced and published about DPI/DPGs	Number of research reports and articles published about digital rights issues in West Africa	At least 10 research reports and 30 articles published about digital rights issues in West Africa	Number of advocacy interventions undertaken to promote digital rights (especially of women) and to counter online gender-based violence (OGBV)	At least 20 advocacy interventions implemented to promote digital rights and to counter OGBV
Number of actions taken by governments and DPI/DPGs actors to improve the ecosystem in reaction to media reports	At least 25 actions taken by government actors and DPI/DPGs actors to improve the ecosystem in response to media reports	Number of engagements (public and bilateral) held to advance digital rights and issues	At least 10 public forums and 5 bilateral engagements held on digital rights issues	Number of women trained on digital rights issues across the region	At least 200 women are empowered with knowledge of digital rights and digital skills

Media for Democracy and Good Governance

Outcomes:

1. Increased citizens (especially women) participation in governance and public discourse through media
2. Strengthened media capacity for public-interest journalism that advances transparency and accountability in governance
3. Strengthened collaboration with ECOWAS for advancing democratic values, norms and practices in West Africa

Specific Objective		Specific Objective		Specific Objective	
Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target
Number of media platforms created that enable citizens (especially women) to engage with authorities and demand transparency and accountability in the utilisation of public resources	At least 50 citizens-authorities engagement platforms created	Number of journalists trained in investigative and public-interest journalism	At least 200 journalists (including at least 80 female journalists) trained in public-interest journalism that advances transparent and accountable governance	Number of joint initiatives undertaken with ECOWAS to popularise the protocol on democracy and good governance, and ECOWAS vision 2050	At least 3 joint capacity building initiatives for stakeholders and 3 advocacy activities focusing on the protocol implemented
The level of responsiveness of authorities to issues raised by citizens	At least 25 of the concerns raised by citizens through the created platforms are responded to and/or addressed	Number of investigative stories produced by the trained journalists	At least 150 investigative stories produced and published to demand transparency and accountability in governance processes	Number of joint initiatives with ECOWAS and other actors to promote information integrity that enhances democratic resilience	At least 3 major regional-level interventions dealing with mis/dis/mal information implemented

Media for Peace and Social Cohesion

Outcomes

- Improved collaboration with ECOWAS in the promotion of the principles of the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework
- Increased capacity of the media in peace and conflict-sensitive journalism
- Increased public awareness of extremism and polarisation; and mobilisation of action to confront their impacts

Specific Objective	Specific Objective	Specific Objective			
Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target	Indicators	Target
To strengthen collaboration with ECOWAS to promote the principles of the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework through the media	To improve the capacity of the media in contributing to regional peace and stability efforts through peace and conflict-sensitive journalism	To counter mis/disinformation, extremist and polarising narratives and mobilise stakeholders to address polarisation			
Number of joint initiatives with ECOWAS to promote the principles of the conflict prevention framework	At least 3 initiatives jointly implemented with ECOWAS focusing on promoting the principles of the conflict prevention framework	Number of journalists trained in peace journalism	At least 200 Journalists (including at least 30% female journalists) trained on peace journalism	Number of actors mobilised and capacitated, and joint actions undertaken to counter mis/disinformation, extremist and polarising narratives	At least 10 major actors mobilised and at least 10 joint actions implemented

