

South Sudan

Ensuring media freedom in law and in practice

Background

South Sudan has made considerable progress in regards to the promotion of freedom of expression, access to information and journalists' safety since its independence in 2011. The adoption of 3 media related laws (Media Authority Act, 2013, Access to Information Act, 2013 and Broadcasting Cooperation Act, 2013) as well as the establishment of media regulatory bodies and commissions are an indication of the continuous efforts from government and media partners to ensure that citizens can exercise their right to access information. However, South Sudan's nascent media sector still requires technical support to be able to respect the laws in practice. Moreover, journalists remain vulnerable to attacks as media houses still struggle to offer them protection to do their job safely. Furthermore, women journalists continue to be underrepresented in the media workforce and in decision-making roles.

What we are doing

- Supporting South Sudan through the provision of technical expertise to implement media laws, enhance protection mechanisms for journalists and support advocacy initiatives.

Learn more about our work (Story on the back page)

What we could further do with your support

- Further strengthen the capacities of media regulatory bodies and commissions to guarantee the application of media laws.
- Reinforce journalists' safety by organizing specialized trainings and producing practical tools such as safety manuals for journalists covering high-risk areas.
- Support more activities targeting journalists in rural areas and media stakeholders to achieve a nation wide impact.

Actions in South Sudan fall under the following outputs of the Multi-Donor Programme (MPD):

Output 1:
Awareness-raising and advocacy

Output 3:
Enhancing the safety of journalists

Output 4:
Policy advice and reinforcement of duty bearers' capacities

Key Achievements

- **Launch of the strategy document to implement the Access to Information Act.** The document, launched by the South Sudan Information Commission (IC), details 5 key priority areas that the IC has set-out to implement in the next 3 years.
- **Establishment of a working group on safety of journalists** thanks to an agreement between key stakeholders. The working group is a first step to set up a national protection mechanism.
- **Over 140 stakeholders from public and private institutions sensitized** to the provisions of the ATI Act, and trained on their roles to practice proactive information disclosure as a mechanism for building between citizens, the government and private institutions.
- The **empowerment of the IC staff** through UNESCO-led activities has enabled it to attract support from other media development partners (such as the Norwegian People's Aid and UNICEF) to support the implementation of the Access to Information Act.



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Protect Journalists and Freedom of Expression

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**“When information is availed to citizens,
they are empowered to hold the government
accountable and the rule of law and
democracy can be strengthened.”**

.....

Hon. Justine Alier De Mayen

*Undersecretary, Ministry of Information, Communication,
Telecommunication and Postal services*

► **Putting in practice
South Sudan's access to
information law.**

In 2013, South Sudan adopted a Right of Access to Information Act, along with two other media related laws: the Broadcasting Corporation Act and the Media Authority Act. Following South Sudan's independence in 2011, the new legislation reflected the nascent country's aspirations to guarantee its citizens' right of freedom of expression.

However, contrary to the short period of time that it took to enact the laws, granting citizens effective access to information has been obstructed by a weak institutional capacity, as well as the fragile and unstable political situation that followed the country's independence.

With UNESCO support, an Information Commission was created in 2016 to accelerate and adequately implement the provisions of the Right of Access to Information Act. UNESCO has been supporting the Commission since its inception by providing necessary policy advice and technical capacity, such as training of staff on transparency principles and proactive disclosures of information.

This support has been critical to increase the limited awareness of media authorities on international standards on freedom of expression and right to information. It was also played a role in sensitizing media authorities and encourage them to meet the purpose of the law.

The Organization has also worked with partners within the UN system, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Rule of Law Advisory Section of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan's (UNMISS), in order to provide capacity-building to representatives from the government, parliament, civil society, media, as well as independent experts.

Similarly, through the commemorations of World Press Freedom Day and the International Day for Universal Access to Information, UNESCO has mobilized media stakeholders to discuss the Commission's strategic plan, and support its operation for the next 3 years.

UNESCO will continue working with the government and media development partners to plan, monitor and evaluate media development activities in South Sudan, as well as to improve its legislation and empower citizens with access to information, especially during the current nation building process.

Read more about our work, visit:

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression/mdp>



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