

**UNESCO announced, on 17 June, it has commissioned a handbook of innovative media strategies and practices that are strengthening independent news media's ability to provide news and information to societies at a time when their very existence is under threat.**

"Strengthening Independent Media, One Case at a Time: A Handbook for Media Viability" will include case studies of innovative ideas from a wide variety of news media companies, mostly in the developing world, that are succeeding in difficult times and have lessons to share with others who are struggling.

The handbook project was announced during the 65th meeting of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

The IPDC, which will publish the handbook in the second part of 2021, released a brochure at the meeting that includes highlights of some of the cases to be included, from community media in South Africa to a pure-play digital success in Indonesia, to a fact-checking network in Brazil to a covid response in Pakistan, and much more.

The handbook is a part of a larger UNESCO initiative to strengthen media viability worldwide, supported by the IPDC Bureau and Council, that kicked off at the 2020 conference on the future of media development marking the 40th anniversary of the Programme.

The resource is being written by Larry Kilman, former Secretary General of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), which organization is a partner with UNESCO in the wider media viability project.

Kilman is author of the IPDC publication "An attack on one is an attack on all". The larger project, in collaboration with the Economist Intelligence Unit, Free Press Unlimited, the International Center for Journalists and Columbia University, will research the extent of the global crisis for independent news media, consult with stakeholders for solutions, share knowledge between media outlets, and produce policy recommendations to support the viability of the news media.

**As the COVID-19 pandemic has so vividly shown, access to information has the potential to save lives. This health crisis has underlined how media and information literacy can address surges in disinformation. It has highlighted the importance of making reliable information readily available in multiple languages, including indigenous languages. It has also underscored that immediate measures must be catered to those most in need, including persons with disabilities.**

The Information for All Programme of UNESCO (IFAP) deals with all these issues. It aims to build inclusive knowledge societies, where technological progress and digital opportunities are part of everyone's daily lives. These are the words of Mr. Xing Qu, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, at the 32nd Meeting of the Bureau of the

Intergovernmental Council for IFAP held virtually on 15 and 16 June 2021.

The IFAP Chair, Ms. Dorothy Gordon of Ghana, emphasized that the Programme can fast-track policy consensus and contribute towards health, education, justice and reducing inequalities. With a mandate that is today more important than ever, IFAP harnesses opportunities offered by technology to share experiences and lessons learned from high-level events, studies and capacity building initiatives that promote digital inclusion, are based on sound data, and contribute to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is in this context and under this driving motive that experts and Government representatives from 22 UNESCO Member States work together through IFAP. Belgium, Ghana, Jamaica, Malaysia, the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation compose the Programme's leadership – its Bureau. They jointly carry out the crucial mission of this unique Intergovernmental Programme of UNESCO, which has been assisting UNESCO Member States in building inclusive knowledge societies throughout its two decades of existence.

At its 32nd meeting, the IFAP Bureau assessed the positive impact of two projects funded and co-funded by the Programme between 2020 and 2021 in response to COVID-19.

In partnership with the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education in Moscow, IFAP built capacities of teachers, educators and decision-makers in nine countries of eastern Europe and central Asia. The project aimed to facilitate online learning and impart media and information literacy skills to address misinformation and disinformation. IFAP was also part of the "UNESCO Caribbean Artificial Intelligence Initiative", raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence in Caribbean Small Island Developing States. Offering training tailored to the Caribbean context, this project has helped pave the way for public policies that support the ethical use of 'AI'.

As UNESCO is establishing cross-cutting strategic objectives to guide its actions over the next eight years, IFAP must act as an enabler for the Organization's communication and information priorities, working in a transversal manner to contribute to UNESCO's assistance to Member States in achieving the SDGs, underlined the IFAP Chair. And, to do so, IFAP is renewing its Strategic Plan for 2022 to 2025 in alignment with UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy. To better serve Member States' needs and guided by the IFAP Bureau, IFAP Secretary Ms. Marielza Oliveira is strengthening and standardizing IFAP's internal processes, increasing the Programme's effectiveness, efficiency and outreach.