

# Cautious Optimism: Attitudes towards the Global Campaign for Media Freedom

Results of a survey in 24 countries where media freedom is under threat

In this factsheet, we present the results of an online survey of 64 media freedom activists and independent media professionals based in 24 countries where media freedom is under threat. The survey asked respondents whether the Global Campaign for Media Freedom is helping to defend media freedom, and how it compares to other media freedom / development initiatives.

## Key findings

1. Over three quarters (78%) of respondents had heard of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom (GCMF)<sup>1</sup> in an online survey of 64 media freedom activists and independent media professionals in 24 countries where media freedom is under threat (June-July 2020).
2. A slim majority (59%) of respondents were positive about the work of the GCMF so far and agreed that 'it is helping to defend media where it is under threat around the world'.
3. Compared to other international media freedom initiatives, the Global Campaign for Media Freedom is perceived relatively favourably, especially given that it has only recently been established.
4. Qualitative comments indicate cautious optimism about the GCMF amongst a majority of respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> The Global Campaign for Media Freedom (GCMF) was launched in 2019 by the UK and Canadian governments. It includes a coalition of 38+ countries seeking to promote media freedom, a High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom and a Global Media Defence Fund, administered by UNESCO. The overarching goals of the GCMF are to 1) shine a global spotlight on the issue of media freedom and 2) increase the costs for those who attack media freedom.

## Sample

An online survey of 64 individual media freedom activists and independent media professionals around the world was conducted using a Survey Monkey questionnaire<sup>2</sup>. This surveyed independent media outlets, press freedom advocacy organisations and media support and training bodies in 24 countries, where media freedom is under threat<sup>3</sup>. Answers were received from 22 women (34%) and 42 men (66%) from 60 organisations. The questions used a 9-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree) and included optional text boxes for qualitative answers. The survey was piloted, and then administered in June-July 2020, with English, French and Spanish versions.

The survey was administered as part of a wider evaluation study among partners of Free Press Unlimited and the European Journalism Centre<sup>4</sup>. The main question reviewed here is: **To what extent do you agree with this statement? “The Global Campaign for Media Freedom (launched by the United Kingdom and Canada in July 2019) is helping to defend media where it is under threat around the world?”**

For comparison, we also asked respondents for their opinion on The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity<sup>5</sup> and of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 16.10.2) that defends the right of access to information<sup>6</sup>. The final sample included:

- Total responses to the overall survey = 64, total responses to our questions = 61.
- 22 women (34%) and 42 men (66%).
- 20 Spanish-speakers, 9 French-speakers and 35 English-speakers.
- 40% working for a small independent media outlet, 17% working for press freedom advocacy organisations, 42% working for media support organisations and 1% working for ‘other’ organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Readers should note that there may be a slight bias inherent in the sample of respondents to the survey. At the time of the survey, all respondents were working for organisations and media outlets that were currently or had recently been recipients of international aid money channelled through Free Press Unlimited or European Journalism Centre. As such, they may have been more aware of international initiatives such as the GCMF, than other media outlets/organisations not in receipt of international aid.

<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh, Bolivia, Central African Republic, D. R. Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (and one additional country from Central Africa and one from MENA region).

<sup>4</sup> The wider evaluation was led by Mary Myers and Nicola Harford, and was a separate consultancy funded out of a grant from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> The full text of the question on the UN plan of action was: To what extent do you agree with this statement? “The UN plan of Action to Protect Safety of Journalists is helping to defend media where it is under threat around the world”

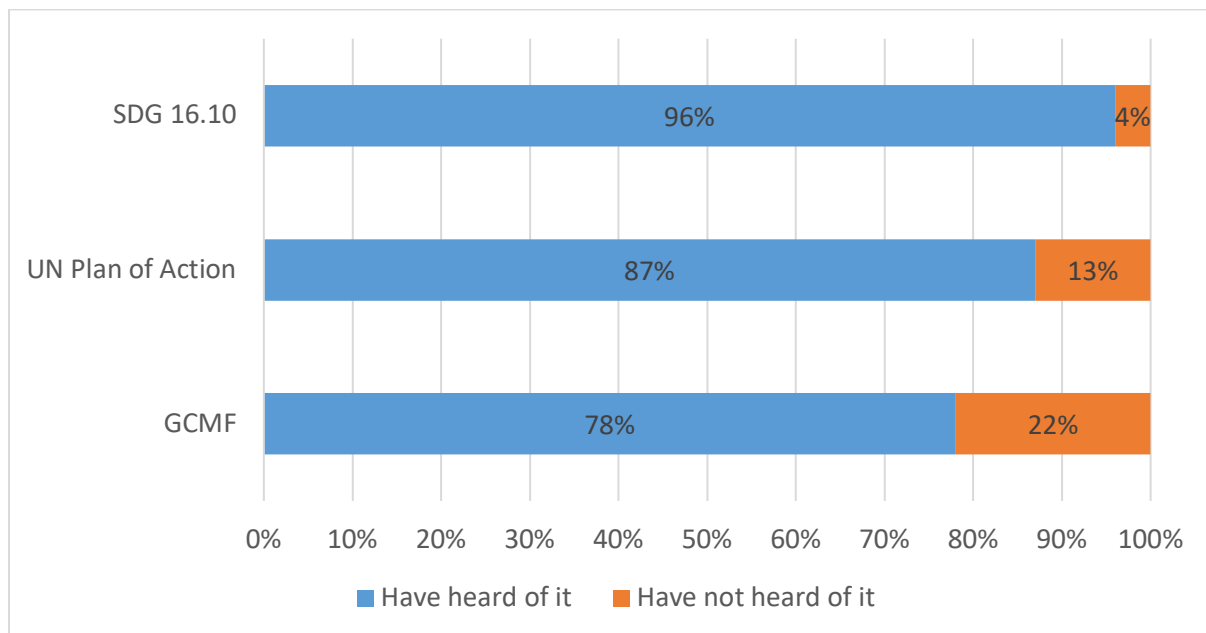
<sup>6</sup> The full text of the SDG question was: To what extent do you agree with this statement? “The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 16.10) that defends the right of access to information is making a positive difference to media freedom in my country”

- Respondents were senior staff of small independent media outlets, press freedom advocacy groups and media support organisations in 24 countries where media freedom is under threat.

## Results

Over three quarters (78%) of respondents who answered the question had heard of The Global Campaign for Media Freedom. Male respondents (81%) were marginally more likely than female respondents (77%) to have heard of it. Respondents working for press freedom advocacy organisations (88%) and media outlets (81%) were more likely to have heard of it than those working for media support organisations (73%). However, 27% of survey respondents did not answer the question.

Figure 1 shows that respondents were more likely to have heard of both The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists (87%) and SDG 16.10.2 (96%) than the GCMF (78%). This could be explained by these two UN initiatives having been established for a longer period of time.



**Figure 1:** The extent to which respondents had heard of different international initiatives relating to media freedom / media development (n=61).

## Evaluation of the GCMF

Media freedom activists and independent media professionals in countries where media freedom is under threat appear to greet the Global Campaign for Media Freedom with cautious optimism. Figure 2 shows that, of those who had heard of the GCMF, a majority

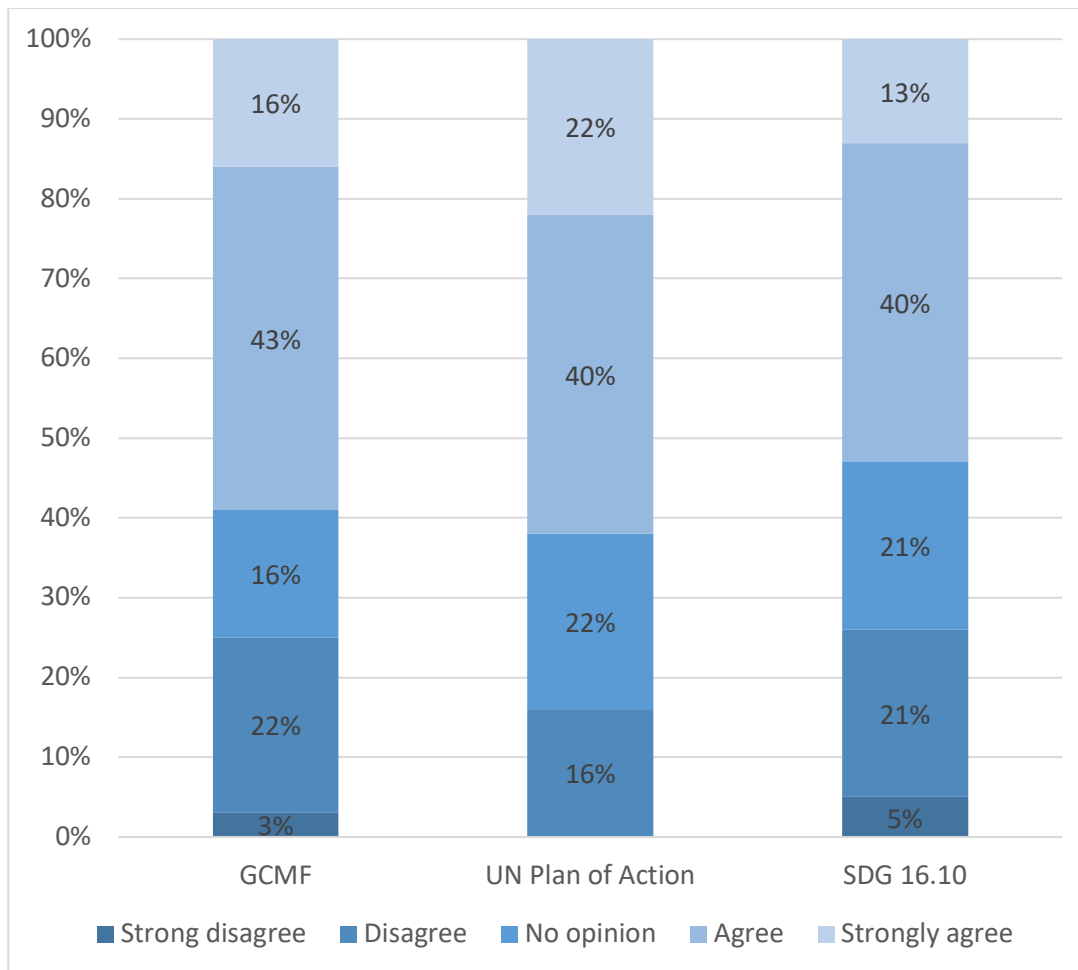
(59%) agreed that 'it is helping to defend media where it is under threat around the world', including 16% who 'strongly agreed' with this statement. One such person said, 'In times of global fragmentation and rise in right wing polity - solidarity is the best form of defence for expression and media freedom'. Another wrote, 'It is a good initiative led by powerful countries'. Although female respondents (64%) were marginally more likely than male respondents (58%) to agree with the statement, most who 'strongly agreed' with it (83%), were male.

While a quarter (25%) of respondents disagreed with the statement, this included only one person (3%) who strongly disagreed. This respondent said they 'don't see its impact on the ground'. Individuals working for media outlets (31%) were more likely to disagree with the statement, compared to those working for press freedom organisations (25%) or media support organisations (19%).

Several respondents reflected the feeling that the GCMF is not yet widely known. One wrote that, 'Here in my country, few press associations have been in contact or have already experienced this coalition'. Another wrote, 'I haven't seen much of their effort in this country in particular and I didn't personally read much about their work after the conference in London last year'.

But respondents were generally hopeful rather than cynical. One respondent said: 'It's not yet tested because in [x country] it's in its first steps, but you see in theory it might be [helping to defend media freedom]'. Another opined 'It helps media have more self-confidence and have the tools they need to defend themselves in case of violence or freedom restrictions.' Yet another said: 'This campaign gives the message to [our] leaders who know that at the diplomatic level you cannot just play around and block the work of the media. In Africa, the opinion of the international community is taken well into account in all important decisions.'

Sixteen percent of respondents expressed no opinion on the statement either way. These respondents variously commented that, 'I attended and was involved in the campaign but it has had not much effect in our area. The impacts are not huge', 'In [x country], uptake has been slow due to repressive laws', 'It will have to fund local journalists' rights defenders to make this a reality in our countries'.



**Figure 2:** The extent to which respondents agreed with positive statements about three different international initiatives relating to media freedom / media development (n=61).

The survey found that levels of support for the GCMF were similar to that for other international media freedom / media development initiatives. Figure 2 shows that the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists was perceived slightly most positively than the GCMF, as no respondents ‘strongly disagreed’ with the positive statement about it and fewer ‘disagreed’ with it. Comments included: ‘The UN Plan of Action to Protect Safety of Journalists has been useful to us as guide in building our advocacy strategies’; ‘There are voices around the world that matter. I think UNESCO [successfully] highlights journalists’ issues and problems and issues of press freedom in my country’.

However, Figure 2 also shows that respondents were more positive about the GCMF than SDG 16.10 as fewer respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the positive statement about SDG 16.10. One respondent wrote, ‘My disagreement is that the SDG 16.10 goal isn't popular outside the UN’. Another responded, ‘Their voice [UN] needs to be stronger in [x country] for

the protection of journalists as digital laws and self censorship has made it almost difficult to openly talk on security issues’.

However, these subtle differences could also be explained by differences in the wording of the positive statements about each initiative – since they were not identical.

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### Researching Media Freedom in a Time of Crisis

This factsheet is part of a wider analysis of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom currently being undertaken by a team from the University of East Anglia and City, University of London. For further information about our research, please visit [www.pressfreedom.co.uk](http://www.pressfreedom.co.uk)

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