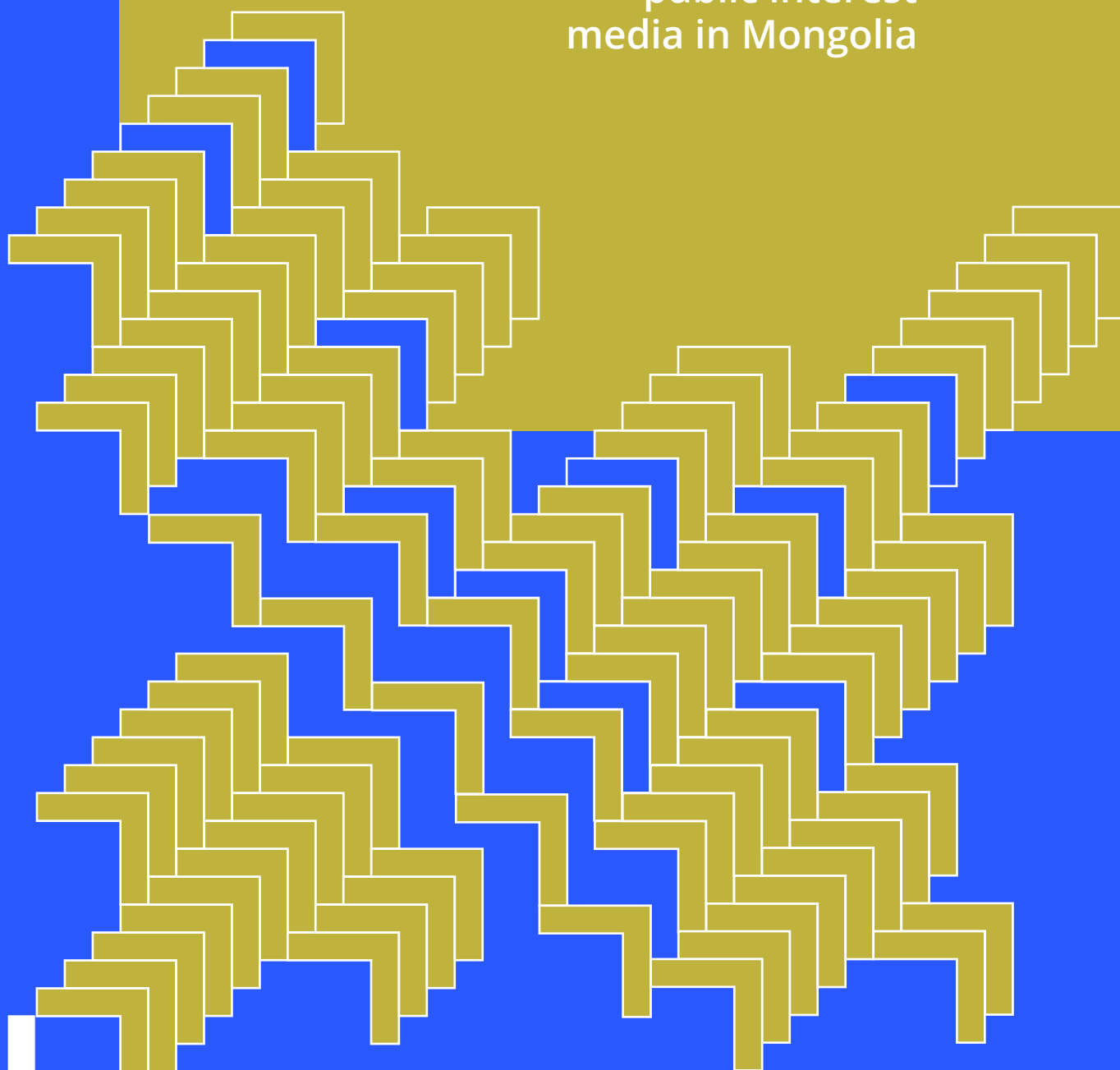


A catalyst, not a crutch

How flexible funding
is strengthening
public interest
media in Mongolia





Despite a vibrant media landscape, Mongolia has historically received limited donor support for independent journalism. Many outlets have succeeded in covering their operating costs through commercial income, but years of operating on tight margins have constrained their ability to invest in new products, audiences, technology, and organisational development. This suggested an opportunity for relatively modest funding to unlock growth that existing business models could not finance on their own.



Executive summary

As donors worldwide seek scalable approaches to strengthening independent media, the case of Mongolia illustrates how relatively modest, well-targeted funding can deliver transformative results. This is the central finding of the mid-term review of a three-year grant programme (December 2023–December 2026) led by the International Fund for Public Interest Media which, in partnership with the Nest Center for Journalism Innovation and Development, is providing flexible core funding and strategic assistance to a cohort of six Mongolian media outlets.

The review highlights that, in key indicators such as non-grant revenue growth and operating profit margins, the Mongolian cohort has far outperformed the results seen across the Fund's wider portfolio. To date, five of the six grantees have increased their non-grant revenue by a median of 25%. This additional revenue now covers a median of 42% of their operating costs. Furthermore, all six outlets have succeeded in improving their operating profit margins and, currently, the cohort's median stands at 32%.

The evidence suggests that these startling outcomes can be ascribed to the following interlocking factors:

1. Flexible core funding has created much-needed space for experimentation and strategic development. Because the funding was not tied to specific deliverables, grantees were able to test new business models, explore new revenue opportunities, and invest in organisational capabilities they considered critical to their long-term sustainability. At the same time, the Mongolian case suggests that the impact of flexible core funding is shaped not only by the design of the grant, but also by the financial position of the recipient

organisation. Where organisations have a stable operational base, unrestricted funding can catalyse innovation, strategic development, and long-term sustainability. Where organisations face acute financial constraints, the same funding may easily be absorbed into maintaining core operations, limiting its capacity to drive transformative change.

2. Strategic and operational support has played an important enabling role.

Through diagnostics, planning workshops, regular check-ins, and performance tracking, the programme helped outlets define measurable institutional goals and monitor progress against them. Several grantees strengthened their ability to use data to guide planning, performance management, and strategic decision-making, while also developing clearer organisational strategies.

3. Collaboration with a trusted local implementing partner kept support grounded in local realities.

The Nest Center's in-country expertise and pre-existing relationships with local actors ensured that external support remained closely aligned with the realities of the Mongolian media market.

4. The programme partners selected a diverse cohort of grantees with ecosystem-level influence.

This strategic decision created structured opportunities for peer learning, collaboration, and collective problem-solving around shared sustainability challenges. Moreover, the grantees' strong profile and reputation for innovation meant that they had significant potential to act as change agents within the wider media sector.

These factors converged within a relatively stable media environment in which independent outlets face fewer of the extreme political and market pressures common to many media development contexts. This learning brief examines the evidence behind these outcomes in greater depth, exploring the interaction between programme design, grantee responses to external funding, and broader market conditions to better understand the reasons for the Mongolian cohort's unexpectedly strong performance.



Courtesy of Graph



The context

With a population of just 3.5 million, Mongolia's economic and political reality is deeply conditioned by its neighbours, Russia and China, both of which consider the country to be part of their strategic sphere of influence. Russian and Chinese propaganda and disinformation are actively disseminated through social media, with Russia, in particular, leveraging the historically close political and cultural ties that it has with Mongolia. Russian television channels remain widely available — especially in rural areas long reliant on Russian satellite TV — while state-controlled Chinese media distribute Mongolian-language content primarily through digital platforms.

Nevertheless, Mongolia boasts a saturated domestic media landscape. According to 2024 figures published by the Press Institute of Mongolia, there are 389 active media outlets in the country, roughly one for every 9,000 inhabitants. Of these, 38% are online platforms and nearly 27% are TV channels while there is also a surprisingly large number of newspapers and magazines (which collectively make up nearly a quarter of the total).

These outlets compete fiercely for limited advertising revenue, often at the expense of content quality. Financial sustainability remains a persistent challenge, with many independent media struggling to cover their basic running costs. This leads to frequent staff turnover and difficulties in attracting talented young recruits. Tight margins also mean that media leaders have little room to invest in innovation and modernisation.

These structural weaknesses are compounded by the narrowing of press freedom. Between 2021 and 2025, Mongolia's ranking in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index fell from 68 to 102

— the result of political pressures, opaque ownership, and restrictive laws. Mongolia recovered some ground in RSF's 2026 Index, though the report still highlights the same concerns and warns that "flawed defamation laws facilitate arbitrary lawsuits against journalists, inciting self-censorship."

Still, as a struggling but still-thriving democracy, Mongolia is often seen as a role model for other Central Asian states. The country has a young population that values democratic freedoms and human rights as demonstrated by a 2024 poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) which found that 68% of respondents believe democracy to be the best form of government.

Yet, trust in the media has been corroded by perceptions of political bias. According to the IRI poll, 56% of respondents believe that the media in Mongolia "lacks the freedom to independently report on any issue." RSF echoes this view: "Mongolians tend to distrust the media because of concerns about the quality of content and their coverage of major political events."

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The Rationale

The Fund's decision to invest in Mongolia was shaped by three converging factors.

Historic underinvestment and unrealised potential. Despite a vibrant media landscape, Mongolia has historically received limited donor support for independent journalism. Many outlets have succeeded in covering their operating costs through commercial income, but years of operating on tight margins have constrained their ability to invest in new products, audiences, technology, and organisational development. This suggested an opportunity for relatively modest funding to unlock growth that existing business models could not finance on their own. These factors made Mongolia a strong candidate for catalytic investment. In this context, flexible support offered an opportunity to unlock latent growth, rather than simply providing a financial lifeline.

Mongolia occupies a unique position between Russia and China, both of which exert significant influence over the country's information environment. In this context, a strong and independent domestic media sector is not simply a bulwark for democracy — it is also a strategic buffer against foreign information manipulation and influence.

Strategic relevance beyond Mongolia. Mongolia occupies a unique position between Russia and China, both of which exert significant influence over the country's information environment. In this context, a strong and independent domestic media sector is not simply a bulwark for democracy — it is also a strategic buffer against foreign information manipulation and influence. Investing in its resilience therefore carried both democratic and strategic significance. It also offered an opportunity to generate insights into how independent media can contribute to information resilience in geopolitically contested environments.

A strong local partner. Underpinning all of the above was the presence of the Nest Center for Journalism Innovation and Development, a trusted local actor whose deep knowledge of the Mongolian media landscape proved decisive to the programme's success. Nest's role in mapping the sector, co-designing the programme's structure, identifying grantees, and mobilising local expertise ensured that the Fund's investment was closely calibrated to local realities from the outset.



The Approach

The Fund's grant-funding programme for media in Mongolia started in December 2023 and will run until December 2026. While the Fund's grants have typically been two years in duration, the support offered to Mongolian media was designed as a three-year commitment from the outset, reflecting a deliberate effort to allow more time for institutional development. Grants to the six selected outlets totalled just over 1 million USD, of which around 80% has been disbursed at the time of writing.

The Fund provides flexible core funding that is co-designed with the grantee through a jointly developed budget and workplan. In line with the OECD-DAC principles of localisation, flexibility, and alignment with partner priorities, outlets may reallocate funds as needs evolve and use available resources to address their most pressing priorities. This approach supports organisational, operational, and editorial sustainability and does not impose quotas on content or prescribe editorial priorities.

The intervention in Mongolia adopts a cohort-based funding model, bringing six outlets into the programme at the same time. Each outlet receives a flexible core grant, complemented by tailored technical and strategic assistance that is designed both to reflect its individual priorities and to address its limited familiarity with grant management processes.

At the same time, the cohort-based approach is designed to encourage peer learning, collaboration, and shared problem-solving, with the cohort members coming together each month for workshops, presentations, and discussions that tackle common interests and needs.

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The selection process

The partners set out to select a diverse but complementary group of outlets that operate across different platforms, serve varied audiences, and fulfil the Fund's criteria for public interest media. Selection was guided not only by the strengths of individual outlets and their growth potential, but also by their respective positioning within the Mongolian media ecosystem and their perceived openness to innovation and collaboration.

Following a broad mapping of the media sector, candidates were selected by an advisory panel of local experts who also considered their capacity to absorb both the funding and the strategic advisory services. A total of 23 outlets were shortlisted and, of these, 10 made it to the interview stage. Due diligence was carried out before the advisory panel reviewed the final selection and made its recommendations.

The cohort

The following six media outlets were selected to form a diverse and complementary cohort spanning different platforms, audiences, and positions within the Mongolian media ecosystem.



- ▮ **Graph.mn:** Founded in 2021, Graph is the youngest outlet in the cohort. With a team of nine staff members, it produces reports, data visualisations, and multimedia content on social, economic, and political issues, with a strong focus on younger audiences. Graph reaches approximately 78,000 website visitors per month and has a combined social media following of around 143,000. It is also one of the founders of News Café, Mongolia's first café dedicated to journalists.



- ▮ **iToim:** Founded in 2015, iToim is a non-profit online news platform that focuses on fact-based reporting and political analysis in the public interest. The outlet operates with a team of 10 staff members and attracts approximately 110,000 unique website visitors per month. It also maintains a core community of 5,200 registered web users and 1,560 mobile app users, reflecting a relatively engaged and loyal audience base.



Courtesy of iToim



- Lemon Press Digital:** Lemon Press is a digital news startup established in 2020. With a team of nine, it primarily distributes content through newsletters and social media, with editorial strengths in technology, data, economics, and finance. The outlet reaches around 43,000 newsletter subscribers and has a combined social media following of approximately 235,000, giving it a strong profile among digitally engaged audiences.



- UB.life:** This independent digital news platform targets younger audiences. Operating with a team of 12 staff members, it publishes news, opinion, culture, and lifestyle content across its website and social media channels, reaching approximately 143,000 unique visitors per month. In addition to its digital output, Ub.life produces Gereg ("Turning Point" in English), an annual print magazine published in collaboration with The New York Times.



- NTV:** Established in 2006, NTV is a national television broadcaster employing 111 people. Its public interest and investigative reporting focuses on governance, public spending, and health and safety issues, with a long track record of exposing misuse of public funds and unsafe conditions in public spaces. While there is little data on the size of TV audiences in Mongolia, NTV's strong digital presence is well evidenced, with a combined social media following of approximately 2.6 million. It was the first Mongolian broadcaster to receive certification from the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI).



- Zuunii Medee:** Founded in 1999, Zuunii Medee is Mongolia's second-oldest legacy print newspaper. With a staff of 23, it focuses on general news reporting and plays an influential role in shaping the daily news agenda for television and online media. The outlet publishes around 1,100 print copies and reaches approximately 35,000 unique online visitors per month. In 2024, it was named Newspaper of the Year after becoming the first Mongolian outlet to be certified by the JTI.

Courtesy of Lemon Press

The support package

During the first year of the grants, support was provided by two implementing partners, the Nest Center for Journalism Innovation and Development (Nest) and FT Strategies (FTS). Nest works to safeguard the rights of information-providers in Mongolia by introducing viable media business models while FTS has an exceptional track record in promoting digital transformation, audience engagement, and media sustainability.

FTS conducted a baseline assessment of each selected outlet, then discussed the findings with senior staff. Subsequently, FTS and Nest facilitated a three-day “North Star” workshop for leaders from all six grantees, who were asked to identify their main development objectives for the three-year period and to map out a plan for achieving them. The grants provided the space and resources for beneficiary outlets to implement their plans.

In addition, Nest organised monthly meetings with a senior leader from each outlet to review progress against the plan and to troubleshoot problems as they arose. During the first year of the programme, FTS compiled quarterly assessments of each outlet’s data, flagging any obstacles encountered. At the end of Year 1, Nest and the focal point at each outlet assessed progress to date, before presenting the findings to the respective newsroom and identifying any additional areas where improvements were needed.

At the start of Year 2, each outlet reviewed its plan together with Nest, making any necessary adjustments. This was followed by another round of regular assessments to track each outlet’s progress. The same cycle is repeated in Year 3.



Courtesy of Lemon Press



Insights and learnings

The Fund's grants in Mongolia are designed to stimulate growth by making diverse but targeted strategic investments. For example, several outlets have used the funding to upgrade their infrastructure and develop data-informed content strategies in order to produce better, more varied, and more frequent multimedia content, including live broadcasts. These improvements have helped to open up new revenue streams while increasing audience reach and engagement.

From improved salaries and working conditions to more inclusive decision-making processes, investments in staff have allowed grantees to build stronger, more motivated teams. Across the cohort, this has led to a 6% growth in the workforce, at a time when many newsrooms around the world are contracting or closing altogether. Mongolian grantees have not only attracted and retained talent but have also succeeded in fostering motivating and productive workplace cultures.

Targeted investments made with the Fund's support have helped to open up new revenue streams and increase audience reach and engagement.

INSIGHT 1

On increasing revenue

It is highly encouraging that, during the first 18 months of their three-year grants, five of the six grantees were able to increase their non-grant revenue (NGR), with the full cohort's median NGR change reaching 23% — significantly higher than the 15% median observed among the Fund's other grantees. Moreover, all six grantees have reported stronger operating profit margins (OPM) — the percentage of total revenue that remains after covering all running costs. Only three had reported positive OPM at baseline.

For example, by entering into long-term advertising deals with ethical partners (rather than focusing on one-off contracts), digital platform iToim was able to grow its NGR by 125% over the first half of the grant period, while its OPM stood at 38% of total revenues. To further diversify revenues, iToim is preparing to launch a paywall that will offer selected analytical content to paying subscribers. Non-subscribers will be able to purchase individual articles on an ad hoc basis.

Similarly, daily newspaper Zuunii Medee introduced a digital subscription plan that offers readers one-time purchases of content as well as monthly and quarterly subscriptions. Furthermore, despite doubling the cover price of its print version, Zuunii Medee was able to increase its print sales, which now account for 10% of all commercial revenue (compared to 1% at baseline). These innovations also contributed to a 9% increase in NGR.

Critically, this growth was translated into improved financial health across the cohort. Across all six outlets, the median NGR change was equivalent to 30% of total costs. By comparison, the equivalent figure for the rest of the Fund's portfolio was just 1% — a gap that reflects both the Mongolian cohort's strong performance and the heavier grant dependency of many organisations elsewhere in the portfolio.

Meanwhile, the grantees' median OPM after 18 months stands at 32%, compared to 7% for the Fund's global portfolio. This is all the more impressive considering that their costs during the same period typically increased by 41% due largely to the investments made.



INSIGHT 2

On building audiences

During the review period, three grantees, Zuunii Medee, Ub.life, and NTV, conducted audience surveys to identify gaps in their content offerings, uncover untapped audiences, and assess people's willingness to pay. The findings informed strategies tailored to audience needs, including devising new programmes, leveraging platforms aimed at different age groups, or using audience data to benchmark changes in pricing policy (e.g. Zuunii Medee's hike in the cover price of newspapers or iToim's plans to introduce a paywall).

Grantees also introduced new tools and systems to respond to perceived demand. For example, Ub.life, which targets younger audiences, was able to pilot new channels on social media platforms such as TikTok and Threads. Over a 12-month period, its TikTok account gained nearly 43,000 likes while seven videos generated views of more than 100,000 (an exceptional achievement in a country of 3.5 million people).

These innovations have had a visible positive impact on the quality of the grantees' journalism as well as on reach and engagement levels. Social media engagement has increased by 191% since the start of the Fund's support (although this growth also reflects more widespread and effective use of social media platforms).

Furthermore, recognising the need to bolster public trust in media, grantees are making efforts to obtain accreditation from the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) — a programme led by Reporters Without Borders which aims to establish a global standard for trustworthy media. In 2024, Zuunii Medee became the first media outlet in Mongolia certified by the JTI, followed by NTV in February 2026. Meanwhile, Graph has already published its Transparency Report (a key JTI requirement).

INSIGHT 3

On streamlining production processes

Advances in quality and credibility have also been underpinned by tangible changes inside newsrooms. Several outlets have been able to pursue more impactful reporting as a result of introducing efficient production processes that draw on upgraded working practices and/or technologies.

Since its launch in 2006, NTV had relied on a single daily recorded news programme. Fund-supported investment in news automation through Octopus has streamlined editing, raised technical standards, and enhanced the visual appeal of broadcasts. This innovation has enabled NTV to run live programmes and expand its daily news production.

Furthermore, in partnership with a local HR firm, and with help from Nest and FTS, Zuunii Medee has introduced a new system of key performance indicators (KPIs) that make the link between the wellbeing of editorial staff and the quality of outputs. Improvements included increased allowances to cover reporters' transportation and phone costs as well as a system for tracking work hours and, thereby, avoiding unmanageable workloads.

Similarly, iToim has adopted a two-week sprint cycle during which each team member earns points for completing assigned tasks. Those who meet their targets receive financial incentives on top of their monthly salary. While the team found the system challenging at first, it is now functioning well and, as a result, weekly production at iToim has increased by 30% with 125–130 original stories published each week.

INSIGHT 4

On producing public interest content

The grants enhanced the beneficiaries' ability to produce impactful public interest content, in particular by expanding the resources available for production and introducing new tools for understanding audience needs. Notable examples include Zuunii Medee's exposé of flooding risks in the capital Ulaanbaatar, which prompted the authorities to clear silt and vegetation from local rivers and then amend laws that had previously prevented such action.

NTV shifted from short-term coverage aimed at maximising clicks or views to a longer-term, impact-focused strategy informed by audience interests and needs. This coverage has contributed to tangible social change. A year-long campaign led to the government increasing stagnant budgets for meals at kindergartens while another prompted several public schools to extend school breaks from 10 to 20 minutes, thereby improving students' wellbeing.

In addition, NTV had the opportunity to experiment with new content such as the social-media-based basketball podcast "Game Day" — a format that has proven to be both innovative and profitable. It has also started to sell content to IPTV providers, unlocking a long-recognised but underused source of income. In both cases, the revenues are not significant when compared to those generated by advertising, but they are steadily growing.

Audience research findings informed strategies tailored to audience needs, including devising new programmes, leveraging platforms aimed at different age groups, or using audience data to benchmark changes in pricing policy.

INSIGHT 5

On facilitating peer learning

A hallmark of the Fund's approach in Mongolia has been its strong emphasis on peer learning — not only among grantees, but also across the broader media sector. Participating outlets have benefited from observing techniques embraced by their counterparts and integrating them into their own working practices. For example:

- 1 iToim revamped its approach to audience engagement after learning from Ub.life's youth-focused social media strategies.
- 2 Lemon Press adopted Graph's data visualisation techniques to make its financial reporting more accessible.
- 3 Zuunii Medee consulted with Lemon Press prior to launching its first newsletter.

Moreover, grantees have shown a strong willingness to share best practices with the wider media community. This was in evidence during the programme's 2024 launch event, where participating outlets engaged openly in discussions about innovation with peers from across the sector.



Kids Lei's Family / AdobeStock

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INSIGHT 6

On fostering collaboration

Collaboration between members of the cohort has flourished. NTV co-launched “The Analysis: Governance and Market”, a talk show produced with seven newsrooms (including three Fund grantees). The cohort also collaborated on coverage of major political and economic events, producing complementary content that amplified the visibility and impact of their outputs. Examples include joint coverage of the May 2025 “Ogtsrokh Amarkhan” protests and collaborative reporting on Mongolia’s spring horse racing tradition, which has long been criticised as a violation of children’s rights. Both iToim and Graph consistently covered this story from a child rights perspective.

At Nest’s initiative, the grantees joined a local project to train an AI tool designed to help Mongolian audiences navigate the news. Embedded on a third-party platform, Pluma. media, the tool analyses content from the cohort’s websites to show how many outlets cover a given event and the tone of their coverage. Newsrooms can also use it to identify content gaps. All participating outlets agreed that the underlying data will be used solely to improve the model and that any resulting spin-offs must remain accessible to all contributors.

In a separate development, iToim was selected as one of 15 grantees for the International Press Institute’s Global AI Accelerator (from more than 200 applications). The grant will give iToim the chance to build an AI-assisted, targeted paywall that will contribute to its progress towards strategic goals established under the Fund’s grant.

INSIGHT 7

On promoting solidarity

Mongolian media outlets continue to face harassment in the form of vexatious lawsuits and the abusive use of restrictive legislation or regulations. Furthermore, concerted efforts by grantees to produce more public interest content have exposed them to external pressures from politically motivated actors. In such instances, Nest has offered grantees legal support.

For example, Nest provided legal advice to Graph.mn after a story involving the Ulaanbaatar city governor prompted a legal complaint. Graph.mn was also harassed by the municipal police agency for three months and subjected to multiple interrogations. The case was eventually resolved thanks to the intercession of a local law firm, supported by Nest.

As part of a collaborative effort involving a total of 18 media organisations, all cohort members have also contributed to efforts to revise proposed amendments to Mongolia’s media legislation that risk curbing press freedom.

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Conclusions

A fuller picture of the Fund's long-term impact in Mongolia, especially in terms of the grantees' financial sustainability, will only emerge after the Fund's support ends in December 2026. Nonetheless, several interlocking factors appear to be contributing to early successes across the cohort. These can be summarised as follows:

Flexible funding is most transformative when it enables experimentation and strategic development

In Mongolia, the Fund and its partners prioritised time-bound, targeted investments in new products, technologies, and research that have quickly unlocked new revenue-generating opportunities in a relatively responsive market where there is strong public demand for trustworthy journalism. This was made possible by the provision of flexible funding, linked to clear goals, which meant that grantees were able to focus on what mattered most. Moreover, because most grantees already operated on relatively lean and commercially viable foundations, they were able to use external support to accelerate growth and innovation rather than simply sustain day-to-day operations.

All six Mongolian grantees improved their operating profit margins, reaching a median of 32%, compared with 7% for the rest of the Fund's portfolio.

The benefits of this approach are well illustrated by the growth in non-grant revenue which saw a median change of 23% over 18 months across the whole cohort. The median for the Fund's grantees in other countries was 15%. Similarly, all six Mongolian grantees improved their operating profit margins over the same period, reaching a median of 32%, compared with 7% for the rest of the Fund's portfolio.

It is also worth noting that the implementing partners selected a cohort of grantees whose strong public interest ethos was complemented by the commercial capabilities they had developed. Once grantees had the means to invest in strategic innovation, these strengths maximised their ability to gain a competitive edge in a relatively responsive market.

Strategic support can accelerate progress towards tangible results

By providing diagnostics, strategic planning, and monthly check-ins, the implementing partners have helped the grantees to define and pursue ambitious, data-driven goals. The availability of high-quality advice and technical support in-country has served to convert planned outputs into measurable outcomes. This suggests that, when given access to timely, relevant, and context-aware technical assistance, organisations with a strong commercial mindset can make rapid progress towards increased NGR.

The outlets themselves cited strategic clarity gained through such assistance as one of the programme's main benefits. Four have also begun prioritising the use of KPIs to measure progress towards strategic goals. This allows them to continuously refine and align their editorial, business, and organisational strategies, thereby laying a solid foundation for long-term growth and resilience.



Courtesy of NTV

Local partnership improved implementation

Partnering with a trusted, local actor can ensure that strategic support is context-specific and that beneficiaries swiftly assimilate learning and innovation. Nest's input helped shape a well-calibrated selection process as well as a support package that was closely tailored to the strategic priorities of individual grantees. This approach highlights the importance of adapting operating models to local realities, grantee capacity, and ecosystem needs.

This model is validated in a 2024 article by the Council on Foundations entitled, "Unrestricted Funding Dilemma: Advantages and Challenges to General Support Grants," which states that "handing scoping to the grantee can help avoid the problems that arise when funders are overly prescriptive in their objectives." It goes on to say, "By allowing grantees to set objectives and metrics, funders maintain accountability while letting grantees prioritize the needs of the communities they were created to serve."

The cohort coordinated a campaign in response to a draft Press Freedom Law and successfully challenged provisions that posed a significant threat to media independence. The grantees also joined forces to develop a low-resource Large Language Model (LLM), an innovation that no single outlet would have been able to deliver single-handedly.

Cohort models can deliver benefits to the wider media sector

The grantees were selected for their potential to act as change agents within Mongolia's media ecosystem — either because they were well-established and respected players or because they were already recognised as innovators. Furthermore, their diversity, spanning different platforms, audience segments, and editorial approaches, created fertile ground for the exchange of ideas and practices. This model served to reduce isolation among grantees and to build a sustained sense of partnership and shared purpose, thereby creating a springboard for collective action.

For example, the cohort coordinated a campaign in response to a draft Press Freedom Law and successfully challenged provisions that posed a significant threat to media independence. The grantees also joined forces to help develop a low-resource Large Language Model (LLM), an innovation that no single outlet would have been able to deliver single-handedly.

Furthermore, training, mentoring, and consultancy delivered to the cohort helped to promote shared skills, professional norms, and standards that extended beyond individual outlets and could feasibly influence the operations of media organisations outside the cohort. The intervention nurtured a more candid conversation about editorial ethics and built sufficient trust among like-minded outlets to open the door to collaboration beyond the parameters of the funding programme.

Postscript

While it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term sustainability of the cohort, the Mongolia experience offers important insights into how flexible funding, strategic support, local partnership, and peer collaboration can interact to strengthen independent media organisations. The findings also underscore the importance of context: the outcomes observed in Mongolia owe much to the convergence of multiple

reinforcing factors, including market conditions, institutional leadership, audience demand, and ecosystem dynamics. Although these conditions may not be replicable elsewhere, the case provides a valuable contribution to ongoing discussions on effective ways of supporting sustainable public interest media in low- and middle-income countries.



Courtesy of UBLife



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Produced in partnership with Mongolia's
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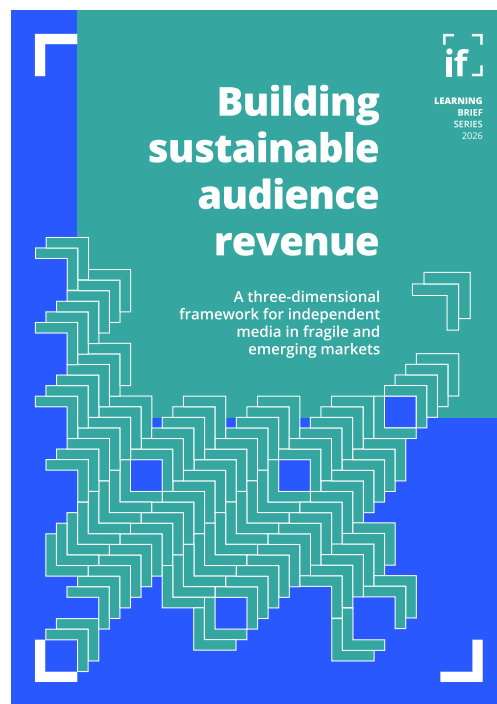
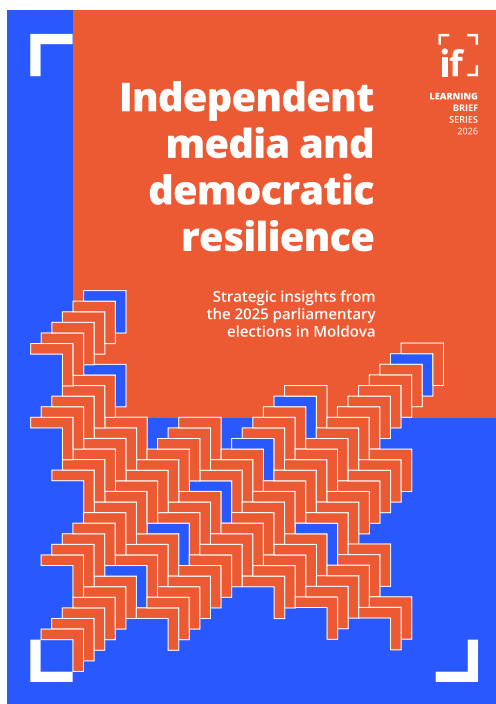
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2026**



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This learning brief is part of a series produced by The International Fund's What Works Unit, which documents and analyses the experience of independent media in low- and middle-income countries to understand what works — and what doesn't — in responding to the political and structural market challenges facing public interest journalism.

