

# Vibrant Information for Just, Prosperous, and Inclusive Societies

People need to generate, access, engage with, and disseminate high-quality news and information in order to make informed decisions, hold those in power accountable, and take actions that will improve their lives.



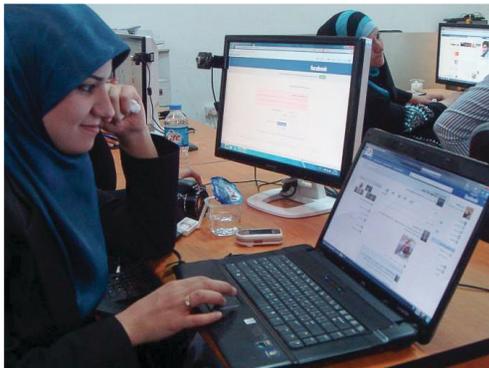
Political upheaval, globalization, economic disruption, and the digital revolution are transforming the world of information and media. The creation and dissemination of distorted information and its use as a tool of oppression or exclusion are ramping up in both unexpected places and well-worn battlegrounds. Authoritarian structures bent on closing political and civic spaces, persistent inequality of opportunity, suppression of human rights, and a decline of democracy underscore that there is no place in the world where people can take fundamental freedoms for granted. Sound information is indispensable to all those freedoms.

At the same time, profound technological changes mean that how people interact with information now is fundamentally different from two decades ago, when IREX pioneered a sectoral approach to strengthening the pillars of independent media around the world. To adequately respond to these forces, seize the opportunities they offer, and be ready for an unknown future, we have redesigned our approach to strengthening information systems.

# What vibrant information means in the digital age

Vibrant information systems include four key components:

- **Content that matters.** Relevant, reliable information is an indispensable public good. Both individuals and institutions—people, journalists, media outlets, civil society organizations, businesses, and universities—must have the political freedom and necessary skills to create quality, fact-based content. People need to possess the skill to uncover and tell critical stories with data. Information actors, and journalistic media in particular, should be accountable for the information that they disseminate.
- **Multiple channels.** Information flows must be unrestricted and unhindered, and content should be widely distributed through a diverse array of independent platforms that all individuals can access and know how to use. People should have access to the information they need and want. This includes access to their own personal data, as well as the data that matters to their communities.
- **Dynamic engagement.** Those who read, listen to, and watch news and information need to have the critical thinking skills to discern facts from lies, propaganda, fake news, and false information. Individuals should be able to process the content, interact with it, discuss it, debate it, and share it with others. People must be safe—digitally, physically, and psychologically—throughout the process.
- **Transformative action.** Individuals and communities need to have the right and ability to act freely upon the information they consume. They must be able to demand better services and challenge antidemocratic power structures that impede information generation, production, dissemination, access, consumption, or engagement.



Historically, information systems have been understood as binary systems consisting of product-driven media outlets that generated and distributed content, and individuals who consumed and made decisions based on it. Today, this division has eroded irreversibly. Even as traditional media and digital media outlets generate and disseminate content on multiple

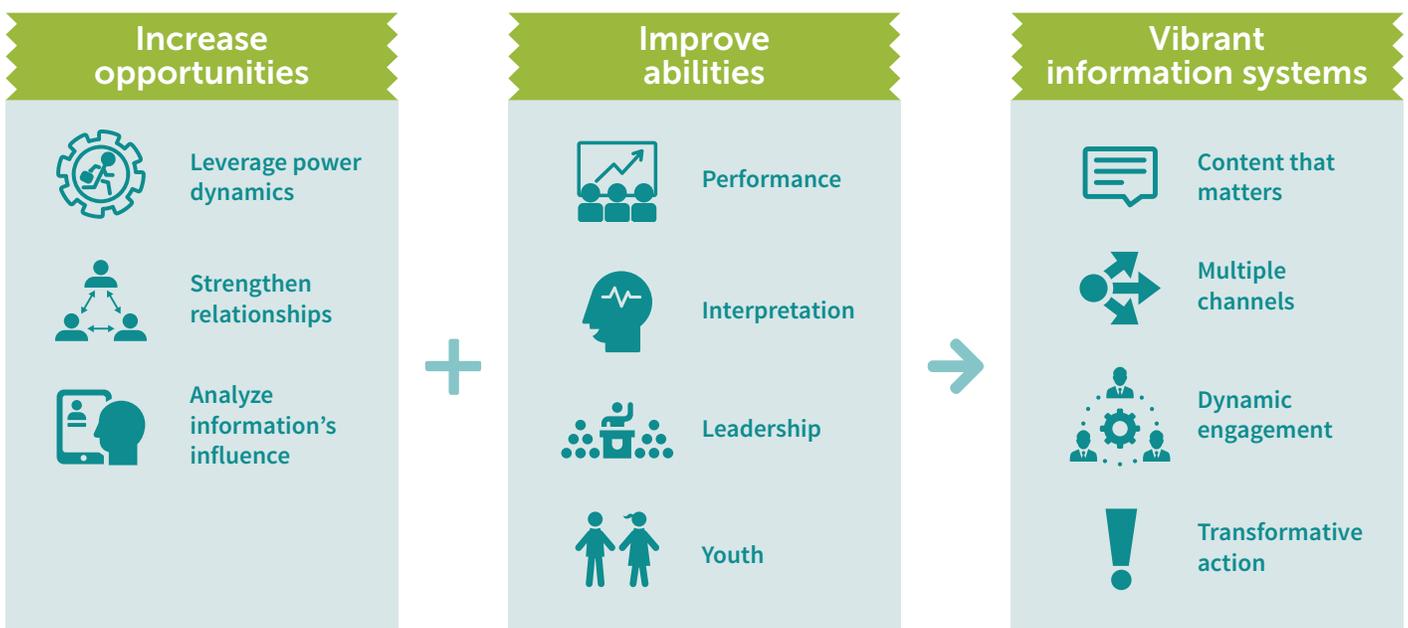
platforms, individuals and nonmedia institutions (such as think tanks, universities, civil society organizations, businesses, and ideological groups) now generate, consume, and interact with information in multiple ways, which are evolving. Ultimately, people must be able to not only make better decisions but also act effectively to improve their lives.

# How we help build vibrant information

IRES focuses on people first. We start by listening to local partners, who understand their challenges and ambitions better than outsiders. We analyze, design, and carry out people-centered programs that foster vibrant information which leads to positive, lasting change.

At the same time, years of experience have taught us that it's not enough to invest in individuals or organizations—to have a major impact, we need to understand and work with the complex social, economic, political, and information systems in which they operate. Therefore, we pay special attention to

the **opportunities** and **abilities** of traditional media, digital media, nonmedia institutions, and individuals to create, protect, or maintain vibrant information. Abilities are the talents, skills, or proficiency to do something. Opportunities are freedoms—legal or cultural—to exercise that ability. Improving abilities grows people's effectiveness in creating vibrant information that underpins good governance and inclusive societies, while increasing opportunities improves the functioning of the complex relationships, networks, and systems so that people can use their abilities for better results.



## Opportunities

**Assess and leverage power dynamics.** Opportunities cannot be improved without engaging in the often unequal forces of power that flow throughout human political, economic, social, and identity systems. We gain an understanding of the prevailing political and economic institutions and powers that affect information, social and cultural norms, resource constraints, and incentives, paying special attention to the relationships and power dynamics among different groups and individuals. This allows us to surface hidden opportunities to support new champions, diffuse spoilers, and engage stakeholders with the greatest potential to advance open and vibrant information.

**Prioritize strong human relationships.** Social trust is a critical, if complex, factor affecting how information is transmitted, consumed, and used. We strengthen human relationships among information actors and stakeholders, whether journalists, bloggers, civil society, or businesspeople. As the foundation of people-centered development, trusted human relationships are crucial to generating and disseminating content that matters and preserving rights. Strong human relationships increase the effectiveness of action so people can improve their own lives. We also forge and leverage networks that form the backbone of civil society and social movements.

**Analyze how information shapes people.** Information is a vital force in forming individual and group identity (such as religious, ethnic, and gender identity) and providing meaning. We consider how information shapes emotions—for example, the emotional reactions to a radio news

story profiling someone overcoming a tragedy or an incendiary tweet maligning a public figure. Over time, these emotions affect decision-making. This broader perspective helps information actors be aware of what influences them and allows them to be effective at creating and sharing information.

## Abilities

**Strengthen individual, organizational, and institutional performance.** We train, mentor, and develop journalists, bloggers, and other information actors to become effective storytellers and to safely engage in information and data exchange. We support community-based organizations and newsrooms—including NGOs, public service organizations, and private outlets—to develop (1) journalistic, business, and organizational skills; (2) digital tools; and (3) offline mechanisms to use data for more effective participation and better decision-making about issues such as elections, health care, economic growth, and gender equality.

**Grow interpretation skills.** We train and mentor community-based teachers, carry out community activities, and produce community messages that

educate people to critically read, listen to, and watch news and information so they can discern the difference between facts and propaganda. In doing so, we build community demand for credible, useful information.

**Teach service leadership.** We empower leaders who effectively steward media organizations through economic and political disruption, challenge and change power dynamics that impede the flow of quality information, and teach the next generation values and skills to ensure that vibrant information systems endure.

**Catalyze youth for positive action.** Investing in long-term change, we start young, working with youth inside and outside school to increase their ability to generate, disseminate, engage with, and act on information.



To ensure our approach is effective and relevant, we continually take stock of progress, remain alert to forces that will influence the effectiveness of our work, and adapt as necessary. We cultivate a mindset of reflection, questioning, seeking, and analysis. We gather and share knowledge, integrate feedback across our activities, and remain flexible so we can correct course and improve, striving for maximum impact.

## About us

IREX is a nonprofit organization that builds a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world by empowering youth, cultivating leaders, strengthening institutions, and extending access to quality education and information. IREX brings to its work more than two decades of global information and media development experience and learning.