

ISOJ 2021: Day 1, Panel

Collaborative journalism networks: the lone wolf investigative reporter joins regional & global packs

Chair: [Marina Walker Guevara](#), executive editor, Pulitzer Center

- [Scilla Alecci](#), reporter and coordinator of European & Asian partners, ICIJ, Italy
 - [Carlos Eduardo Huertas](#), founder & director, CONNECTAS (Latin American network), Colombia
 - [Alia Ibrahim](#), founder and chairman, Daraj, Lebanon
 - [Purity Mukami](#), reporter, Finance Uncovered (UK) & The Elephant (Kenya)
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Mallory Tenore Hello, everyone, and welcome back. We're going to be starting our next panel momentarily, but before we do, I'd like to share a few notes and also thank everyone for joining us for the biggest ISOJ ever. We now have more than 6,600 registrants from more than 130 countries. That's a record for us. So we truly appreciate that you're here with us today, and we hope that you'll stay with us throughout the rest of the week. This year's conference is full of fascinating keynotes panels and workshops, and the conference wouldn't be possible without our two main ISOJ sponsors, the Knight Foundation and Google News initiative. Thank you to both organizations for your support. Throughout the week, we'll have simultaneous interpretations to Spanish, and this feature is being sponsored by Univision Noticias. If you're tuning in via Zoom, you can click on the interpretation globe icon in the bottom right hand corner of the screen, select the Spanish channel, and tune into the Spanish interpretation. If at any point you have trouble with Zoom, you can always tune in via YouTube, in English and in Spanish, and we'll post the YouTube links in the chat so that you can easily access them.

Now I would like to introduce our next panel. It's titled Collaborative Journalism Networks: the Lone Wolf Investigative Reporter Joins Regional and Global Packs, and it features a stellar lineup of journalists from around the world, from countries including Kenya, Colombia, Lebanon and the U.S. So now I would like to turn it over to Marina Walker Guevara, who will be moderating today's discussion. Thank you very much.

Marina Walker Guevara Hello, everyone, and thank you for joining us today at the International Symposium on Online Journalism. This panel will done focus on collaborative investigative reporting. My name is Marina Walker Guevara, and I am the executive editor at the Pulitzer Center. Most of my career has focused on facilitating large-scale collaborations of journalists, working on investigative stories of global scope. But the reality is that while collaboration is now popular among investigative journalists, we traditionally have been the ultimate newsroom lone wolves. We used to work in isolation. We hoarded information, and we scoop others. Until, we realized that we were missing some of the biggest stories of our time. Stories that transcend borders, newsrooms, and our own egos. So we changed the paradigm, and we started to build networks of collaboration across countries, regions, and the world. Some of the most exciting and consequential stories of recent years have been the result of journalistic solidarity and radical sharing. Along the way, we try to make investigative journalism more accessible, more inclusive, and a little less risky.

Our panelists today have been at the forefront of some of those amazing stories, and they are here today to demystify collaboration, to tell you about some of the challenges they face and the lessons they learned along the way, and to answer your questions about how to start your own collaborations. We will spare you the Zoom PowerPoints, so, yay, and we will try instead, a Q&A format, first between the panelists and me and then between them and you. So please get ready your questions. Let me introduce our panelists briefly first, and you can look at their bios on the website if you want to read about their full story. I'm going to start with Carlos Eduardo Huertas those who joins us from Colombia, where he founded CONNECTAS a regional journalistic platform and a network of investigative reporters. Welcome, Carlos. Purity Mukami will join us from Nairobi, Kenya, where she works as a reporter and a data scientist specializing in statistical data. Alia Ibrahim is the founder of Daraj, a digital media organization based in Beirut, Lebanon, but working across the Middle East and North Africa. and las but not least, of course, is Scilla Alecci. She's an investigative reporter and a videographer for the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the ICIJ, where she also serves as a partnership coordinator of Asia and Europe. Hi, Scilla. Let me get things started with you. So, Scilla, ICIJ is a pioneer in collaborative investigations. Panama Papers kind of marked a before and after of what is possible when journalists work together and collaborate across borders, and ICIJ journalists often talk about radical sharing. I used that term in my introduction. So can you tell us what radical sharing really means in practice, and how it works?

Scilla Alecci Sure. Well, radical sharing is a philosophy, a way of life, but also in practical terms, every day is lots of work put into effort. What it means, Marina, you mentioned the idea of people, journalists, working as lone wolves and scooping each other. So radical sharing is basically the opposite of this. It is the idea that we want to work in a newsroom that goes beyond borders, where everyone helps other colleagues in other countries, where we are one team, even if we are in different countries, and we belong to different organizations. And the idea is that there is only one goal, which is publish a story or investigate some facts for the public interest. And when we talk about public, we mean the global public, and not one country's audience or readers. As I said, we try to do this every day in our projects, and we have some tools in a way that help us.

To do this, we have some technology that allows us to share our findings with colleagues around the world and be in constant communication with them. I think we will talk about tips and other aspects of collaboration later, but surely having a constant communication with your colleagues, even if they are not in your own office or country, is one very important aspect of collaboration because radical sharing would not be possible without trust. So working hand-in-hand with your colleagues that you cannot see every day means that it requires a lot of effort and sharing, proactively sharing, information is one of those efforts. It takes time, but I think it really pays off because radical sharing also means that in the end, the people, the readers, or the viewers, and the public basically who are going to be informed with your reporting will have a much more nuanced story that draws from the expertise and backgrounds of everyone in the team.

Marina Walker Guevara I like what you say, Scilla, about radical change being a philosophy, and a way of life, and also something that you can conquer every day and become a better collaborator as you go with the small wins every day. Now I see that some of the better, or the better known, stories have been based on giant leaks of information. And while leaks are exciting, not all journalists have access to a leak to kickstart a collaboration. So what are the challenges and opportunities for large-scale collaboration when you don't have a leak, when you are working off just a traditional investigation or public data?

Scilla Alecci Leaks are great because they provide one common starting point for everybody, but that's not the only way to do a collaboration. For example, one of our latest projects in the income files was not a leak, and it came to us from one journalist in the Netherlands who had investigated the medical device industry in her own country and then realized that there were many problems that went beyond the Netherlands that were worth being investigated in other countries because the problem was the system and not an isolated case. And so that's just an example of how basically one country and one story that looks and sounds, or may sound, local at first, if you actually look and investigate further, it can become a global story.

And I think, as you said, everyone talks about collaboration now, and the best way to develop a collaboration is when you have a good story that you can start with instead of just having this idea of collaborating. If you really know what you are doing already and you want to go deeper and have other colleagues dig deeper with you in other countries, that's how you start assembling the team that is more catered to the needs of the story rather than to the idea. So, for example, if you know that you need colleagues in some specific countries, you will start to contact them for some specific leads to work with you on some specific aspect of the story. If you know that you need a data expert, then you are going to start working with data scientists like Purity or others who can provide that kind of expertise. So I think it's a bit like you assemble a car, little by little, starting with the engine, and then with the wheels, and then the other parts until you have this great moving vehicle that really leads you somewhere.

Marina Walker Guevara And it's fantastic because you can leverage technologies, you can leverage expertise, you can leverage resources across newsrooms. You don't need to do everything yourself, which is what we traditionally have done. Thank you so much, Scilla. Alia, I'm coming to you now. You co-founded Daraj to do independent investigative journalism in the Middle East and North Africa, but have also extended and have done collaborations across the world. And since the founding of Daraj, collaboration has been kind of an essential part of your business. So tell us why you decided to make it that way, and has it paid off?

Alia Ibrahim Actually, being involved in the national collaboration was one of the reasons that Daraj was created. When the Panama Papers were first published, for us being Arab journalists in the Arab world at the time, watching the scale of collaboration, being so inspired, seeing all these brands of news organizations and all of these colleagues working on stories that are in a lot of cases very relevant to our audiences, and knowing that the stories didn't get published in any Arabic news media, let alone being investigated. Our audiences had to wait some time until translations were made available. For all these reasons, as individual journalists we were as inspired as we were heartbroken for not having been part of this. And this was really one of the reasons that Daraj was born. Since then, one of the stories we love telling now and that goes so much in tune with this, is that the Paradise Papers were published five days after the launch of Daraj, so this is to tell you how much we were excited about being in partnership with those collaborations. Since then, a lot has happened, and we've collaborated in both with regional partners and with other international partners. And every time, honestly, it has paid off, for the same reasons you were mentioning before. We're sharing resources. We're sharing information. For start ups like us, really outcomes we have been able to achieve would have been unimaginable outside the scope of collaboration.

And for that, I could give you a very tangible example, which is one of our last investigation, and it was a collaboration with OCCRP. If it's fine, I'll give just a little bit of background to show how steep the impact was of such a story. Since 2019, Lebanon has been living one of its biggest financial crises. It's really one of the biggest financial crises in history, and it has left over one million depositors in Lebanon without access to that money. Half of the population is under the poverty line. Eighty percent of the currency has lost almost 80 percent of its value. All to say that there is really a huge crisis happening. In late 2019, we received a document, a leaked document, unsourced also, that says that the central bank governor in Lebanon has a personal wealth of over two billion dollars outside in international banks. And for us, we tried for a couple of months to source the documents. We tried to validate that and didn't get anywhere. Almost two months later, the central bank governor himself was commenting on the documents, which by then had become public on social media, not outside social media. And then he mentioned the name of the company that he said was behind it, and this was the time when we needed the help and the support of the European partners. So we got in touch with our colleagues at OCCRP, and from that moment on, a fascinating collaboration continued for months. Almost nine months later, we published our first investigation, which showed that the central bank governor at least flags about a huge personal wealth, and it showed some kind of like an ethical dimension because all his fortune was taken out. Also, some people were able to take their money out of the country at the time where the majority of the Lebanese people had lost their savings. And down the line, we published another story on August 10, four days after the big explosion in August that destroyed half of Beirut, and which, to a large extent is another story related to lack of accountability in our country and in our region. Long story short, the second report we showed that there is a conflict of interest, which would be a criminal charge. Today nothing happened in Lebanon, obviously, because we don't have a strong judiciary or an independent judiciary. But today and somehow in relation to the reporting that we have done there are cases investigating and that has been a seizing of assets of the central bank governance in Switzerland, and there are cases along the same lines in the UK, in Britain and in the U.S.

For us, this is important because, honestly, we have access to reporting here. We know the story really well. We know the people. But there is so much we couldn't have done. We don't have access, for example. We don't have data analysts. We don't have access to records showing ownership of companies, and we don't have the knowledge to do it or access to it. And that was all made available to us through our collaboration with OCCRP. It's another dimension of working really, and first the quality of the stories we ended up producing was simply not doable for us outside this collaboration. And I'd like to believe that even the impact is something that gives us the motivation. It's not an easy process. It's very long. Sometimes you're also not sure you're going to get anywhere, despite all the efforts you're putting, but it's been an incredibly rewarding experience.

Marina Walker Guevara So, Alia, also by collaborating on the reporting and in the research that can lead to joint publication, which is so much more powerful, especially in countries like your country or my country Argentina, where things often don't happen, but when there is outside pressure, there might be a little bit more of a chance.

Alia Ibrahim Absolutely. And you mentioned something. It also makes it a little bit more inclusive, but also less dangerous because we're not solely assuming the repercussions that could happen locally if it was our story solely.

Marina Walker Guevara Exactly. I want to go to Purity, but, Alia, just one follow up question. You talk about impact, and we often talk about collaboration in terms of we know

that collaboration makes a story stronger, deeper, more comprehensive. But does it make the journalistic business also stronger? You founded Daraj as a commercial enterprise with the aspiration that it would be profitable, and I admire you for that. So has collaboration been better also for business?

Alia Ibrahim I genuinely believe that this is value. What we're offering, even in commercial terms, is a need. And, yes, we haven't figured out the way of how to build this in the process. But I genuinely believe that in the medium and long term, the argument has been made that there is a commercial value for this, and it's a stronger, more independent journalism that we can do within the frame of such collaboration. One-hundred percent.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you so much. I am actually going to go to Carlos now and then to Purity. So, Carlos, for many years you worked at legacy media organizations in Colombia, and then you decided to go the entrepreneur way, much like Alia, and decided to create your own organization, journalistic platform and a network of investigative reporters in Latin America. Why do you think that that was needed at the time in Latin America? And how do you go about creating trust, something that Scilla mentioned, among journalists who have never worked with one another before?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Thank you, Marina. A decade ago, we began with the idea of a straining the capacities, stimulating potential and accompanying the bravery of journalists in the region that we had affinity. When you join journalists from Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico, you have a great party and you make strong friends. The challenge is how to turn that party factor into a working factor, and maintaining that, stimulating the dynamic. Furthermore, the Americas are full of stories, full of processes that go beyond the political borders of a country. On a permanent basis, leaders make multilateral agreements and make decisions that affect their citizens. In the business world, there are entrepreneurs who understand very well the advantage of the region, with practically the same language, no frontiers, no borders, a similar culture, and the criminal world have for a long time moved from Canada to the Patagonia as a single territory. The media are usually focused on the power of the dynamics of the capitals and usually only touch the regional issues, just for serendipity. So on one side, we have stories under each stone, and on the other side, you have courage from brave journalists. It was natural thing to do, and that is the origin of CONNECTAS.

CONNECTAS is an accelerator that we promote better journalism, how to provide resources, promote ideas of projects, and we participate journalistically to make the story. About the trust that you question, this is one of our walls all the time. The first step in the way that we work is to permanently identify new talents, colleagues with whom we seek to build a new generation who breaks the inbreeding that sometimes occurs in the journalistic world. We work with them to strengthen their capacities, and we work together. That facilitates our work as an articulator later because we know them. We know their skills. We know their abilities, and we facilitate their work with more experienced colleagues and in that trustworthy umbrella of permanent pedagogical editorial support and other win-win models, results are beginning to be achieved.

Marina Walker Guevara Carlos, so the title of this plan talks about the lone wolves, but you said in our pre-meeting that you prefer a different analogy. The analogy of ants. Can you talk about that?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas That's just a reflection. The trouble with the lone wolves, is the wolf usually works as a pack too? And right now in the collaborative field, we believe more

in a journey, not like in a competition. And in a journey, the ant looks more like a better idea for us, because we all the time try to discover good talents around the Americas and work with them, work together, doing the best journalism that we can do. And that is the general reflection that we have about the ants and wolf.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you so much, Carlos. So, Purity, you took part of ICIJ's impressive FinCEN files investigation, which focused on the role that banks play in facilitating or enabling money laundering. So I would like to ask you to give us your perspective as a journalist from the ground, in your case based in Kenya, when you are called to join a large distributed team during a pandemic to work on a really complex global story? Just by saying that I feel a little overwhelmed and intimidated myself. So I wanted to ask how you made it work, what was the experience like, and how you made it work for yourself and for your outlet?

Purity Mukami So then the communication to me came maybe half a month before the first COVID case in Kenya, but it was not foreseen. So what really helped is there was a physical meeting, which happens to be the only physical meeting throughout the project, where we met with the other African investigative journalists who were taking part in this project, and then the ICIJ training team and coordination team, which helped us create relationships. First of all, I joined the project six months after most of the partners, and at that moment, I was more of a data scientist than an investigative journalist with how to do this big project. So for a minute, I was like, if my boss trusts that I can do this, then all I have to do is go and be on the project. And what really made a difference for me is listening to other journalists from Africa, who had done similar project before. I remember at one point after the first few training sessions, I was feeling overwhelmed with materials, leads, ideas. Until one evening, I was contemplating quitting the project because I was like, I have only five months and the rest of the team has been here for six months. And we were having this conversation with one lady, journalist from Burkina Faso, a West African country, and she really talked me into the fact that there are ways you can quickly get which leads to focus on. You don't have to deal with all this material. So that relationship I created with other journalists and checking with them often really helped me.

And then I kept the ICIJ training team close to me. I went to each and every question and answer sessions, where it would be almost me and the trainers, so that helped me catch up. But the other thing that helped us in our participation is having a supportive boss. I would update him every step of the way. He would encourage me and give me a different perspective. And that's what kept us going. One once in a while, I would check in with a Tanzanian partner to know how he's doing with this project, and the challenges he's facing, and how he is tackling those challenges. At that moment, I would be with a partner from Namibia or Malawi, just getting the encouragement. And two to three months down the line, I was good to go. So those are some of the things that made it work.

Marina Walker Guevara So, Purity, when you say a supporting boss, do you mean a boss in your own outlet, or you're talking about the coordinators of the investigation?

Purity Mukami Both. So the boss at our newsroom was already enrolled in the project and he was already excited with a project, though he was not quite active, but I would get time to talk to him about my fears, about when I feel endangered. And remember, this is now the pandemic has already kicked in. I'm having to work from home. No meetings in the office. So I would have secure calls with him and share my fears when I have anxiety and all that. And he kept encouraging me to go on. So in a way the FinCEN files project

cautioned me from the effect of COVID. There was no time to think there is COVID when there was this massive project to deal with.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you, Purity. So I would like to move now to how you make these collaborations work. Purity was just giving us some really good tips about relying on others, asking questions, staying close to the training team and having a supportive boss, which sometimes you can't control. But there are things we can control. And we've been putting a lot of thought into how we perfect collaboration, so they are actually inspiring and exciting experiences and not nightmares. So I want to go around the room and ask our colleagues to tell us very sincerely what are some common mistakes or challenges that you have experienced while engaging in these collaborations, and what we have learned along the way? How have you been able to overcome them? Sometimes by talking about these gaps is the most practical way to signal to others the way forward. So why don't we go and start with Alia?

Alia Ibrahim Thanks, Marina. Actually, yes, and I think it's a learning process, and it's a space that we're trying always to improve, as you've said. On the receiving end, for example, one of the biggest mistakes I did as an individual journalist and also as an organization was being too excited about too many possibilities at the beginning of the collaboration and not having a very clear work plan, spending too much time sometimes on the documents, as opposed to doing some actual reporting or starting the writing. I think one very, very important thing that I think that we learned is super important is bilateral communications and making sure that we stick to that.

And yes, the analogy with the lone wolf, we've overcome it a how we want to do our journalism. But there are some areas where we still, by training, maybe, or because we've done it for so long, where we have to bring ourselves to one better communicate and two work according to a schedule that does not involve us alone. It involves the people we work with. It's a huge challenge. Things have improved, as you have said. Technology and platforms have helped us do that in better ways. But I think with every new collaboration, we're taking what we've learned from the previous one. And I think, personally, I know that we have missed on some really good stories because of organizational issues and communication issues.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you, Alia. Scilla, you have coordinated and you coordinate large teams of partners in Europe and in Asia for ICIJ. What are some of the challenges you have experienced in that task.

Scilla Alecci It really depends. It varies country by country, person by person, you know. From time zone change, which may seem stupid, but it's not. Sometimes when I go back to Europe and I'm just closer to everyone, it's much easier just to pick up the phone in the morning and have a talk. The idea of having communication is certainly an important part of the collaboration. And sometimes I feel like in the past I would leave it too much. Like I would talk to some people, and maybe some people are more proactively talking to you. They contact you. While others, they don't do that as much, maybe because they're busy. So I tried to kind of schedule more appointments and make it proactive, regularly scheduling these meetings with people so that I can have the opportunity to talk to as many people as possible, and even if it's just for a few minutes in some cases. Because in my case, I'm also a reporter, so sometimes I also get overwhelmed by my own stories and anxiety in the same way that Purity does. But when you switch to the coordinator mode, that's when you kind of have to have more like a better discipline on how to deal with people, considering the geographical, and time, and also cultural challenges.

Marina Walker Guevara And a big shout out to you, Scilla, for investigating, doing your reporter work, and also coordinating. Those are like two entirely different jobs. They require different qualities and skills, and you somehow manage to do it all.

Scilla Alecci Well, I try, but I feel, if I can just add one thing, is that they are different things, but at the same time they kind of feed each other. And also the idea that I can work with people who have more experience or just know much other things, it's so inspiring. And really this is a privilege for us. I mean, I cannot ask for more.

Marina Walker Guevara Carlos, what are some of the things that keep you up at night when you collaborate with others in your region?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Good question, no? Because collaborative work involves grave responsibility. It's like a body with many extensions. There are issues that compromise the physical security of those who participate. There are situations of digital monitoring of communications. There are laws presently now in Latin America that have contrasting words. In many cases, there are complexes. High standards. Maintain better standard, if it's possible, are required. And the closing moments are sometimes challenging. Doing well in places, being attentive, finding credible and effective solutions sometimes take away sleep. But one of the key is clarity in all the steps. You need to be very clear about the deadlines. You need to be very clear about the responsibilities, about the coordination, even under our model of radical sharing and radical sharing collaboration. Also, you need to clarify the exit doors because sometimes situations happen, and you need to be attentive about that. That is the idea.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you, Carlos. Purity, FinCEN files has been a success by all measures, but was there something that you wish you or others in the team would have done differently?

Purity Mukami I think being on board, making the decision to be on board as early as possible in the project could have made a difference. But if not for COVID, we would have had three months to work on the project where the project was going on for a year or so, and that was giving us the pressure. You don't want to be the one holding the entire global team down. You don't want to let people down. And you've joined the project late in the time. So onboarding people as early as possible could have been better for us. And actually choosing to be on the collaborations at the right time is what I could say could make a difference. But thank God for COVID, because the deadline changed and gave some of us some more time to give our best.

Another thing maybe we could do better is to have a better internal structures. Because when you get into collaborations with different people and there is other in-house projects that are going on, having a clear structure that accommodates the project, and not having the thought that this project is more of this team, and you're feeling like it's more inferior or more superior than the other project, knowing how you're getting into the collaboration and having the structures to have the best out of it.

Marina Walker Guevara And that is a good point and one that we hear. Because usually media outlets try to keep these collaborations in a very small team and try to not share the news a lot across the newsroom for security reasons. But then when it comes to publication, suddenly people are finding out, and there's a lot of stress about graphics and presentation and other things because nobody knew that these small team of reporters

had been working for a year on these gigantic investigations. So it's not easy to navigate. Scilla, a key aspect of a happy journalistic collaboration is knowing how to choose partners well. And so I wanted to ask you, what do you look for in journalists that you invite to join ICIJ investigations? And also what are some of the guidelines that you expect these journalists to observe while collaborating?

Scilla Alecci So obviously, ICIJ has been around for 20 years, so there is already a very trusted network of partners. But there are countries where we don't have partners yet. Because speaking of Asia, for example, there are countries that are not friendly to the press, and there is no independent media. So every time it's a challenge to find people that you can trust and also who can be safe enough to work and investigate. They could be very good journalists, but sometimes they are not investigative journalists. So it's really difficult to find the right fit.

The way I try to find new partners is, I mean, it takes a while, and I try to talk to them slowly. I try to get people to be really wanting to work with us. Because a lot of the time it happens, for example, we go to conferences, we are approached by lots of journalists who want to work with ICIJ or want to be part of ICIJ just for the sake of it, but they don't understand the hard work that goes behind the collaboration. And so usually those people maybe don't even email you. They don't even follow up. And I try to find the people who are not just talking about collaborating, but actually showing a real effort in wanting to do the real work. So it takes a while. And you can see whether some journalists really want to get into the collaborative journalism and contribute to something. And so this is one of the things. And obviously when this happens, when they are approved, and they get to work with us, I try to be in touch with them as much as possible. And also I want them to be in touch with me. So this is maybe one of the guidelines, in addition to the fact that obviously they have to be respectful of others. So, for example, Carlos was mentioning security. So obviously our work is sometimes sensitive, and they have to be able to respect all the security measures that we have in place with encrypted emails, et cetera, and not sharing links with anybody and things like that. And obviously also be helpful to others as much as they can. Obviously, reporters are busy. We all know that. But when we talk about radical sharing is a philosophy, that's something that we also want in our partners. People who are helpful, and wanting, and really believe in the idea that if they help others, that they can get better too.

Marina Walker Guevara Yeah, and always when I talk about collaboration, I say that a lot of you are going to be benefiting from the help of others, but you will be expected to do work that may not end up in your story, but that will make your colleagues story better. I remember a case from a journalist in Argentina who once told us that she had gotten this document for a colleague in Denmark. She took a bus and was on the road for like two hours to get to this one courthouse, get the document, and she was so happy. And I asked her, like, "So is it also going to help your story? Are you doing the story together?" She was like, "No, not at all. It's just for him. But I'm so excited. I got it for him." She knows that in the future she will get the same from someone in the network.

Alia, so in these collaborations, inevitably, we need to build consensus and we need to cede some control. There are things that journalists cherish, like setting up our own publication date or the decision of when we're going to go and ask questions to the subjects of our stories. And those things now in collaboration have to be decided across newsrooms and inevitably somebody is going to be unhappy. So how was this process for you of ceding control, and what advice do you have to new collaborators?

Alia Ibrahim Well, it's part of the package. You get the good things. And, yes, you have to release some of your control. The funny thing, I think, and this is something that keeps coming back every time, is the last 48 hours before publication, no matter how slow the time could look during months earlier, no matter how you think you are ready, the last 48 hours are usually you feel that so many things went wrong. You feel so many things could go wrong. So the pressure of the last 48 hours, the fact that you have this pressure of feeling that you could fail everybody else, be at the level of security. It's not just your own group, or your own media. It's really the team, and you feel responsible for everybody else on the team. But I think it's like when you start the family. You lose a lot of your freedom. But you get a family in return. You get what it gives you. Today, for us being investigative journalists in the Arab world, you have no idea what it means to know that we're not orphans. We're not on our own. We feel it in the sense of we're working in teams that could give depth and substance to our reporting. But also after publication, we feel that we're not that vulnerable. We lost a little bit, or we compromised a little bit, of our freedom running our newsroom, but it's totally worth it. Again, it's a package. We take it as it comes.

Marina Walker Guevara And in the same way, you can't imagine how valuable it is for all of us around the world to know that we have reporters in the Middle East like yourself that we can rely on in any investigation.

So let's talk about reluctant bosses. We talked about supportive bosses. But sometimes, and I experienced this myself, going to a media outlet, talking to an editor about joining a possible investigation, and the editor being reluctant, scared or feeling like what's the need of joining this unknown group of people? It just sounds scary. So I wanted to ask Carlos and Purity, if she wants to chime in. How do we negotiate? How do we make the case for collaboration when an editor doesn't believe or have experience in collaboration?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Well, using a reference to soccer or tying my professional life in the past. It seems like we need to develop the ability to score goals against the owner, like a special ability to develop. Because sometimes the owner tries to control the content, and that's a very weird situation. Fortunately, today there is an explosion of new platforms in the Americas, and the media ecosystem is very broad, which means they are more independent. And we work with two kinds of strategies. One is building stories with journalists to our hub, CONNECTAS hub, which is a vibrant and active community. And from this year, we are going to start something that we call "ARCO," which means CONNECTAS Regional Action, which is looking for a close up job with the media. With them, our first emphasis is to show them why they earn for well focused on collaboration, produce very good results that increase prestige, increase readership. And for the genius in the management, they can translate that into ways for them to finance. And that's the idea how you can show that they won with better journalism.

Marina Walker Guevara I remember, before I got to Purity, that after a few investigations, some of our families were saying that people were subscribing to their newspapers. And among the reasons they were citing was, we subscribe to your newspaper because it's part of a network of collaboration, and we want to see more stories like that. Purity?

Purity Mukami So just to add. The newsroom I worked for when I was working on FinCEN files is called African Uncensored, and the good thing was it's led by one of the top investigative journalists we have in Kenya. And I knew for sure he was on my side. But of course, there were structures in between with other different bosses. And as you earlier said, when you're working on some of these projects that can be sensitive, you have quite a bit of navigation to do. And as fast as I noticed that there was a part of the bosses that I

have to navigate was to know who is on my side, and how can I team up with them? How can I have them supporting me, covering me up? And I had to have communication at some point to say that for the sake of security, can I reduce the amount the line of reporting that I have for this specific project? So it's to remain calm, and to know who is on your side, and to capitalize on that. And to keep calm and understand also that the rest of the team that want to be in the know, and sort of be clear on why it will not go that way. So it's more about the remaining calm and communicating, just as Alia has said.

Marina Walker Guevara Wonderful, Purity. In the last ten minutes of our conversation, and then, of course, we will move on to questions from the audience, I wanted to talk about expanding the concept of collaboration. So collaboration among journalists is very well established, as we have discussed. But what about collaborating across disciplines, collaborating across other professions? And what are some of the ethical issues involved with that idea? Alia, I believe you have collaborated through Daraj, for example, with think tanks and others. Can you talk briefly about that experience? And then I'm going to go to Carlos and his collaboration with advocates.

Alia Ibrahim And yeah, I have to say that to this point, it continues to be a very experimental exercise. It's pretty much like our relationship with our donors. If they have not believed in what we want to do, they wouldn't have supported us. And if we did not believe that collaborating with third actors of civil society, who at the end of the day shared our vision of what a better world looks like. Now, I think as a journalist and as the as a co-founder of Daraj, a top priority for us is to be very clear and transparent towardd our audience. And that's why whatever we are publishing, we label very clearly. So this is an investigative journalism piece. This is an opinion piece, and this is a space for collaboration with civil society actors. The last the last round of of such collaborations happened in the aftermath of the August 4 explosion. And honestly, it came out of frustration because the mainstream media should have been shedding the light on civil society, so we are literally doing the job of the government, which on top of being very corrupt, is also completely absent. But civil society rose to the occasion, and they're doing fascinating work on reconstruction, on fighting poverty, and even organizing elections, and getting ready for elections. What we do as a media is just like give whatever support in the form of services to help them with the social media, let them get more exposure, stuff like that. But we label it as such. We label it as this is not journalism. This is outside of our journalism. We curate the partners we work with very carefully. We make sure that we're opening our space for civil society actors within Lebanon and outside Lebanon. We've also started a collaboration with academia because we think a lot of these sources are being put there. I think there was a number saying that one percent of academic work gets sited. And this is really too bad because there's a lot of information and work, so we're recycling. But this is all very experimental. I have a great sense of that for the future. But again, I think the trick here is to explain and get the culture and the ecosystem at the level of the audience to understand the difference between the all kinds of offerings that you are making available as the media. And we're still too young. So doing all that at the same time is a bit of a challenge, but I think it's paying off. And I think, honestly, it's unavoidable living where we live at this stage. We really have to do this.

Marina Walker Guevara Carlos in Colombia, and throughout Latin America, you have decided with your team to start collaborations with advocacy organizations like Transparency International. So I wanted to ask you how that decision has worked out, and whether there's a risk that at a time of so much distrust in the media, that you can be the focus of attacks because of these partnerships?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Usually the relationship between the media and civil society organizations has challenges. The organizations distrust the ability of journalists and only want to install their press release, the usual relation. For us, as a journalist, as a media, only want to approach the organization as sources. The paradox is that we are rowing for the same site. So how to establish better relations to build together? That is why we have been building those bridges for so many years. For example, in Dominican Republic, we are working with participations with Participación Ciudadana, which is the local chapter for transparency, and other organizations on the stories that help to control resources, fiscalization for the public resources related with the pandemic. With Transparency of Venezuela, for example, we collaborate in which they contribute a powerful database built by lawyers who was in there for a long time and in different countries, review hundreds, perhaps thousands of files. The journalistic work that was on our site. A member of CONNECTAS that worked together with them allowed them to identify the issues that were developed for the journalists. In other words, in the end, the investigative techniques of the organizations were added with the investigative techniques for the journalists and produced a result that helped expose in this case a bribery or a scandal for five billion dollars of Venezuelans around the world. This is a challenge, of course, but it depends. It is similar, like Scilla mentioned before, you need to choose the best partner to do that kind of exploration. But we really believe that in this relation between civil society organizations and journalists, we can understand new ways to do the same thing.

Marina Walker Guevara And I imagine another important aspect is being very transparent, like Alia was saying about who is participating, who is collaborating, and why.

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Of course. And the coordination are increasing. Because in the journalistic field, you have the same language. You understand what the the role is. But in between the organizations and the journalism, you need to be more and more clear.

Marina Walker Guevara Absolutely. Purity, in your case, a collaboration between a statistician, I don't know if I'm saying it correctly, a data scientist and an investigative journalist. I believe that FinCEN files was your first large-scale collaboration of this nature with investigative journalism. And so I wanted to know what tips you have for both data scientist wanting to collaborate with journalists and journalists for the first time, getting to work with a data scientist like yourself?

Purity Mukami The first thing is to be open, to listen to each other, and to know where each side is coming from. For example, for me I've had to learn. Because now I'm doing full-time journalism, even though I'm a mathematician. I've had to learn their rules and their accreditation that I got to work toward. Also, they are quite a number of my colleagues who have joined the team, like from the from the statistics world and increasingly working in these newsrooms in Kenya. And it's to understand where they come from, how they understand things, and how they communicate things, and for them to understand that there are rules. You are not going to impose this because you did the research and you found this. There will be a place where you have to get opinions from other experts, and where you have to be transparent. Of course, if this is an opinion or if this is an investigative project. So for me, the biggest thing is to listen to each other and understand where each party is coming from.

The other one is that the credit. For me, the biggest challenge was how they would credit my work. Because in journalism, there was no standard for crediting a statistician. And I had to come up with a role called data reporter in the newsroom because I wanted my work to be recognized, not to be on the backbench and do the investigation. And then I

had to understand that I cannot write a story. So I had to work with a reporter who is good in writing the script. And then we would agree on the crediting system, and how I would be credited. It didn't come immediately, but the way I am, it's experimental. It's being open to the many possibilities out there.

Marina Walker Guevara Good for you for advocating for yourself. And perhaps piece of advice that you will share, and I know you have shared quite a bit already, that you think would make a real difference for that person? And I'm going to go to you, Scilla, first.

Scilla Alecci I would say don't feel afraid of asking questions. It's OK to not know something. It's OK if you need to go to another colleague who knows more than you. Be humble, and you will find that many other people are just like you.

Marina Walker Guevara Carlos?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Well, very early in my career, I had a wise piece of advice, and it is one that I always reiterate is be clear that in journalism you don't work for a person or an organization. You work for the citizen. It's always clear who the boss is that helps in the permanent decisions and dilemmas that arise along the way. Collaboration is that methodology, is a powerful technique that must continue to be refined. We should reach a positive experience. But collaboration is not the purpose. Keeping a clear eye on the purpose of what we do makes work easier in a profession of so many external pressures and so many internal temptations.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you for that, Carlos. Purity?

Purity Mukami For me, clarity of involvement, understanding who will be doing what at what place and how things will be done for a new collaborator is really important to be clear on how things will go.

Marina Walker Guevara Alia?

Alia Ibrahim Well, everything everybody said. Come with an open heart, and come with an open mind, and know that journalism has never been more powerful. We're reinventing news. We've all worked in all kinds of newsrooms, and it's never been so liberating knowing that we can do so much. It's a fantastic work, and it's a fantastic industry. And now more than ever, it's breaking all the limits that constrained it for too long.

Marina Walker Guevara Well said. Well put. And with that, I think that we can wrap up this part of the panel. I want to thank each of you for your wonderful contributions. More power to you, and to collaboration, and to your networks. Thank you for the fantastic and important work that you all do.

Here we go again, so we are going now to the questions from the audience, and thank you so much to you who have contributed your questions. Let's get started with those. And the first question is for Scilla. So, Scilla, mentioned that collaboration is a way of practicing journalistic solidarity, says Lourdes Cueva Chacón. Can you explain what journalistic solidarity means to you, and can you give us examples?

Scilla Alecci OK, so if you can hear me. I think solidarity is on two levels. It's when you work as a journalist and also when you're off. That means that we know there are reporters who work in countries where the government continues to apply pressure and threaten

them. And so this means that when you build a network of trusted collaborators, even if they don't work with you on a project, you will still be on their side. And so this is one of the ways we can show solidarity. And then the other one, of course, is while we collaborate, and the fact that we have to be aware that people in other newsrooms may have fewer resources, fewer people available. And so the idea of helping each other, even just by making calls for other people, or just finding a document that others cannot access. Or, for example, in the U.S., you have a lot of documents, but some of them are really expensive to get hold of. And so maybe richer, wealthier newsrooms can just spend those two bucks to buy documents or access and just give it to someone on the other side of the world. All of these little gestures kind of contribute to a better collaboration, and in the end, to a better story for everybody.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you, Scilla. Purity, I wonder if you could share with us if there's an example or two from FinCEN files where you really experienced that journalistic solidarity from your colleagues?

Purity Mukami Yes, Marina and the audience. I remember in the story I wrote, it involved local companies which were subsidiaries of a Switzerland-based company and had other subsidiaries in other countries. And I remember getting in touch with the Bulgarian journalist to get for me company records. Also, I could not call Switzerland from here, and I remember having someone call the office in Switzerland from Switzerland, another journalist in Switzerland. That's the most striking example I can give.

Marina Walker Guevara Wonderful. Sometimes that phone call or that one document can make a world of difference in your story and in your experience.

Purity Mukami The story could not have gone out without that calling.

Marina Walker Guevara Simple as that. Alia, so we have a question for you from Nairobi, Kenya, from Ann. And she says, Did you actually do research to determine that collaborative investigative journalism was the way to go in your country? And was Daraj the first enterprise to do this kind of journalism in Lebanon?

Alia Ibrahim Well, we knew for a fact that our region was in need for independent journalism. That was our starting point. There are other independent journalism media in our region, but we were one of the first to deal with heavy journalism that covers all 22 Arab countries. It came because of the need, because of the dealing of the Arab Spring. What I mentioned about the investigative journalism, we do investigative journalism, but this is not everything we do. We do a lot of collaborations that are not only about investigative journalism. We do believe in collaboration as something that could give small organizations like ours much more impact. And we do it across all kinds of journalism that we produce. In terms of business models, I'm not aware of many like us. We have registered that as right from the beginning as a profit-making company, and it was a huge debate at the time. But honestly, the arguments you were making then is the same we're making today. For us to be really independent, we have to be really financially viable. We're still working on that. We're working on diversifying our revenue streams. We're happy that almost 30 percent of our budget is made by production and consultancies, which far from being fully independent. But I think in the long term we're working. This is one of the biggest challenges we face.

Marina Walker Guevara And I can follow up on that with a question from Jane, and she says, "It's very clear how collaboration benefits investigative journalism, but what about

other forms of journalism, like we see fact-checking networks and other forms of journalism that can also benefit?"

Alia Ibrahim Well, you know, if you look at it from the perspective that we're really operating at a moment where the noise all over is just so big. So imagine if you're independent, and small, and you have this network of amazing journalists working for different independent media, or actually not even necessarily media. We do work with fact checkers. We do work with international organizations on human rights, on women's rights, etc. The consolidation of people who share values to better disseminate the information they work on, to better distribute, even to better start conversations that are healthy for the world we live in. Not too long ago, starting a lot of conversations about solution driven journalism, about constructive journalism. All this we did not even hear about 10 years ago. And I genuinely believe that if we look at what's happened over the last 10 years to journalism and to the world at large with populism, et cetera, I think we have to be very creative in consolidating the efforts who want to improve the conditions of citizens everywhere.

Marina Walker Guevara Thank you, Alia. Carlos, a question from Brazil. They want to know about collaboration in countries that still suffer, that are right now suffering an erosion in freedom of the press. And journalists are persecuted at different levels, so does collaboration help in these cases, or can it actually be risky when a journalist associates herself himself with an international entity or media organization?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas Thanks. Thanks for the question. Unfortunately, in Latin America, that situation is growing. The cross-border collaboration helps in different ways. It helps to leverage the capacity. It helps to find information that in some countries are closed, but in others are open. It helps to find different points of view to discover and learn an other perspective that your colleagues and in other countries, in other contexts, help to spread the investigation in a massive way, looking for more impact. It helps to protect the teams that are involved in the investigations in different ways. And a very important point, you build friendships, and at the end it's fun.

Marina Walker Guevara Absolutely, Carlos. We're going to be wrapping up the questions, but I don't want to do that before asking what some people are asking us in the Q&A, which is how do they join? Like if a journalist wants to be part of these networks, how do they go about it? So Scilla, do you want to take that one?

Scilla Alecci So the ICIJ website has all the information on how to reach out to us, the ICIJ, the organization. If you want to start a collaboration, even if it doesn't have to involve ICIJ, but you have a specific country mind, please reach out to us. We know a lot of people that we can put you in touch with, and those people can take it from there.

Marina Walker Guevara And another question people are asking is about technology. Can the panelists quickly recommend what they have found to be the most useful platforms, or tools, apps, for collaboration? Maybe Purity and Scilla?

Purity Mukami OK, maybe, I can begin by talking about simple things like Signal and WhatsApp to be in communication and to be able to share documents securely, and I will let the rest of the more experienced panelists to add on to that.

Marina Walker Guevara Scilla, so ICIJ has Datashare, which is a very powerful tool for analyzing and sharing documents. Do you want to talk a little bit about that and how can people access that technology, if it is possible?

Scilla Alecci ICIJ has developed a platform called Datashare. You can find information about that on a website. It basically helps index and go through a very large amount of information, and you can download it on your computer. You can also use it in collaboration with other journalists, and it's free. So please do that, and you will see how it makes your life as a journalist easier.

Marina Walker Guevara Wonderful. Any other, Carlos, any apps or platforms in Latin America that were particularly helpful to you?

Carlos Eduardo Huertas I'm always saying the same. The most powerful thing that we need to change is here. It is the best tool, you know. Any digital tool you can obtain. The power that you have is here. For example, you have people in different countries, different contexts, different experiences, and you always look at the way to communicate, to share. And the change that we need to do as a journalist is here, not in the tools, not in your computers, nor in your Wi-Fi. It's in your mind.

Marina Walker Guevara Absolutely, and to take the first step. We all can look around, and we find our first network is the people that are sitting around us. If we are still in university, it's our classmates, and start to build those networks from scratch. Also be don't be afraid to knock on doors, to call, to send messages, because journalists all over the world are so much more open now than they were before about collaboration. They will answer your email and they will put you in touch with who you need to be in touch with to get started with collaboration. So changing that mindset, taking the first step and getting in touch with Alia, with Carlos, with Scilla, and with Purity. Of course, that's your first step.

Thank you so much, everyone. We are going to wrap up this session now, but to be continued in real life in the virtual newsrooms. Thank you so much, everyone, for having been with us for more than an hour, and more power to these finalists and their powerful investigative collaborations.

Mallory Tenore All right, thank you so much, Marina, and thank you to each of you for this really compelling conversation. I loved hearing you talk about the power of collaboration and the ways in which each of you has strengthened your investigative journalism through those collaborative efforts. And I could tell from the questions that the tips that you shared will definitely be helpful for our audience. So thank you again.

And to everyone in our audience, we are so glad that you're here with us today, and we hope that you'll stay with us for the rest of the day. Normally, if ISOJ were in person, you would leave this session and start mingling with other ISOJ'ers. But we can't quite replicate those in-person connections, but we are offering up a virtual platform called Wonder, which you can use to have private or group conversations with other ISOJ'ers and speakers. So we'll be dropping a link in the chat to the Wonder room throughout the day, so you can access it as many times as you would like in between sessions. So with that, we hope you'll stick with us. Next up, we have a panel titled Community Management and Audience Engagement: Turning the News Into a Conversation, and that panel starts at 4:00 p.m. Central. And if you're interested in community engagement, you won't want to miss it. And right after that panel, we will have our welcome party. So we'll have some nice festivities to look forward to. Thank you again for joining us, and we'll see you again soon.