



# **DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNANCE AND THE MEDIA:** **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA** **IN BUILDING AFRICAN SOCIETY**

A POLIS Report edited by  
Charlie Beckett and Laura Kyrke-Smith

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# **‘Development, Governance and the Media: the role of the media in building African society’**

A report edited by Charlie Beckett and Laura Kyrke-Smith

In March 2007, POLIS brought together a wide range of media practitioners, policymakers, donors, NGOs and academics in a high level conference on ‘Development, Governance and the Media: the Role of the Media in Building African Society’. What follows are the reflections and recommendations that emerged from a day of productive and at times contentious debate.

POLIS will now be taking its work forward on development, governance and the media in a number of ways:

- From 2008, the LSE will offer an MSc in Media, Communication and Development, contributing to a much-needed increase in research capacity in this field.
- POLIS also runs an annual Global Silverstone Fellowship, allowing a practising foreign journalist to conduct research in to an area of global journalism.
- In addition, POLIS will soon publish a Newsroom Fellowship report on freedom of speech in the Balkans.

POLIS would like to thank the Steering Group and its partners for their assistance in conference organisation and production of this report: BBC World Service Trust, Open University, Concern, Panos, the Communication for Social Change Consortium, UNESCO UK and the UK Department for International Development. Special thanks to Myles Wickstead for chairing the day’s events.

POLIS would also like to thank the conference researchers and rapporteurs: Orlando Bama, Sarah Higgins, Sophie Middlemiss, Agnieszka Troszkiewicz and Malgorzata Zielinska.



# POLIS – Journalism and Society

POLIS is a joint venture by the London School of Economics and the London College of Communication. Its mission is to study and debate the changing relationship between journalism and society in the UK and internationally.

In its first year, POLIS held a range of public and private seminars and events on diverse topics such as terrorism and war reporting to Al-Jazeera and the future of news. POLIS also has a Fellowship programme for journalists and a series of major research projects.

We welcome proposals for future research and events from media organisations, NGOs, academic bodies and other interested individuals.

For more information on POLIS please refer to the website:  
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To join in the debate about journalism and society at POLIS go to the Director's blog:  
[www.charliebeckett.org](http://www.charliebeckett.org)

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# Foreword

It seemed to me that there were four specific objectives we should address at this conference.

The first was to develop greater cohesion between the media and development communities, so that they could move towards a common agenda and language. No-one knows better than the media how inconvenient it can be when people use different language to describe the same things; or how confusing it can be to use the same language to mean different things.

The second was to follow through on the Commission for Africa objective of presenting a more balanced picture of Africa. That was: 'To offer a fresh and positive perspective for Africa and its diverse culture in the 21st Century, which challenges unfair perceptions and helps deliver changes'. Everyone knows about Darfur and Zimbabwe. But they should also know about Africa's improved governance, peace and security; its stronger economic growth; and the development of viable institutions and systems.

In the consultations around the Commission for Africa Report, about 85% of respondents put governance at the top of key issues which had to be addressed. This became the key theme of the British Government White Paper published in mid-2006, the third in the 'Eliminating World Poverty' series – 'Making governance work for the poor'. So our third objective was to examine the role of the media in promoting good governance in countries at all stages from development, from fragile states to the emerging 'Lions of Africa', and to find out more from DFID about how they were implementing their White Paper commitments.

Our fourth and final objective was to look at the potential of new technologies to improve access to information and news, which would in turn influence and impact on democratic processes.

A good deal of useful work was done before the Conference through the production of briefing and background papers, which helped to stimulate lively debate and discussion in both the plenary sessions and the breakout groups. There was a strong sense



*Myles A Wickstead,  
Conference Chair  
Former Head of Secretariat,  
Commission of Africa*

that this discussion was timely and that this was the beginning rather than end of a process. For that reason, a further event is being held at the LSE on the afternoon of Wednesday, 27 June – though I think and hope that many other dialogues and discussions will have taken place before then as a result of the connections made at the Conference.

Events such as this do not just happen. They take a good deal of hard work and commitment to organise, so I would like to conclude by thanking all those who helped to put the event together – those who prepared the background documents, those who chaired the Panels, those interns who agreed to help with the preparations and to act as rapporteurs, and of course to POLIS (particularly Charlie Beckett and Laura Kyrke-Smith) for all their efforts. The fact that everyone who participated last time is enthusiastic about a follow-up event suggests that there is a good deal of momentum behind this initiative. I hope that by reading this Report you will see why that should be so.

Myles A Wickstead, Conference Chair  
Former Head of Secretariat, Commission for Africa

# Introduction

This conference and report was the idea of a group of Media for Development stakeholders who wanted a forum to host the current global debate on these issues. This was the ideal opportunity for POLIS, launched in the Summer of 2006, to demonstrate our interest.

This report is timed to coincide with a whole range of other initiatives in media for development. Firstly, it is designed to reflect upon the implications of the 2006 Dfid White Paper on 'Making Governance Work for the Poor'. That is an ambitious attempt by the UK government to set out a strategy that includes a call for media to play its part in governance and transparency.

This report also seeks to continue debate around the African Media Development Initiative (AMDI), the most extensive, independent mapping of African media to date, setting out a range of ideas for actions that can impact on the future of African media. This, together with the UNECA-led Strengthening Africa's Media (STREAM) consultation process, is now being taken forward as the African Media Initiative (AMI).

Our contribution was to bring these various streams of work together for discussion in London. We wanted to reach out beyond the Media For Development sector. So we brought Africa journalists and African media activists together with international journalists, media for development experts, academics, government officials, and non-media NGOs. It was a rich mix.

The aim of the conference and this report was not to come up with specific policy recommendations or settled opinions. The ambition was to spark ideas and inspire action. This report is based on the research and proceedings of the conference but it has been written to stand alone. You didn't have to be there.



*Charlie Beckett*



The report is in three sections. The first is a rendering of the morning sessions where four key speakers outlined some very different contexts for the debate. They give the World Bank, African media, African academic and African media research approaches.

The second section is made up of four papers based on the thematic afternoon break-out sessions, looking at media for development in four different frameworks: Politics, the Millennium Development Goals, Fragile States and New Technology.

The third section is made up of responses from two African journalists, Dfid Director General Sue Owen, and POLIS itself. POLIS seeks to put journalism – and journalism in a digital age – back at the heart of an understanding of the future of media for development in Africa.

This report is part of a much wider process that is moving rapidly forward. We look forward to working again with those people who came to the conference, who read this report and who work in all aspects of development and media.

POLIS itself has the Silverstone Global Journalism Fellowship, giving a working international journalist the opportunity to conduct research in to just these kinds of issues. And our partner, the London School of Economics Media and Communications department, will soon have a Media, Communication and Development Masters degree which will in effect create a world-class academic research centre for study in this area.

We hope you enjoy what follows.

Charlie Beckett, POLIS Director

# Executive Summary

In March 2007, a POLIS conference brought together senior African, UK and international journalists, policymakers, academics and media development professionals to debate the role of the media in building African society.

At a time of unprecedented challenge and change in global journalism, this report develops the day's debates to set out how the potential of the media can be seized to improve development and good governance on the African continent.

- Globally, we are witnessing a **transition from conventional modern journalism to networked journalism**. Networked journalism is inherently 'consumer led', creating patterns of interaction that oblige the media to build in constant and pre-emptive communication with its audiences.
- Responsible media interaction and increased trust must be fostered at all levels of society. A key focus of media development efforts must be education in media literacy, targeted not only at journalists but at governments, donors, development partners and the general public; to foster an **improved and empowered communications environment**.
- Any approach to media development must include **systems-wide** measures including development of an enabling regulatory framework and increased access to information.
- Future media development processes must be **African-owned and African-led**, ultimately empowering Africans at all levels of society. Within this, media development strategies must fit the specific contexts of diverse African realities.
- While **new technologies** offer new and exciting opportunities, we must focus not on a transition from 'old' media to 'new' media, but on maximizing the potential for expanding networked journalism across the media in all its forms.
- **The media is necessarily political**, seeking to foster debate around inherently contentious social, economic, cultural and political issues. Donors and NGOs must recognize the clear-cut distinction between using the media to promote specific development policies and building the media as a component of genuine democratic debate.

- **Good governance and accountability** are ultimately about effective and dynamic communications between policymakers, politicians and their constituent populations. Greater effort is required to convince African governments, donors and financial institutions of the value of free and fair media, and of expanded networked journalism.
- **Fragile states pose specific challenges, but effective media development interventions remain imperative.** In fragile states, donors and NGOs must set realistic standards but not be risk-averse in pursuing long-term media development goals.
- There is an **absence of adequate research capacity** for further exploring the kind of questions that this POLIS conference sought to address.

# **‘On the eve of something big in media’**

## **(Eric Chinje)**

**Charlie Beckett and Laura Kyrke-Smith**

50 years on from the start of decolonisation of Africa is a good moment to look at the state of the media and its relationship to development and governance across the continent. It is a particularly good moment because those people working for a stronger media to build African society say that the situation is now critical.

There is nothing new about recognising the importance of the media for development and good governance in Africa. There has been a long trajectory of media development initiatives by a multiplicity of actors, and much fruitful debate surrounding their evolution and implementation. And still, much work remains to ensure that African media becomes independent, self-sufficient and widely acknowledged as a public good for the benefit of African society. This isn't just work for journalists, or for politicians, or for the Communications For Development NGOs. Whether we like it or not, the news media is everyone's business.

African news media is not alone in being at a critical moment. Worldwide, the news media is facing dramatic upheavals because of technological and market changes. Global freedom of expression can be seen to be expanding in many regions. Trends such as economic growth, expanding education and the emancipation of previously marginalised groups are helping to fuel a growth in the free distribution of information. Yet it is also under threat and its freedom in retreat in many areas. Potential political gains from new technology are neither self-evident nor inevitable. Africa has many examples of retreat and threats, and a historical failure to capture the benefits of free media being seen elsewhere in the world.

And yet there have been powerful and successful initiatives from Africans to shift the process up a gear. Across the continent there has been an expansion of new and old media in the private and

public sectors. And a series of significant players have acted together in a coherent way to forge structures that will promote best practice and the development of news media.

POLIS hopes that this report will be central to seizing the momentum and continuing debate to ensure that the media – and our relationships with and responsibilities towards the media – are taken seriously, and for the benefit of all involved in the process of promoting good governance and effective development in Africa.

This introductory section – reflecting the morning’s proceedings of the POLIS conference – will set out the parameters of the current debate from key perspectives. The African Media Initiative – the outcome of a thorough process of research and consultation, unprecedented in depth and magnitude – is our starting point. Academic, donor and media perspectives will then be considered, before four aspects of media development are considered in greater detail in the following chapters.

## **A way forward: The African Media Initiative**

### **Eric Chinje, Head of External Relations and Communications, African Development Bank**

The African Media Initiative (AMI), led by Eric Chinje, lies at the heart of current UK media development initiatives in Africa. An entirely African-led initiative, it is a first in many ways.

*‘This idea came from Africa, was nurtured in Europe, but they’re now looking back to Africa for its implementation – and that’s the AMI difference.’ (Eric Chinje)*

AMI emerged from two processes: the BBC World Service Trust ‘African Media Development Initiative’ (AMDI), and the ‘Strengthening Africa’s Media’ (STREAM) process spearheaded by Economic Commission for Africa. The two processes were consistent in their findings and in the lessons that can be drawn from past efforts to strengthen media on the continent.

This is how Eric Chinje identifies the mistakes



*Eric Chinje and Paul Mitchell*

of past donor approaches:

- **Journalists** have faced numerous problems including pressure from media owners, and financial weakness with interlinked vulnerability to corruption and declining ethical standards.
- **Training** has been ineffective. Many past attempts at training journalists through courses and workshops were tokenistic; ‘nothing more than a culture of per diems’. Editors were reluctant to send their most deserving journalists for training. Those who did attend training lacked commitment, or felt that training offered lacked relevance; either way, they were primarily in it for the money.
- **Donors** and training providers were uncoordinated, and the first real attempt at coordination – the Partnership for Media Development in Africa (ParMA) – failed to include African media professionals in its conception or delivery, and fizzled out quite rapidly.
- **Private sector** support has been ‘sporadic,unreliable and ineffective’.
- **Governments** have continued to confine the media in a space where it was unable to flourish and contribute effectively to changing society

To tackle these issues, the AMI Steering Committee has a clear path of action: bringing forth actionable proposals, and identifying mechanisms for addressing the action areas. AMI is setting up both an advocacy programme and a technical team. The latter will be charged with implementing a five year programme, initially donor dependent but ultimately ensuring that the private sector becomes the focus of media activity in Africa.

By clarifying a strategic approach, and increasing coordination in implementation, Eric Chinje believes that AMI can ‘finally make a difference in African media development’.

*'It is the hope of everyone involved that this broad-based, comprehensive approach will finally pay off.'*

## **A donor perspective: fostering an 'empowered communication environment'**

### **Paul Mitchell, Manager of Development Communication, World Bank**

The international donor community, Paul Mitchell argues, puts a focus on the media which is 'simply too exclusive'. Resources are directed towards training initiatives which have minimal impact, are unsustainable, and even counterproductive. Borrowing James Deane's phrase, Paul Mitchell asks us to reverse this approach and make our starting point the development of an 'empowered communication environment'. At the heart are the users of public services, the recipients of development aid, the consumers of media; what Paul Mitchell terms 'the client'.

*'We must empower the client... services must be demand and not supply driven and by giving the client a blueprint of what needs to be done they can demand from donors where the interventions should take place. These agendas must be owned by the clients and we have found strong demand for them.'*

Paul Mitchell sees several components of improving the 'empowered communication environment', with the caveat that they must be specifically implemented according to individual country context:

- Reforming **Ministries of Information** to improve access to information and to conceive of communication as a means of delivering better services to their citizens;
- **Decentralising** communication beyond the capital cities;
- Improving the functioning of **private media**;
- Funding studies to assess the **media market** – the means of receiving and sharing information;
- Developing a market for the **ancillary services to media**, such as fostering the growth of advertising and



*Paul Mitchell*

creative industries;

- Developing effective **media legislation**, including taxation, freedom of information laws, regulating and licensing arrangements and criminal liable acts;
- Encouraging **civil society** to act as a watchdog in governance and the markets;
- Strengthening academia, especially research and training in **media studies**;
- Taking advantage of the opportunities created by **new media**, especially mobile phones.

With these components in mind, Paul Mitchell urges a concerted effort to encourage donors – as well as governments and policymakers – to consider communication as a sector in itself, equal to health, the environment or finance, for example.

*‘We must get rid of the tyranny of the economists in development who blocked this view for decades. Unless communication is seen as a ‘sector’, it is not seen to have substance. Unless this happens there will not be the investment or the funding mechanisms that are needed to develop the communication sector and truly let it take its place in making governance and development work.’*

### **An academic perspective: conceptualising ownership of media development**

#### **Professor Fackson Banda, Chair of Media and Democracy, Rhodes University**

In his contribution to the debate, Professor Banda asks us to ‘step out the box in which we’ve been thinking about media development’. Our conception of media development, he argues, is premised on a ‘post-colonial suspicion’ which leads us to critique any momentum that emanates from ‘the West’. In fact, we need to replace binary North/ South or East/ West oppositions with a relational approach; taking as a starting point the mutual exchange and flow of ideas and initiatives within Africa, and between Africa and elsewhere. This approach is best brought to media development through the concept of ‘ownership’. *‘Are Africans in sufficient control of the media development agenda? What is the place of Africa in the scheme of things?’*



*Professor Fackson Banda*



Professor Banda considers four key components of 'ownership':

- **Ideological** ownership: how do we reconcile competing ideological approaches to the forms that media development takes? Is media development an extension of ideals of liberal democracy? Of human development? Or should communitarian principles guide our approach? How can we effectively balance US-favoured commercial, European-favoured public service broadcasting, and other more rooted community approaches to media?
- **Conceptual** ownership: who determines the meaning of the concepts surrounding media development? What are the competing 'developments' and 'journalisms' being envisioned? Should we accept the current South African trend towards 'developmental journalism' at the very moment when many in 'the West' consider it a Marxist or neo-Marxist hangover? Are Africans able to articulate the kind of journalisms that can respond to their specific types of situations?
- **Procedural** ownership: do previous and current processes – such as AMDI and STREAM – resonate with African societies? Are they media-led? Are we giving the process the political legitimacy it needs? Successful processes, Professor Banda argues, will need to involve political actors at both national and pan-African levels; incorporating political elites at country level and in organisations such as NEPAD.
- **Contextual** ownership: how do we ensure that ownership is localised to account for the many 'African realities'? *'To speak of Africa might not be entirely accurate.'*

In the light of these questions, Professor Banda asks us to consider the numerous existing contributions of Africans to media development, both in practice and in theory. The 1991 Windhoek Declaration is particularly notable, pledging a commitment to an independent and pluralistic African press, and inspiring the UN's founding of the annual World Press Freedom Day.

While promoting media development in Africa involves a wide range of international and African players, the scales of ownership – in its various forms – must continue to be tilted in Africa's favour.

### **A media perspective: a diverse and inter-connected media environment**

#### **Amadou Mahtar Ba, President of All Africa Global Media**

Amadou Mahtar Ba highlights the long history of media development initiatives in Africa, including the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) of the 1970s, and the founding of the Pan-African News Agency (PANA). Yet there is a crucial new dimension to current initiatives. Whereas NWICO was characterised by 'political second-guessing' of international actors, AMDI, STREAM and AMI have put the media – using professional African journalists – at the centre of project development and implementation. This is 'the really fundamental difference'.

Amadou Mahtar Ba argues that it is crucial in current initiatives to recognise the sheer diversity of the media in Africa. Within the same media organisation you find outstanding professionalism alongside poor quality journalism. Yes it is possible to identify areas that need investment more than others. On the whole the media in English-speaking parts of Africa is far better developed than in Francophone countries; the latter should be a particular focus.

It is also vital to view the media as a business: essentially, the media needs to sell to survive. The international community must to be more imaginative in assisting media organisations to talk about issues – and many developmental issues fall in to this category – that won't automatically sell papers.



*Amadou Mahtar Ba*

Finally, the political and economic conditions of the country in which the media operates cannot be neglected, Amadou Mahtar Ba insists. Using the example of Guinea, he accredits the failure to develop an effective media to the economic paralysis of the past few decades.

*‘Media in itself cannot develop. It has to be in a context of a country where the fundamentals – political, economic and social – are set.’*

## Diversity in media development

What emerges, in these varying perspectives, is the beginning of a consensus on leading questions of practice and approach. The first point of agreement is on African ownership. The value, and indeed necessity, of collaboration with international actors in the field of media development, cannot be denied. But future media development processes must be African-owned and African-led, and ultimately empowering Africans at all levels of society. AML aims to lead a broader, more comprehensive process of media development in Africa. Indeed media development processes involve, and will continue to involve, a wide range of actors – and all the accompanying ideologies and practices they bring. While some trends are clearly emerging, such as the increasing predominance of the private sector, the wide range of stakeholders makes a broad-based and discursive approach the only viable option.

The target, ‘the media’, too, is multi-faceted. It encompasses audiences, advertisers, researchers, lawyers, Ministries of Information: an extensive range of stakeholders beyond the editors and journalists themselves. In the competitive development environment, whether they intend it or not, all international actors – be it issuing press releases about their work, selling adverts to local radio stations, or using billboards to conduct public awareness campaigns – are impacting on and being influenced by the local communications environment.

And while communications must be viewed as a viable sector of its own, the communications environment is of course part of a broader political and economic context upon which it is dependent for survival. We must stimulate an economic climate



which promotes sustainable investment in the media. It will also be necessary to get more African politicians on board, for little can be achieved without political support – and because ultimately, as Nigeria has proven in the past, media development is fundamental to promoting good governance at all levels of society.

The following four chapters – drawing on the breakout sessions of the POLIS conference – will take specific aspects of media development and consider them in the light of the above perspectives.

# Media and Power: How can the media hold governments in developing countries, international financial institutions and donors to account?

Session chair:

**Mark Wilson, Panos**

Session rapporteur:

**Orlando Bama**

If the news media is to build greater levels of accountability and reduce corruption, then we must focus on its relationship with governments. The relationship between a national government and its media is – at times – inevitably antagonistic, but most governments are committed in principle to provide the political will and establish the regulatory and enabling environment which allows media the freedom and ‘space’ to speak and act freely. It is when such political will and protected space are absent that the media cannot – or fails – to hold governments to account. Governments need to be persuaded to be committed to the media as a ‘public good’ and to support it through public service legislation and open, independent regulation promoting high journalistic and media standards.

‘Governments need to be persuaded to be committed to the media as a ‘public good.’

With this in mind, four key questions were raised in this session – discussions around those questions form the basis of this report:

- What priority initiatives should international stakeholders take to boost African media’s ability to hold their governments to account?
- How can the media foster ‘deep democracy’ which promotes wider engagement, participation, and accountability in society?
- What would it take to build stronger relationships of trust and vigilance between polity and media in Africa?
- How can the media hold donors and international financial institutions to account more rigorously?

Questions 1 and 4 dominated the debate as participants wrestled with issues of accountability and the prioritization of media development initiatives. These were the main outcomes.

There is a real need to educate journalists, governments, development partners and the general public in both the North and the South *on the central role that communications and media can and must play in political change.*

Development is actually a social and political process and communication is an important part of that.

There was strong consensus that supporting and strengthening media in shifting political dynamics is a *long term process*. As one participant put, 'The process of making the media have an impact on politics is a long and arduous process and needs persistence and involvement by all stakeholders. If you want to be part of this process, you have to be in it for the long term; you have to be ready to hang in there and ride out reversals, some of which can be quite severe.'



It is important to keep the process *grounded in local realities* and to avoid substituting donor-driven agendas for local aspirations, needs and priorities. It was acknowledged that one of the legitimate complaints in the past against media development initiatives has been that too much money was going through donor organisations, 'parachuting experts into Africa without sufficiently involving and supporting the development of local actors,' namely, African journalists, local NGOs, and civil society organisations.

*It was also noted that a systems-wide approach is needed*, encouraging governments to enshrine their commitment to media development by enacting and enforcing freedom of information legislation, building and managing information databases and making them accessible to journalists and the public.

*The role of economics in sustaining and boosting African media capacity to promote good governance and democratic consolidation was underscored.*

As one participant put it, 'You need media legislation and you need press freedom but there is a market-place reality that governments do exploit. The reality is that some governments will

apply market strangulation techniques.’ An example of how independent affordable capital can actually allow media to ride out storms was in Slovakia where a \$300,000 loan helped a newspaper to buy a printing press, thus saving the paper and keeping it in business despite a government ban on printing at existing presses. Not only did the loan help that newspaper weather the crisis, but today that paper is still in business and employs 350 people.

*The importance of community media to create an environment for greater accountability* was emphasized. When we talk about governance, the discussion quickly moves into investigative journalism. But often, all it takes is not journalism but simply opening up local spaces and allowing people to air their views and grievances. So the rise of community media is opening up discursive spaces and transforming the local dynamic. There is a need to tap into what is happening at the local level and feed that into the national debate. An example was given of community radio stations in Indonesia forcing local politicians to maintain good roads, by simply allowing local residents to call in and air their grievances.

*Wider donor agendas threaten the effectiveness of media development initiatives.* For instance, the United States may not be very keen to help develop independent media capacity to hold the government of Pakistan accountable because the US is more interested in supporting President Musharaf’s government as an important strategic ally in the international war on terror. China, whose commitment to independent media is likely to be questionable, is moving in as a major player in development, and affecting the governance agenda in parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa. One participant noted that: ‘China has decided to fund the whole of Liberia’s radio system, but part of the deal is that Liberia Radio will rebroadcast China Radio International.’ However, it was noted that AMDI, STREAM and now AMI processes supporting African media development were driven by African media professionals and must remain demand-driven, from bottom up – donor agendas should not be allowed to obfuscate the tangible needs and real demands initially articulated by African journalists.

‘Wider donor agendas threaten the effectiveness of media development initiatives.’

*One big under-valued partner in the process of communication for development is the African Diaspora. They can and should be made a key element in the global effort to develop media capacity to bring about greater transparency, accountability and responsibility in governance and development back in Africa.*

*It is also important to explore alternative business models for media development and sustainability in Africa. Donor assistance is not a permanent solution over the long term. Examples of new business thinking that could support the international endeavour to develop African media include:*

- Levying a media tax on major multinational corporations operating in Africa and using the proceeds to fund public broadcasting and community media.
- Investing in secondary and tertiary industrial development within Africa to facilitate the processing and trans-formation of raw materials like timber into finished products like paper. Instead of exporting timber from a country like Liberia and importing paper from Europe, why not use Liberian timber to produce paper in Liberia, which could considerably lower the price of paper and improve the business bottom-line for Liberian newspapers?
- Experiment with subscription radio. It was noted that a recent survey in Liberia revealed that many listeners in Liberia would be willing to pay for radio. This is quite surprising, challenging donor community assumptions. All that needs to be done now, in the case of Liberia and perhaps elsewhere on the continent, is to figure out how much radio listeners are willing to pay for quality radio – both good reception and high quality content.



- Encourage and incentivise local investors to invest in the media. As one participant put it, 'There are enough people in Africa with enough money to invest in African media. But commercial media is not often seen as an immediately profitable business venture. International donors and local stakeholders need to figure out a way to help African investors understand that the media is a public good worth investing in; communication must be recognised as a public good that is part of a healthy society.'

*Local content generation needs to be a priority* for media support. As one participant put it: 'Just opening up new TV channels that carry re-runs of American soaps or radio stations that play music all day long is not the kind of media development we should be talking about.' Another participant concurred: 'We need to stimulate a local market for information, and demand for political news...' It was also noted that in many African countries, more than half the population is under 18 years old. Therefore, African media development must focus on media content for young people.

*Gender issues and community empowerment need to be considered carefully.* The media are an important source of power. This conference and specifically this session were built on the assumption that the media are powerful – and that free media are an essential component to the healthy development of a society, and indispensable to any possibility of real accountability within it <sup>1</sup>. Theories of media power posit that media of mass communication, as social institutions, wield the capacity to frame the public debate, set the public agenda and consequently influence political, economic and social outcomes. In *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen famously argued that no famine has ever taken place in a country which has multi-party politics and a free media – the power of the people is supported by independent media <sup>2</sup>. In developing African media, caution is needed to ensure that media power does not end up in the same hands – the powerful – used to perpetuate unequal power relationships to drown out the voices of the whispering majority. Plurality of voices is one way to make sure that power structures are not consolidated or built up. However an apparent plurality of media can also be deceptive.

<sup>1</sup> Many studies concur that free media and the free flow of information and communication are pre-requisites for good governance, sustainable economic growth and human development. See Panos London's consultative paper: 'At the Heart of Change: The Role of Communication in Sustainable Development' for more details. ([www.panos.org.uk/heartofchange](http://www.panos.org.uk/heartofchange)).

<sup>2</sup> Sen, A, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, London, 2004. Further research by the London School of Economics found a 1 per cent increase in newspaper circulation is associated with a 2.4 per cent increase in public food distribution and a 5.5 per cent increase in calamity relief expenditures (Besley, Timothy and Burgess, Robin, 'Political Economy of Government Responsiveness - Theory and Evidence from India', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November 2002).

The increasing concentration of media ownership in many markets means that – despite a plethora of titles and outlets existing – the actual ‘voices’, interests and views reflected may be extremely limited.

Despite the growing popularity of television and the spread of new media, *radio remains the cornerstone of Africa’s communication for development and should continue to be given top priority.* In many African countries, recreational reading is not a mass hobby and for obvious reasons. Besides low levels of literacy, the practice of many people sharing a newspaper limits newspaper circulation, lowers advertising revenues and makes it more difficult for newspapers to survive economically. So, until a culture of reading is developed, until literacy rates improve, until more Africans are able to afford a newspaper, it makes sense to focus more on radio, since radio sets are much less expensive than television sets and since listening to radio does not depend on the availability of electricity, which in many African cities and villages is either non-existent or irregular.

Africa is a vast continent with more than 50 countries and *the domestic political, social and cultural realities vary from country to country.* ‘In some African countries the environment is so repressive that it is not even possible to start talking about media holding government accountable,’ one participant argued. Though outside Africa, the case of Pakistan is quite enlightening. In the fifth year of its liberalisation, Pakistan’s media seems to be crossing a critical threshold in its watchdog function by giving ample coverage to recent nationwide protests against the sacking of the country’s Chief Justice by the executive branch. The media is paying a high price for its determination to hold the government accountable; journalists have been beaten up, TV stations have been invaded and ransacked by police. African media must be prepared to pay a heavy price for its freedom and development, if and when necessary. One participant highlighted the crucial role professional associations and journalist unions played in supporting and strengthening journalists and the media at times of political attack. Support for these groups should be a priority of the international development community. The overall consensus in this session was that

‘Africa is a vast continent with more than 50 countries and the domestic political, social and cultural realities vary from country to country.’

what is too often overlooked is that for a truly independent and pluralistic media to exist, there also needs to be pluralism of media content. Only when media is diverse and pluralistic in both form and content can the competition of voices, opinions, facts and interests be fully engaged; and only when this takes place can governments and the powerful in all sectors of society be held accountable. The quality as well as quantity of media content matters. Achieving quality and an engaged, informed and respected media is a responsibility of the media themselves, and if journalists and media owners are really interested in building greater levels of accountability, they should seek to help build a more informed and engaged citizenry that demands and provides it more effectively as well. Of course, citizens have the right to choose the kind of media they want, but the media has both a responsibility and a real interest in helping to establish a public of educated consumers who are media literate, and know what they want and need.



*Mark Harvey, Internews;  
Mark Wilson, Panos;  
Kaitira Kandjii, Media Institute of  
Southern Africa.*

To be able to perform the tasks suggested by this session, Africa's media needs to be strengthened. Two recent analyses of the media in Africa by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (entitled 'Strengthening African Media' – STREAM) and the BBC World Service Trust's 'African Media Development Initiative' (AMDI) reconfirmed that this must take place through:

*Establishing media freedom and an enabling and supportive regulatory environment; Supporting the development of media infrastructure and long-term financial sustainability; Building media capacity and professionalisation; supporting programming and the improvement of the quality and diversity of content.*

These diagnoses are not new, and both have set out a wide range of recommendations that require sustained efforts from a wide range of stakeholders, including African governments, donors, civil-society and media support NGOs, and media practitioners. They do, however, establish a clear and coherent framework for action which would strengthen the media across the continent and therefore its ability to hold governments, donors and international financial institutions to account. The challenge will be to prioritise these tasks and pursue them in a way that is more

integrated, sustained and effective than in the past. The realities of power and the fundamentally political nature of the media's role in accountability mean that the establishment of media freedom and a protected space for the media to operate in is the foundation upon which all other media development is based.

It is hard to persuade developing world governments into creating and maintaining an environment of greater accountability to the media when the structures and behaviours of inter-governmental organisations (such as the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank) are opaque, unrepresentative and unaccountable to so many stakeholders; and when developed world governments as in the UK are restricting existing Freedom of Information practices rather than extending them<sup>3</sup>. Wealthy countries and international donors signed up in 2005 to the 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness'<sup>4</sup> – a code of good practice – but it is too early to say whether the Declaration's accountability mechanisms function effectively. It is here that media in the developed world can play an important part, by more vigorously exposing the hypocrisies and demanding the highest standards of transparency and accountability of international bodies and their own governments. Creating greater space and opportunities in media in the 'North' for journalists and others in the 'South' to share their views will also expand accountabilities and extend the types of analysis available to readers, listeners and viewers.

'The structures and behaviours of inter-governmental organisations (such as the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank) are opaque, unrepresentative and unaccountable.'

<sup>3</sup> *The Economist*,  
23 December 2006, p. 46

<sup>4</sup> See the OECD 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability': [http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_3236398\\_35401554\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html)

# Media and the Millennium Development Goals: advocacy or debate?

Session chair:

**James Deane, Communication for Social Change Consortium**

Session rapporteur:

**Sarah Higgins**

Among the key tenets of theories of sustainable development is the idea that it 'is a process in which communications flows – among people, and between people and governments – are crucial'<sup>5</sup>. The media is a vital part of communications flows. So surely it will be vital to use the media if we are to realise the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015?

In fact, not enough has been done in the way of serious research concerning the relationships between the media sector, and the organisations and governments that promote developmental policies and messages. This session attempted to address that gap by looking at two broad questions:

- How the media might better promote the MDGs and actively work towards their achievement;
- Whether sufficient or appropriate strategies exist to enable media to subject the MDGs – and the policies chosen to meet them – to informed public debate, particularly in terms that reflected the perspectives and realities of people most affected by them.

These aims entail trying to reconcile a fundamental paradox. One set of strategies require the media to do the bidding of international organisations through the promotion of specific goals. The other is designed to build a vibrant, pluralistic and uncensored public sphere through which media could constructively critique the policies of these organisations.

Regardless of political orientation, it is essential that all sides in these arguments recognise that two entirely separate issues are at stake. Firstly, there

<sup>5</sup> Panos (2007) *At the Heart of Change: The Role of Communication in Sustainable Development*

are attempts to build public support for the benefits of development itself, played out within a media sphere and to multiple audiences, both in developed (donor) nations and developing nations. Secondly, there is the key issue of communication for development, i.e. providing the infrastructure, training, legal support and opportunities required for a developed media sector.

### **‘MDG? Isn’t that a brand of beer?’**

The Millennium Development Goals, outlined in the Millennium Declaration, were created in September 2000, at the centre of a multi-lateral agenda for combating global problems. They represent tangible targets, and provide a coherent framework through which governments, international organisations, and all aspects of civil society can work to achieve sustainable and quantifiable development. The MDGs were the culmination of an unprecedented global consensus in development policy.

At the POLIS session, Salil Shetty, Director of the UNDP Millennium Campaign began by highlighting the successes that could be achieved through this application of international political will, particularly when allied to effective media strategies. But the seeming lack of awareness of the MDGs demonstrated in the vox pops shown by Mr. Shetty (most succinctly in their confusion with a Genuine Draft!) suggested a lack of global awareness of the MDGs, and confusion about their role and relevance.

To begin with, several participants questioned whether the MDGs actually had direct meaning for the individuals, communities and societies who might be affected directly by the problems of poverty, and asked if it was for that reason that so few people were aware of them. After all, as Lara Schlotterbeck of UNICEF remarked, those living in poverty had somewhat more pressing issues to consider than the paper targets of international organisations based thousands of miles away. It was also pointed out, by Bronwen Manby of the Open Society Foundation, that there existed several different sets of international targets, for example, those pertaining to human rights, or to economic rights. ‘The world is bigger than the MDGs’, said Peter Da Costa (SOAS), so why focus on these few goals?



*James Deane, Communication for Social Change Consortium;  
Salil Shetty, UN Millenium Campaign.*

Yet the MDGs are rooted, argued Shetty, in the real problems faced by real people, and are intended to ameliorate the very real issues of global poverty and under-development. He suggested that the technical language itself was unimportant, designed instead to draw countries together under a common umbrella and framework for action through which development could be attained and the targets of the MDGs achieved. Thus, for example, Vietnam had altered and shaped the MDGs to suit its own national needs in a local context. Mongolia had gone so far as to add a ninth goal. Countries had, therefore, not taken the MDGs simply as goals to be achieved, but as starting points from which to develop. Utilising the extensive reach of the media, suggested Shetty, was key to raising this awareness, and essential in tailoring messages to their specific development contexts.

### **Harnessing a Mule?**

The media sector does not merely exist to do the bidding of international organisations. There will always be a tension between free journalism and politically motivated campaigning.

Joe Hanlon of the Open University, for example, argued that the role of the media is to challenge hegemonic assumptions, to probe further, to analyse the MDGs as a contested political space. He felt that the MDGs were deeply embedded in the Washington consensus, transferring money from economic sector help to social welfare. As he pointed out, there is little point in achieving universal primary education (MDG goal number 5) if there are no jobs available for newly educated adults at the end of their education. Media, he suggested, had a responsibility to question and challenge the hegemony of the international nomenclature.

‘The role of the media is to challenge hegemonic assumptions, to probe further, to analyse the MDGs as a contested political space.’

The MDGs, it was argued, had become an a priori assumption of international development vocabulary, taken for granted as ‘depoliticised technical targets’ rather than recognised as the politically motivated and contested elite consensus that they actually represented.

Non-governmental organisations were also criticised for seeking to depoliticise development debate and simply push one unified message upon the media.

As Jim Tanburn noted, in developing nations across Africa NGOs are paying media outlets to convey a particular message, even going so far as to provide content themselves, thus eroding editorial independence and journalistic capabilities. So in a sense journalists had been objectified in the rush for development, rather than being part of its driving force. Media has been developed merely as a means to an end, a tool to achieving the targets of others; itself simply a silent mule.

‘Journalists had been objectified in the rush for development, rather than being part of its driving force.’

### **A Reified, Deified Media?**

But if the media does have its own voice, what should that voice be, and how can media play a contributory role in societies? Peter Da Costa (SOAS) challenged the way that media outlets are often presumed to be acting in the ‘public interest’ when in fact they are commercially motivated self-interested organisations. Moreover, as Tim Allen (LSE) pointed out, a diverse and developed media sector does not itself lift people out of poverty. Social objectives do not always mesh with a free press.

Instead, the media sector is the site of a power struggle: who is allocated space and time to speak, and on which subjects? Currently, the MDGs have occupied that space and are established as the goals of sustainable development. But there is, instead, a complex relationship between independent information sources and communications networks (i.e. the media) and those institutions seeking to disseminate their own messages.

Salil Shetty saw no paradox here, but argued that there remained an urgent need to focus attention on the more pressing issues that the MDGs do represent, namely delivering upon the targets of more anti-retrovirals, condoms, diagnostic health tools, and bednets that will enable those actually affected by poverty to escape it.



For others, there was likewise no problem in the media helping international organisations in the pursuit of specific goals, as these clearly could work. This was on the proviso that it is clearly recognised and understood that such a relationship does not amount to ‘harnessing’ the media and certainly does not represent the sole facet of communications development. As Gavin Anderson argued, communications must be recognised as completely different from development.

## **Communication for Development**

To develop a plural and active media sector, different development strategies are required. To begin with, international organisations themselves must open up to journalists and improve their outward-facing communications protocols. Several commentators criticised donors and development agencies for failing to respond to requests for information for being cumbersome and unwieldy in disseminating information. Poor branding of the MDGs, and poor communications on the part of international organisations, has been to blame for failures in the ‘promotion’ and implementation of the MDGs.



The DfID representative present challenged the assertion that DfID simply promoted its own agenda at the expense of free media. Whilst recognising that DfID has an interest in promoting its own image within Whitehall and to the British electorate there are in-country programs that support media institutions with few strings attached, and certainly no content prescriptions. As John Barker of Article 19 then observed, this was not in itself a problem – ‘there’s nothing wrong with DfID putting its propaganda out’. After all, the ‘role of the Guardian is not to promote a development agenda’. DfID is rightly entitled to its own voice as long as it is not at the expense of independent yet financially supported media in developing nations.

The key problem for DfID, as well as for all international organisations, was the lack of specific articulation of the twin strategies necessary for dealing with the two distinct development strands: getting the good news out at its own successes and for its own strategies, and supporting local media to make politics work for the poor in developing countries. The first strand represents the majority

of current work in the media-development field; the second remains under-developed. As Joe Hanlon remarked, this often comes about due to the way that funding is sourced.

## **NGOs and the media**

The relationship between media and all forms of international and development organisations clearly requires a significant improvement. As several representatives suggested, links between civil society and the media can be described as tenuous at best. Jazz Shaban (Action on Disability and Development) suggested that there was a perception amongst NGOs that media are pursuing stories seeking to manipulate issues, perhaps not always presenting NGOs in a favourable light. This hostility can be overcome where there are long-term relationships between NGOs and journalists which relate individual stories to a wider context and longer timeframe. This is tricky to do, given the cash-strapped nature of most NGOs. James Georgelakis (Everychild) suggested there was considerable difference in the way NGOs viewed media, with those adopting a more rights-based approach being increasingly amenable to the media. Civil society, he said, does not take a vast interest in media, either in developing or developed countries. Moreover, he suggested that beyond building up the media's own capability to grow and its capacity to challenge governments, a concerted effort was also needed to build up the capacity of NGOs and communities to talk TO the media.



## **Conclusions**

There were three main conclusions from these sessions:

First, that debate over the role of the media in development has been confused, principally because two main roles are conflated. One role focuses on the role of the media in building public awareness and support for development strategies; the second on promoting a free, plural, well-trained heterogeneous media sphere that operates as a watchdog and contributes to a vibrant public sphere.

Second, different strategies, partnerships, networks and methodologies are required to meet these two different objectives, and much current

confusion in development policy related to media because this is not happening.

Third, that too few actors are engaged in debates around media for development, and mainstream civil society organisations in particular need to see the media as something more than a deliverer of their messages, and more as a critical component of democratic debate.

'Too few actors are engaged in debates around media for development.'

# Media development in fragile states: where there is an absence of willing or capable government, should we abandon media development altogether?

Session Chair:

**Anna da Silva, BBC World Service Trust**

Session rapporteur and report author:

**Sophie Middlemiss**

This session set out to explore the special challenges for media development players in Africa's fragile states. The usual assumption is that a free media is a good thing. Can there be circumstances when that is not the case? And if so, should interventions go as far as deliberately restricting media freedom? Of course, in practice the choice is rarely so clear. In many fragile states, as session chair Anna da Silva put it, the best media development players can hope for is 'to not make the context worse'. For the BBC World Service Trust's Kari Blackburn, the scale of the challenge means that media development should, if anything, be intensified in fragile states.

With as many as 25 African states classified as 'fragile' by DfID (2005), and Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan all clustered under this broad umbrella, a 'fragile state' remains a contested, catch-all term. But according to DFID (2005), four key indicators mark out 'fragile states'. They are the failure to provide state security guarantees, the absence of effective political control, inability to exercise economic management and insufficient administrative capacity. Each of these factors impacts on the media environment.

For the purposes of the session, we conceptualised media development as operating at four levels: systems (policy, legislation), organisations (media owners/managers, individual ministries), practitioners (journalists, media workers) and populations (audiences). A pervasive emphasis throughout was on the limitations of attempts to advance a blueprint or universally applicable



*Yusuf Garaad, BBC Somali Service;  
Anna Da Silva, BBC World Service  
Trust, Dapo Oyewole, Centre for  
African Policy and Peace Strategy.*

formula for media development strategy guided our discussions. Participants had been working across African countries as diverse as Uganda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and Somalia, and all brought different experiences and insights. As DFID's Graham Teskey said, 'there is no question of a preconceived strategy in a particular country; it has all got to be absolutely context specific'. Fragile media Dapo Oyewole (Centre of African Policy and Peace Strategy) argued that the relationship between fragile states and fragile societies is interdependent. In some fragile states social ties remained functional and cohesive, and skills and independence of mind were retained in spite of the 'fragility' of the state itself. The relationship of media to fragile governance is similarly variable. At some times and in some places, media reinforces governments' authority; in others, it constrains. Likewise, media workers in fragile states can be both empowered and crippled by the actions of their governments.

On many indicators – often on basic logistical and financial levels – media in the fragile states is also fragile. In the worst cases, freedom of movement is inhibited and journalists live in fear of their lives. Colin Bickler (City University) advocated journalists' associations as organisations for mutual defence, urging donors to 'support journalists to form groups for 'self-protection''. Media could be made fragile by lack of resources, lack of training, and lack of skilful and responsible journalists.

'Media in the fragile states is also fragile.'

Governments in fragile states often contribute to the weakness or fragility of local media. If the government is 'fragile' in the sense that it lacks the capacity to carry out its basic functions, it is unable to invest properly in media. And if it is *unwilling* to perform its core functions, it can deliberately constrain the space within which journalists operate, using prohibitive legislation, tendentious censorship, and straightforward use of force.

However, are governments in fragile states necessarily a hindrance? A paper from the Crisis States Research Centre (LSE) in 2005 <sup>6</sup> has challenged what it took to be an unquestioned orthodoxy among media development players and donor communities. This orthodoxy, it said, emphasised the need for an independent, pluralistic media to act as watchdog over a

<sup>6</sup> Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics: 'Why Templates for Media Development do not work in Crisis States' (2005)

government which was fragile in the sense that it was *unwilling*. Within this framework, media were seen as forcing unwilling governments into accountability and deeper responsiveness to their electorates.

The CSRC paper drew attention to the challenges of the other type of fragility (states' inability, not lack of will). Here, it argued, there is a need to build societal consensus around the nascent government, minimising tensions, particularly in the aftermath of conflict, instead of amplifying them, using the press and broadcast media as loudspeakers. Some level of constraint would therefore be necessary to contain opposing viewpoints and construct consensus and strengthen the central state in the aftermath of conflict. The CSRC contribution underlines the fact that media's effects can be destructive as well as constructive. Just as it can give people vital information, so it can spread 'misinformation'. Tim Allen (LSE) implied that not only governments but media too – and fragile media in fragile states particularly – often depart from their desired functions. Moreover, in fragile states, the risks of their doing so are magnified. The answer therefore may be for media development players to focus on skills training and capacity building.

'Media's effects can be destructive as well as constructive. Just as it can give people vital information, so it can spread 'misinformation'.'

## Media as opposition

Most participants were aware that media in fragile states can often fall short of the ideal by being, on occasion, inflammatory, sensationalist, divisive, and inaccurate. As Dapo Oyewole put it, 'media is not always a sacred Fourth Estate'. Media could be heavily politicised in fragile states, used as a mouthpiece either by the government or by the opposition. Dapo Oyewole, for example, spoke of media 'working as an advocate for the people against the state' in Nigeria during the 1980s. In a 'failing' state where the government is unwilling to protect its people, and media independence is under threat, one of the first things competing political factions do is seek control of the radio and TV stations which give the power to control the thinking of the people as to who holds the reins of power or not.

So when the media functions as a political opposition, the role can be both empowering and problematic: 'One of the greatest victims of a fragile

state is the opposition – the state clamps down on opposition, who are gagged or silenced,’ he explained, with the consequence that ‘media ‘becomes’ the voice of the opposition’. This can be especially problematic for external donors if they support that oppositional media in a fragile state.

Peter Mwesige (Makerere University) preferred to see media as oppositional only insofar as it limits the government’s control, not because it endorses political alternatives: ‘Are the journalists in fact the opposition or are they just giving accurate, fair, balanced coverage’ which ‘positions them de facto as the opposition?’

## Media regulation

The dilemma over regulation is acute in fragile states, where governments may be untrustworthy and the infrastructure for independent regulation lacking.

Which is preferable, participants asked – to entrust media with self-regulation, or to regulate content via an independent or government-affiliated body? Real contention emerged over how far and by whom media outputs should be constrained. Yusuf Garaad, Head of the BBC Somali Service, was resistant to the idea that censorship could be permissible under any circumstances: ‘Censorship I would not at all advocate, in any circumstances. I don’t see where it works. If people use information in a civil war based on sectarian or ethnic issues, then, there’s a problem, and that’s the know-how [of journalists], and that’s where the training comes in.’ He wanted to make a distinction between the provision of information, which he saw as media’s primary function, and the communication of perspectives, stating: ‘spreading hatred is not [disseminating] *information*’. Instead, looking to the post-conflict phase, Yusuf pointed to the example of Somalia in the mid-1990s, suggesting that the fact that dissatisfied citizens could phone into a radio show and voice their grievances defused potential conflict and substituted for violence after the civil war. Allowing free expression and exchange of views was a better way than censoring to regulate the tenor of political discourse conducted in the media, he suggested:



‘Once radio stations started to appear in Mogadishu ... after a time they became a platform for people to express their views,’ he said. ‘I believe those people involved in the fighting – if they can challenge a politician over the radio by phoning in, that can ease the tension.’

From the opposing viewpoint, Tim Allen critiqued the idea of the indiscriminate liberalisation of the media landscape, calling for reappraisal of a central assumption cited in one of the conference briefing papers that ‘media freedom is central for any debate on the role of media in development’: ‘It strikes me that’s a very dangerous statement. The crucial issue in fragile states is how do you constrain certain information flows? You don’t want people to be promoting hate speech. Media intervention means that you keep them going down one route and prevent them going down a certain other route; in other words, censorship is crucial. If we’re going to talk seriously about media interventions in crisis states, we have to talk about how censorship is going to be introduced.’

But is this censorship or regulation? Independent media consultant Mary Myers accepted the risks of irresponsible reporting in fragile situations and agreed that some control of media output was permissible:

‘I think Tim is being deliberately provocative by describing this as censorship but there is a need for regulation in these situations’

If that is so, should a government-affiliated body have control of regulation, or a media-led body? The issue of who decides whether government or journalists’ associations take the lead in regulatory mechanisms cuts to the heart of the media development dilemma in fragile states: in any given context media development organisations will have to approach the question with a *priori* position on whether the government possesses the legitimacy to be a partner in their work or whether they are setting out to counterbalance its influence.

## **Building consensus**

One way through the impasse on the appropriateness of censorship or constraint may be to consider the categories of fragile states.



Paul Mitchell (World Bank) described three categories: 'falling', 'fallen', and 'getting back up again'. Some levels and types of media development intervention become appropriate at different stages in the process of state rehabilitation. It's possible that the challenge to liberal ideas of a 'free media' are most pertinent in the post-conflict phase, when fragile states are 'picking themselves up again'. In such circumstances it may be possible to argue that building consensus around government by limiting the proliferation of dissenting political perspectives can be desirable.

At other phases in the lifecycle of fragility, other imperatives are more pressing. In falling states, external assistance has to operate on the basis of what Paul Mitchell called 'triage', focusing on 'what you can do to stop them falling'. Crisis response action should centre on 'getting information in'. Providing vital information in the service of meeting material needs is critical in rapidly deteriorating situations. For example, in Darfur, explained session chair Anna da Silva, the BBC World Service Trust delivered humanitarian aid by using the airwaves to give life-saving health-related information.

### **Fragile journalism**

There are risks of irresponsible reporting in fragile situations and a need for responsible, professional journalism. All journalists have responsibilities as well as rights and there may be certain things that simply should not be broadcast. More generally, using information sensibly and with good judgement can be critical and media development practitioners have a strong role to play here in training people in how to act as responsible journalists.

'All journalists have responsibilities as well as rights and there may be certain things that simply should not be broadcast.'

Journalists in fragile states need material support, too. Duncan Furey (IWPR) emphasised the 'talent and skill of journalists' in Zimbabwe would make all the difference in the emergent phase when the country is able to pick itself back up again: 'They just can't do it now in Zimbabwe but when they get the chance they can turn out great stories overnight. When it becomes possible to print papers, it really will happen – they don't need training, they just need support.'

Cultivating a kernel of talent among local journalists within small-scale projects which go on to function as beacons of media excellence takes time, but as demonstrated by the BBC World Service Trust, it can be the a direct way of transforming the media landscape. By trusting journalists to do a good job, and focusing on encouraging them to do so by holding out examples of what constitutes stand-out journalism, donors and media players can inspire individuals to become ‘professional’ in their work.

### **Donors and fragile governments**

One approach for donors to manage risk is to focus on the legislative level of implementation of media development strategy. For some donors, governments have to be central partners. Donors like the World Bank, by mandate, cannot do business in a country without a government. Media NGOs like Article 19’s approach rely on government buy-in. As John Barker (Article 19) put it, ‘you have to convince the government [your media development work] is their idea’.



Many donors prioritise legislative frameworks because they have the virtue of seeming to bind governments to a concrete commitment, promising more permanence than a single isolated project. If a provision (for freedom of expression, access to information, or right of reply, for example) is enshrined in the law, wronged parties have recourse to legal frameworks to back them up.

But commitments on paper lack leverage without implementation. As John Barker (Article 19) put it:

‘at Article 19, our more legal programme will go in and try and use international pressure to work with the government to put frameworks in place. Of course the downside of that is, they’re only frameworks. You then have to go back and try & get some local citizen involvement to make sure those are actually implemented’

### **The art of the possible**

Risks and the opportunities for media development are magnified in fragile states. In these conditions, the appropriate response is to do what you can. Practising the art of the possible, as Kari Blackburn of the BBC World Service Trust underlined, requires media development players to be ‘very realistic, and learn from our failures’. Over-ambitious past

projects had included an attempt to develop a public service broadcaster for Rwanda on the BBC model as the state was 'getting back up again'.

Being both realistic and opportunistic is vital:

'The danger is you'll do nothing if you insist on a holistic strategy. We might have to be opportunistic, and say: we recognise that the environment is not fertile for a comprehensive legislative-regulatory framework. But let's fund it, and see what happens. Now I think that's a perfectly legitimate strategy.'

Graham Teskey (DFID)

'Being both realistic and opportunistic is vital.'

## **Local ownership**

If donors want to generate sustainable outcomes, leaving a lasting legacy, their commitment to local 'ownership' must be sincere. Africans must be in the driving seat as far as possible, for example, through the exchange of regional perspectives on media development and governance work.

Although many donors continue to be nervous about surrendering control of the outcomes of their media development strategy, successful media development must be sustained over the longer term, and in fragile states donor time-frames are often too short and based on an 'emergency aid' model.

Ultimately, transferring ownership of processes and structures to local actors and achieving lasting change in the media environment will rely on audiences who should, in the long run, demand more of their media. Both governance and development assistance derive their normative power from the appeal to serving 'electorate' or 'audience'. The final element of media development strategy must be the cultivation of audiences with high expectations.

## **Evaluation, research and education**

At the start of any intervention, audience research will help media development players to build a relevant, contextualised strategy. Designing a strategy carefully tailored to context, which can have a sustained impact, requires formative audience research. The intervention must be designed in the most located, detailed way possible. Only a thorough evaluation through background research could create a resolutely targeted strategy which would maximise the chances that audiences

will ‘respond’ as hoped to better (more diverse, balanced, independent) reporting and broad-casting, and come to expect more of both their media and their governments.

Academic research centres are needed to carry out the formative research. Michael Keating (Centre for Democracy and Development) explained how his project had approached its research in difficult conditions in Liberia: ‘we, and the Press Union of Liberia, directly, through the university paid the students to conduct audience research – we just did it, we didn’t ask the Liberian government’.

A well-designed strategy entails continuous research cycles keeping media development work close to the people in whose name it is conducted. Because of the brain drain in fragile states this may have to be led by regional or international NGOs with experience in this kind of structured research. Certainly there is a role for a body with international reach to co-ordinate best practice and new thinking in this area.

Thereafter, focusing on educating audiences about the proper functions of media is essential. The extent to which media is able to perform its ideal functions will depend on the relationship between media and society. A wholesale culture change is necessary in many places for audiences to realise that media is in some way for them. If populations become empowered, ‘owning’ and *demanding* audiences, expectations of media as well as of governments will be higher and, all being well, performance improve.

As donor involvement recedes – and, preferably, earlier – audiences must become the agents of expectation. This transfer should take place long before development players withdraw: ownership is critical to the legitimacy and sustainability of media development work. And to give audiences the best grounding for eliciting better performance from their media, media development players must understand and represent the attitudes of audiences as closely as possible when they design their initial strategy.

‘Focusing on educating audiences about the proper functions of media is essential.’

Fragile states offer some of the most difficult dilemmas for media development. And they also demand the most structured and well thought-out responses. But ultimately, in the field, it is the pragmatic and specific nature of any intervention that offers the most realistic hope of a positive impact.

# Media and New Technology: Can the digital revolution boost the impact of African media on development and governance?

Session chair:

**Gerald Milward-Oliver, The Anima Centre**

Session rapporteur:

**Malgorzata Zielinska**

In developed countries there is a debate raging about whether new media technologies can deliver social or political benefits. Why should Africa be different? With its economic and historic challenges Africa may not appear to be well-placed to take advantage of digital communications advances. Consider the lack of infrastructure, the need for further technological deregulation and issues related to literacy and skills. And yet there is no doubting that new technology can contribute to developments within the African media, and to the media's role in enhancing governance and democratic processes in Africa. This session sought ways of thinking through approaches to the threats and opportunities of new media technology.



Five key themes emerged:

Transition from old to new media

The potentials and limitations of the new media  
in relation to governance and development

Developing Infrastructure

Decreasing Regulation

Improving Trust

## **A transition from 'old media' to 'new media'?**

It is often assumed that, whatever the circumstances, new technology should be used. Sometimes, however, it makes sense not to. People must be cautious with their emphasis on the new: it is all too easy to push ahead while forgetting to expand and use existing technologies. 'Why are we so fixated on the usefulness of the Internet?' asked one session participant: it's a pertinent question. Old media continues to dominate media communications across

Africa, and many would argue that community radio continues to be the most effective and wide-reaching form of media development. New technology is only a tool, and people's use of it is what makes a difference.

Distinctions between old and new media can therefore be a distraction. While no-one disputes that new technology-driven media offers some actual and a number of potential benefits, the advantages of old technologies and old practices should always be recognised. It follows that a 'marriage' between old and new media is called for, rather than a battle between the two. The focus should not be on the shift to new media, but on an expansion of choices, with people driving change within the framework of existing conditions.

### **Harnessing new media to improve good governance and empower citizens**

Despite the potential benefits offered by new media, we must never forget that innovative technologies are Janus-faced. They can be developed and used in ways that may either be empowering or disempowering. The tension between these two possibilities depends on the context in which they are used – political, cultural and economic. So the role of new media technologies in enhancing democratic debate and citizen empowerment across Africa is by no means certain. Much old and mainstream media in the developing world continues to be state-controlled or regulated, and so faces a challenging future. But with new technologies, alternatives to government-controlled media become more accessible. The role of media development initiatives should be to facilitate the creation of viable alternatives to state-controlled media, while also countering tendencies towards large-scale media monopolies.

'A 'marriage' between old and new media is called for, rather than a battle between the two.'

'Innovative technologies are Janus-faced. They can be developed and used in ways that may either be empowering or disempowering.'

Two young Kenyans found it difficult to hold their MPs accountable because information about the work of the Kenyan Parliament is so difficult to get hold of. They set up Mazlendo (Swahili for patriot) – a volunteer project run as a blog. They did it because they ‘feel that Kenyans have a right to know (and) need to take a more active role in determining their country’s role’. They also did it because the technology gave them a way to get past what they describe as a closed society that works on a presumption ‘that the public does not have a right to know unless they have special permission’. In other words, they did it because they could and they gave themselves permission.

Source: Polis Briefing Paper

Care needs to be taken to foster an environment in which new technologies can empower citizens, rather than be diverted for the benefit of those in power (the introduction of Chinese Internet monitoring technology in Zimbabwe, for example). With this in mind, international donors should focus on fostering an environment of citizen empowerment, which in turn will provide for good governance and transparency in Africa – and new media is clearly an important tool in the process. Donors also must be willing to deepen their understanding of the media environment and, at times, to take risks. The media environment is not a planned environment – and people use new technologies in unexpected ways. It is important to understand what people in Africa actually do with the Internet, mobile phones, and other technologies. The potential of new technology must be developed in indigenous and contextualised forms. In the same way, while new media that make use of these technologies – from SMS to blogging – undeniably create multiple opportunities for online discussion, we need to understand who is talking to whom. If the new media simply replicate discussion amongst elite groups, encouragement should be given to involving those – the vast majority – who remain excluded. Often where communities are mobilised and have found a voice, they may not be listened to. We cannot presume that new media equates with empowerment; this is something which we must actively promote. So who can access and take advantage of available resources and information? Who can produce and disseminate information? How effectively are new technologies reaching people? Do people know how

‘We cannot presume that new media equates with empowerment; this is something which we must actively promote.’



to use the new technologies presented to them? Is there real change? The Internet has its limits in the African context – and not only as a result of an inadequate power and telecommunications infrastructure. Literacy rates in many African countries are very low (ranging from 16 to 89 percent, dependent on country), so any written media have a limited audience. Hence the popularity and potential of community radio.

There are about 33m Internet users in the whole of Africa – less than four percent penetration, against over 38% penetration in Europe and 60% in North America. Of those 33m, more than 12m are north of the Sahara, 5m in South Africa and 5m in Nigeria – leaving less than 18m split between another 50 countries, where penetration rates are as low as 0.2%.  
Source: Polis Briefing Paper

However, the Internet is potentially a powerful tool and can bring significant change to developing communities. It offers a two-way exchange, one in which information can be accessed, but also disseminated, by those who wish their voices to be heard. As a result, there is new growth in African dynamic news aggregation sites, as well as citizen journalism. In addition, technology offers a route for the African diaspora to maintain contact. A conference participant from Kenya explained how he can influence the opinions of family and friends, simply through the use of SMS. He also noted that many opposition politicians retain an active involvement in the politics of the country, even when resident abroad, thanks to new media technologies.

### **Establishing infrastructure to realise the potential of new media**

Despite promising developments for the provision of more substantial bandwidth joining west, east and southern African coastlines to the global telecommunications network, the existing power and communications infrastructure across Africa needs significant improvement if new technologies are to be effective. Frequent power outages can be just as restricting as the limited availability and very high costs of bandwidth. Given that an increasing volume of material available online – particularly when produced within developed countries – is based on an assumption of high



*Gerald Milward-Oliver,  
The Anima Centre*

bandwidth, it follows that many of those who can only access the Internet via dial-up cannot take advantage of much of the information that is present. There is also concern that the private sector hinders the potential for technology in Africa. Technical training must be included if the technology is to be used to maximum effect and to the benefit of African people. At the same time, media development initiatives need to be sufficiently funded, particularly those, such as community radio, that depend on technical equipment. The normal three-year funding stream is frequently insufficient – a point recognised by a number of participants from international donors who acknowledged that valuable projects are all too often discontinued as a result of donors' financial policies. Lessons can be learned from the development of new technologies elsewhere in the world. However, business models that have been successful in the developed world will not necessarily be applicable to other contexts. At times, alternative models must be introduced that do not lead to high costs and unaffordable access to networks. Finally, understanding what is already available and using it effectively is crucial. People often forget to take advantage of the technology that is already there. As one participant commented, 'the bandwidth missing is the one between the human ears'. Another told of an organisation equipped with Internet technology that used a driver to go up and down a mountain to transfer information instead of using an Internet café in the driver's village. Media development is not only about putting in new technologies: it is also about informing people of how the technologies present can be used for maximum benefit. For example, an American journalist working in Africa told of the use of bicycle messengers who carry data embedded in barcodes. Deregulating to increase the impact of new media

'The new technologies offer enormous possibilities for increasing human freedom and social justice. The origin of the internet, designed as a way of collaborating without any central control, makes it an excellent tool for this, and because the internet has developed in an unregulated way on the basis of collaboration, it is not controlled. Not yet. But this situation is unlikely to last. In fact, it is under threat from governments and multinational companies, through legislation,

regulation, monopoly control, legal pressures, and intellectual property restrictions. The new ICTs will not be new for very long, and they might not continue to be as free as they are now. The possibilities they offer can be taken away from us, unless we actively participate in the inevitable regulatory process that any new technology experiences.’ ([www.apc.org](http://www.apc.org))

Deregulation is a prerequisite for a free media. However, what models of regulation should be adopted for new media? Do the models used in Europe and North America work for Africa? The mobile phone system in Africa works, in part because it is operated by a number of private sector competitors. There was consensus that donor and western governments can help to maintain pressure on African governments to further deregulate the media and communications sectors. How can governments be persuaded that new media cannot be bottled away for ever; that constructive engagement will pay dividends? Persuading African governments of the merits of deregulation itself will have a major impact on the ability of the media to monitor, report on and influence governance-related issues.

### **Building trust: a role for new media?**

Whichever technology is used, whether old or new, media success must ultimately rely on the generation of trust and credibility. Readers and listeners need to trust journalists, and journalists need politicians and civil servants who can be trusted. But there is a problem with trust as a catchall. People choose to accept versions of events from media that they trust – but those media may simply be feeding the reader’s/ listener’s/viewer’s existing prejudices. As far as new media is concerned, the filter of editorial selection is, in many cases, missing. An increasing number of citizens are given the power to become journalists. But with power comes responsibility, and as the technology enables individuals across Africa to become increasingly empowered in their relationships with government, so they must learn how to use that power constructively and judiciously. This is an issue that concerns media worldwide and is not specific to Africa. Many writers of blogs and other new media tools will wish to establish a bond of trust with their readers. And if they breach that trust, those same tools

‘Persuading African governments of the merits of deregulation itself will have a major impact on the ability of the media to monitor, report on and influence governance-related issues.’

provide the remedy – for others to go online and expose the breach.

## Conclusion

New technology offers additional tools that can also be used by governments and business elites intent on restricting empowerment. New technologies can, however, be harnessed to an advantage. To do this, the infrastructural needs of the continent must be addressed, both in terms of accessing and disseminating information. New media technologies depend on an assured power and communications infrastructure, which is not currently available. Equally African governments must be persuaded of the virtues of a free, private-sector led and competitive media sector, taking on board the potential of 'old technologies' but increasingly embracing new technologies too. There needs to be a much more thorough-going analysis by donors of new media benefits and actions that can promote them. In many ways it is a good thing that many new media initiatives such as the growth of mobile phone use or pan-African satellite TV has taken place outside of the media development industry. This implies a growth that is organically linked to demand and a real market force. However, that does not mean that interventions should ignore the potential of new technology in enhancing the political and developmental impact of the media itself.



'It is also apparent that all the journalists surveyed are not inert objects waiting on external salvation. They are proactive professionals who use their own initiative in utilising ICTs in order to better do their jobs. This is through actions like visiting cybercafés at own cost to do email, deploying cellphones at their own expense and being sceptical of the content on the Web. Accordingly, any interventions need to start from this point – not from an assumption of intrinsic inadequacies, passivity and backwardness.'

Source: 'What the Newsroom Knows: Managing Knowledge within African Newspapers' © 2006 'Highway Africa'. Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies, Grahamstown. Editors: Guy Berger & Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda.

## The need for evidence

There is a desperate shortage of up to date research on the positive impacts of new technology. Just because it does not rival conventional radio, for example, does not mean we should not recognise the potential of the internet as a catalyst for change to a more open networked journalism for Africa. These are the areas where research might provide useful data to provide the basis for future interventions.

'There is a desperate shortage of up to date research on the positive impacts of new technology.'

- What patterns of media production and use are becoming predominant in different contexts?
- What are the information and communication needs, priorities and values of the poor and how do these intersect with journalism practice?
- Are the voices of the poor actually being heard?
- Are new networks of journalism practitioners being formed around new media, how effective are they?
- Are journalists playing a role as information intermediaries, for whom and with what effect?
- Are those living in poverty better able to affect their own circumstances as a result of the spread of new information and communication resources?

POLIS will be focussing on these questions in its continuing work on journalism, new technology, governance and development in Africa.

# Making governance work for the poor

Making governance work for the poor is the central theme of our third White Paper, and the media has a powerful part to play in making this happen. Providing information, encouraging debate, giving people a voice and helping hold governments to account - these are just some of the ways in which an independent and pluralistic media can contribute to better governance.



*Sue Owen  
Director-General, Corporate  
Performance, DFID*

DFID supports media development across the continent. However, development agencies don't have all the answers and the POLIS conference provided DFID with a welcome opportunity to listen to some of the experts working in this sector.

The day led to some challenging debates that practitioners in this field need to consider further in order for media in Africa to realise its full potential. To give two examples: in fragile states should the media be supported as entry-points arise, or is it better to insist on a holistic strategy to strengthening media, even if this means waiting until the environment is more stable? Is media necessarily a priority amongst competing demands for donor support, and what are the lessons for getting the sequencing right? The debates are on-going, and it is a dialogue in which DFID looks forward to taking part.

There was much interest as to what DFID is doing in the area of media and communication. Our work can be summarised into three different strands:

1. Supporting the development of media – in recognition of the role of an independent, pluralistic and free media in strengthening democratic governance
2. Communications for development – supporting the use of communication in development policy and practices as an essential tool for meeting the MDGs
3. Corporate communications - facilitating information and knowledge exchange with key internal and external groups about DFID's work.

The large part of DFID's support to media development is country-led. Decisions are taken by country programmes, in response to local

contexts. For instance, DFID has a vibrant and well-established media programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo, encompassing support for the country's official media regulator, community radio and training activities. DFID's country-led work is complemented by some central initiatives. Earlier this year, DFID launched a £100 million Governance and Transparency Fund, with the aim of supporting civil society and media groups. DFID also continues to work on media and governance policy issues, and the conference provided some valuable pointers on policy areas that DFID could usefully develop.

In the area of communications for development, DFID works with a range of partners including the World Bank and the BBC World Service Trust. In Nigeria, DFID has funded a popular radio drama, 'Story, Story,' set in a fictional market place, and tackling issues such as corruption, poverty and ethnic tension.

It is also DFID's job to get good stories out on how development works, and this separate category of work falls under the heading of corporate communications. We have a responsibility to report, including to the British public, on how money is being spent, and what impact it is having on poverty reduction.

Finally, I'd like to reiterate Myles Wickstead's message to the international news media on the need for positive reporting from Africa. There are many stories of hope, improvement and success from the continent and they should be reported. We need to challenge unfair perceptions of Africa and get across the good stories.

Many thanks to POLIS for organising this conference. It was an extremely useful day for me personally, and for my colleagues who were there in force. In particular, it was great to hear from African media professionals, including on the African Media initiative. We took valuable feedback on board from those who have worked with DFID or encountered DFID media programmes across the continent, and will continue to listen and learn so that we can better support this dynamic and growing sector.

Sue Owen

Director-General, Corporate Performance, DFID

'There are many stories of hope, improvement and success from the continent and they should be reported. We need to challenge unfair perceptions of Africa and get across the good stories.'

# The view from the Nigerian newsroom

**Laura Kyrke-Smith**

POLIS brought together two contrasting Nigerian journalists to debate the state of their work with a leading British journalist who has covered Africa for the last 30 years. Ibiba Don Pedro and Shola Oshunkeye have both won the CNN African Journalist of the Year award. Jon Snow presents Channel 4 News and is RTS Presenter of the Year. At the lunchtime open session they discussed the dilemma for journalists who seek freedom of expression but who also want to change society.

Ibiba, an independent journalist who abandoned the newsroom for a freelance writing and reporting career, argues that in Nigeria it is impossible to be a robust critical journalist in a news organisation because of commercial and political pressure. The funding for adverts comes from the political parties and from the oil giants – exactly the people she writes against: ‘The media business is too serious to be left to capital, you know. I go against the flow. The media needs people like me.’ She knows the consequences of her work could be dangerous, but remains fearless: ‘It’s like, well, if I’m going to die I’m going to die doing my work... what am I going to do about it?’

In contrast Shola Oshunkeye, Editor of Nigeria’s ‘The Sun’, is proud of his country’s media: ‘The independent media is as old as Nigeria itself. Media was the vanguard of the struggle for independence. So that tradition has trickled down over the years... what we have essentially in Nigeria is advocacy journalism’. Shola thinks there is hope for the press. He admits: ‘The government in Nigeria is the biggest spender, in terms of news and business opportunities, and it also exerts some control. So if you are not criticising constructively, you are likely to be shut out.’ But he has faith in the ability of journalists and editors such as himself to resist the pressures exerted on them.





His paper's model – and namesake – is the UK's 'The Sun'. He features blazing headlines, shocking exposes and even a page 3 girl (though he insists she doesn't reveal much). For Shola, this is exemplary of how the press can contribute to political and social debate in Nigeria: 'There is no crime in imitating a good product... there's no crime in knowing what your market wants, and going for it.'

Should we lament the dearth of quality independent papers? Should we be concerned that it is left to the tabloid press and the independent campaigning journalists to hold people to account and to create debate? Not at all. Ibiba and Shola should serve to demonstrate both the dynamism of many of Africa's journalists and the sheer diversity and plurality of its media landscape. They should give us confidence in the ability of countries such as Nigeria to develop their own exciting forms of journalism.

Of course, Shola and Ibiba both say they are working against extreme difficulties. Nigeria is not a stable market for a free news media. They face political and practical obstacles, and pressure must be exerted on the Nigerian and other governments to permit serious political and oppositional journalism a greater voice. But what Shola and Ibiba prove is that a healthy media thrives on a plurality of outlets and opinions, and on genuinely popular contentious debate.



*Jon Snow, Channel 4 News; Shola Oshunkeye, The Sun Nigeria; Ibiba Don Pedro, independent Nigerian journalist*

# The future of African journalism

**Charlie Beckett and Laura Kyrke-Smith**

What emerges from this report reflects the conference. There is a great diversity of experiences, perspectives, and activities involved in media development in Africa. Yet despite this range of views a framework becomes visible. We have a structure for continuing debate, if not a specific list of recommendations. Those should be left to the actors in the field such as AML. But by putting journalism back at the heart of debate let us pull these thoughts together.

## Putting journalism at the heart of debate

The media landscape in which we operate is changing rapidly, and journalism itself is adapting to new circumstances. Journalism is not a given. It changes according to the context it is in. Understanding the shape of the media environment – and where it is heading – is a core component for developing new and better strategies for media development in Africa. By focussing in on journalism we do not seek to exclude other forms of topical communication or forms for the dissemination of information and debate. As we shall explain, we believe that this conference has highlighted how news journalism is changing in a way that allows the possibility for it to be better connected with the diverse flows of informational discourse that contribute to governance and development.

Globally, we are witnessing a transition from conventional modern journalism to networked journalism<sup>7</sup>. Conventional journalism is hierarchical, professionalized, and formulaic: it has deadlines, packages, and messages for its mainly passive consumers. Networked journalism retains the core functions of journalism: to report, analyse and comment, and to filter, edit and disseminate. But there are key differences, too. Networked journalism changes from a linear process to networked interactivity, where there is constant communication and exchange of information between journalists and society.



**'Globally, we are witnessing a transition from conventional modern journalism to networked journalism.'**

<sup>7</sup> Charlie Beckett, *How can new technologies be harnessed to create an enhanced public service media environment?* (British Council 'Politics and Media' conference, Sarajevo, 2007)

In Africa, as elsewhere, this takes many forms, from talk radio phone-ins to internet blogs. It is new digital technologies which offer greatest scope for developing networked journalism. They reduce production and distribution costs, save time, widen access and improve interactivity. In his contribution, Gerald Milward-Oliver rightly acknowledges the current limits to internet and mobile phone technology on the African continent. But infrastructure is improving, and the future of African media inevitably lies in these newer forms of communication. And so networked journalism will increasingly be the way that journalism is done. The question is whether the social and political benefits of properly networked journalism will be realised.

### **Fostering an ‘empowered communications environment’**

Understanding journalism as networked is imperative for fostering what James Deane has termed an **‘empowered communications environment’**. Networked journalism is inherently ‘consumer led’, creating patterns of interaction which oblige the media to build in constant and pre-emptive communication with its audiences. As New Media commentator Jeff Jarvis argues: ‘journalists realise that they are less the manufacturers of news than the moderators of conversations that get to the news.’<sup>8</sup> News-making is a shared and incorporative process in which all are involved: communications in this respect is a public good, and the media facilitates a **public service**.

By putting consumers, citizens, clients first, networked journalism allows African media development to become **African-owned** in the broadest possible sense. It puts African media not just under the ownership of AMI, journalists, or politicians, but in the hands of African society as a whole.

Networked journalism also addresses the **concern for context** which pervades the contributions to this report. As Anna Da Silva’s contribution highlighted, drawing up a targeted media strategy must begin with an in-depth appreciation of what is most needed, making audience evaluation and constant assessment of impacts critical. A starting point of networked journalism would push this point

‘The question is whether the social and political benefits of properly networked journalism will be realised.’

‘By putting consumers, citizens, clients first, networked journalism allows African media development to become **African-owned** in the broadest possible sense.’

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Jarvis, *Networked Journalism* (2006) <http://www.buzzmachine.com/2006/07/05/networked-journalism/>

further, ultimately striving to foster a media that is less about impact and evaluation and more an ongoing process of exchange. Media development processes which are consumer-driven, but fundamentally interactive, cannot but accommodate the peculiarities of multiple 'African realities'.<sup>9</sup>

But if the public is now the producer then they must be empowered and educated to engage and create journalism. An empowered communications environment works to strengthen civil society in this way, educating 'audiences' to be media literate, strengthening capacity for research in universities, and encouraging action to promote development and good governance by engaging people in public debate. This dimension of the communications environment is particularly important in Africa, where informal face-to-face communications, unmediated, continue to determine how people react and interact in society. Media literacy must be included as an educational goal. In a recent speech to the UN, LSE Media and Communications Professor Robin Mansell highlighted the importance of increasing media literacy:

'This potential depends hugely on widespread media literacy. Media literacy is often seen as providing people with a means to protect themselves from harmful aspects of media. But our engagements with close and distant others are mediated increasingly by our new media environment and this means that media literacy is essential for participation, active citizenship, learning, and cultural expression.'<sup>10</sup>

'This potential depends hugely on widespread media literacy.'

## Dispersing responsibility and building trust

Networked journalism is no quick-fix solution, however. It carries with it important new moral responsibilities and ethical choices.

Professor Roger Silverstone, the inspiration behind POLIS, had important teachings in this respect. The '**mediapolis**' – the mediated space in which we communicate with others – is both a moral world, in which there are a set of values to which people aspire, and an ethical dimension, guiding the way in which this set of principles is applied in specific contexts.

<sup>9</sup> Professor Jackson Banda, see previous section of report

<sup>10</sup> Robin Mansell, *Crossing Boundaries with New Media* (UN General Assembly debate on 'Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities', 2007)

It is no longer the responsibility of a single editor to decide how a story should be run, how the actors should be portrayed and what messages should be told. If journalism is networked, the set of moral principles, and the ethical choices within, are determined by all those who are part of the circles of media interactivity. **Responsibility is dispersed** among an unprecedented range of actors.

In James Deane's contribution, it is noted that NGOs are paying media outlets to convey a particular message, or directly providing content, subsequently eroding the media's capabilities. In the same section, international organisations such as UNDP and DFID are criticised for failing to respond to requests for information and being unwieldy in finally disseminating it. Paul Mitchell criticises donors for being 'supply driven'. Governments across Africa continue to put constraints on access for information and reduce potential for media development by disregarding the journalists as unprofessional and irresponsible. These attitudes discourage high quality, honest journalism, and deprive citizens of the materials required for informed civic debate. The truth is that fostering a healthy and pluralistic networked media requires all involved to interact responsibly – to communicate more openly and more creatively – and to be aware of the contribution of their actions to the overall communications environment.

'Fostering a healthy and pluralistic networked media requires all involved to **interact responsibly**.'

It is not only organisations which use the media for communication that carry responsibilities. Journalists, civil society and the citizens who interact with the media need also to consider the impact of their ethical choices on the communications environment. People's participation in the media environment, in blogs and on talk radio, can appear counterproductive in terms of fostering improved information and inclusive debate. People will use the media when they are aggrieved or roused by an issue and want to 'have their say'. This can make interactivity problematic: it does not immediately equate with allowing moderate and considered discussion. Interaction has to be understood as a two-way process: citizens must view the media not just as a tool of communication of their own grievances or concerns, but as a means of listening to others too. **Responsible 'citizen journalism' is about listening too.**

'Responsible 'citizen journalism' is about listening too.'

Journalists – the moderators in all of this – must recognise that dialogue alone cannot fulfil the role of the media to inform, educate and entertain. Journalists must take responsibility for making interactivity genuinely informative and productive in the pursuit of development and good governance. This is particularly true in ‘fragile states’, as Anna Da Silva’s session highlighted, where media can be destructive as well as constructive. Here the responsibility of journalists is strengthened further: using information sensibly and with good judgment can be literally a matter of life or death. Journalists may consider this compromise – being responsible, being accountable, requires **asking journalists to trade journalistic freedom for social responsibility**, and making ethical choices which put the ‘public good’ before their own.

Trust here is key, and it is with journalists that the main responsibility for fostering trust lies. Journalists, NGOs, governments and international financial institutions must widen their networks, their channels of communication, and build longer-term relationships through which debates can take place. The multiplicity of other actors will only interact responsibly with media networks if they feel the journalists can be trusted to moderate responsibly too. Trust will become ever more important as new technologies allow rapid increases in the number of citizens to declare themselves journalists, too.

In terms of widening the scope of networked journalism, and maximising its potential for empowerment at all levels of society, the responsibility lies with both journalists and citizens more widely. All must be alert to **recognising marginal voices and alternative communications flows**, and providing them with a greater voice and potential for accessing information more widely.

### **The media as a contested and political space**

If the media is a space for interaction and debate, what clearly emerges from the contributions in this report is that this space is political: and necessarily so. Political in this sense means not just oppositional. Indeed journalism that sets itself up as purely oppositional to government or to international institutions may mitigate against measured debate. Rather, the media is political in that it exists to foster debate around issues –



political, economic and social – which by nature may be contentious. **The media becomes a site for mediating potential conflicts between state and society.** It serves as a public political sphere; a space for political debate outside the institutions of government, and for fostering the ‘we consciousness’ that ultimately binds state to society.

As James Deane attests in his contribution, many international organisations continue to assume that the role of the media is to do their bidding on the ground. In this opinion, the media is the means to an end of a successful development policy, rather than a space for discussing and negotiating its implementation. Major development organisations subsume their local media interaction within their internal and external communications departments; the logic being that their messages are for consumption and not for contestation.

This does not, however, enhance the potential for communications to be a force for good.

**The clear message to international organisations and donors is not to be afraid of creating a space in which their policies are contested; for ultimately this is to their benefit, as well as to the benefit of the communications sector itself.**

A developmental intervention will succeed if there is genuine debate between all actors involved in and expected to benefit from its implementation. The networked media is the logical space for this debate to take place.

Mark Wilson highlights that institutions of government too must take the media seriously in this way. **Governments must improve their external communications with citizens,** making information readily available and ensuring they can be held accountable for their decisions. This is starting to happen, with the assistance of new media: all African governments now have their own websites. But African governments must also improve their media development policies, establishing legal rights to freedom of speech and access to information, supporting the media and the development of new technologies, and improving the access of marginalised people to communications flows as a matter of priority.

‘It serves as a public political sphere; a space for political debate outside the institutions of government, and for fostering the ‘we consciousness’ that ultimately binds state to society.’

‘Good governance, ultimately, is about effective and dynamic communications between policymakers, politicians and their constituent populations.’



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As DFID's recent publication on 'Governance, Development and Democratic Politics' states, 'the media plays a key role in improving governance by providing two-way communication between citizens and the state'.<sup>11</sup> Networked journalism in this way can contribute to policymaking, as effective policies are more likely to result from integrated inclusive public discussion. Arguments among the social and political elites must be permitted to enter the public domain. At delivery level, networked journalism can improve a government's responsiveness, accountability and capacity for effective implementation of policy. The media assists in making politics work not just for elites but for the poor too, by making governance transparent, and making it accountable.

**Setting realistic standards**

The media environment in which international organisations, NGOs and governments operate is hugely diverse in scope, in quality, and in ownership. Internet usage is on the rise, but often privileges the most regressive and extreme voices. It certainly favours those with higher incomes and education. 'Quality' publications may suffer undue pressure from a corrupt government. Journalists may be poorly trained and poorly paid, bribed to publish stories that aren't true. Tabloid journalism is on the increase across Africa: in South Africa tabloids have been around for just five years, but the 'Daily Sun' already has over 3.8 million readers. Realistically, owners and editors are commercially motivated, keener to publish scandalous exposes and spurious allegations that sell papers than worthy stories in pursuit of developmental ends. In short, the media isn't just BBC and broadsheets. This may be a relatively diverse network of news media but it is not yet the kind of networked journalism that we want to see. Can we really expect it to change?

In part, as Gerald Milward-Oliver makes clear, this is a technical issue. The lack of communications infrastructure continues to hinder development across Africa, particularly in rural areas. Networked journalism has normative qualities and can exist as a principle, but it is nevertheless dependent on a certain technical



<sup>11</sup> DFID, *Governance, Development and Democratic Politics* (policy paper, 2007)



level of infrastructural development.

Beyond this, it is the work of journalists, media development organisations, governments, lawyers, academics and many others to improve the professionalism, sustainability and scope of networked journalism in Africa. But it is their responsibility to do so in a way that makes their own agendas not only attractive – to make development and good governance sell papers – but open to debate too. All who interact with the media must do so in a way that accepts, and doesn't shy away from, the inherently politicised and contentious nature of the communications environment that emerges.

Ultimately this is about releasing control to sharing and networking ownership. Just as a politicised media will contain views that we don't personally agree with, so will the media landscape take forms that we may find undesirable. The media will continue to make mistakes. In any media development policy there will be a certain element of contingency: in 'fragile states' in particular, donors have to be risk takers. But it is only through a process of learning and debate within the media itself that effective communications can be strengthened. The contribution to this report on 'fragile states' serves to illustrate that the process of media development is a long and winding one. 'Fragile states' can be divided in to 'falling', 'fallen' and 'getting back up again'; all states, and all communications environments, are arguably on this continuous path of setbacks and improvements. Ultimately we must put our faith in the power of networked journalism to self-perpetuate and self-strengthen to the benefit of all involved.

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The POLIS Africa Development Governance and media conference was like journalism at its best. It was a topical gathering with some of the most interesting people involved in the subject present. At times the message was grim, sometimes contradictory, frequently disputed and always passionate. Like all journalism it was imperfect. However, it was also a testament to the deep strengths of African media and societies. And it was a vision of the potential there, too. We look forward to being a small part of the process that has come from the independence movements of 50 years ago, through to the agenda set out at Windhoek in 1991 and Gleneagles in 2005. Journalism has observed

this history: now it is time for journalism to help make it, too.

As POLIS we wish to stress how we will contribute. Core to our efforts will be the concept of media literacy. This is more than media training and media education. We believe that the study of the politics of news media by all societal players as well as journalists is vital to realising the potential of networked journalism.

- **Research:** with the launch of the MSc Media, Communications and Development, at our department at LSE, there will be a research and study capacity for more detailed investigation, and with case studies. POLIS will be publishing further reports based on that work in the future.
- **Forum:** POLIS will continue to act as a forum for debate of these issues and we are planning another conference to revise and reflect on progress after AMI's first stage of operation.
- **Africa:** POLIS will also be seeking to contribute to debate and study within Africa with media and academic partners in Africa, as well as providing Fellowship opportunities at LSE for African journalists.

# Further information

POLIS: [www.lse.ac.uk/polis](http://www.lse.ac.uk/polis)

LSE Media and Communications department: [www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse](mailto:www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse)

DESTIN (LSE Development Studies Institute): [www.lse.ac.uk/DESTIN](http://www.lse.ac.uk/DESTIN)

LSE Crisis States Research Centre: [www.crisisstates.com](http://www.crisisstates.com)

UK Department for International Development: [www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)

BBC World Service Trust: [www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust)

Open University: [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)

Communication for Social Change Consortium: [www.communicationforsocialchange.org](http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org)

Panos: [www.panos.org.uk](http://www.panos.org.uk)

Concern: [www.concern.net](http://www.concern.net)

UNESCO UK: [www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk)

BBC World Service Trust:

'African Media Development Initiative' (2006)

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/specials/1552\\_trust\\_amdi/page9.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/specials/1552_trust_amdi/page9.shtml)

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'Why Templates for Media Development do not work in Crisis States' (2005)

[www.crisisstates.com/download/publicity/crisis\\_report\\_low.res.pdf](http://www.crisisstates.com/download/publicity/crisis_report_low.res.pdf)

DFID:

'White Paper: Making Governance Work for the Poor' (2006)

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Global Forum for Media Development:

'Media Matters: Perspectives on Advancing Governance and Development from the Global Forum for Media Development' (2006)

[www.gfmd.info](http://www.gfmd.info)

OECD:

'Deepening Voice and Accountability to Fight Poverty:

A Dialogue of Communication Implementers' (2006)

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'The Case for Strengthening Media in Africa: Framework and Proposals' (2006)

[www.uneca.org/africanmedia/documents/Framework-Proposals.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/africanmedia/documents/Framework-Proposals.pdf)

World Congress on Communication for Development:

'The Rome Consensus: Communication for Development, A Major Pillar for Development and Change' (2006)

[www.uneca.org/africanmedia/documents/Recommendations\\_Rome\\_Consensus.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/africanmedia/documents/Recommendations_Rome_Consensus.pdf)











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