



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

2005
60
1945

Bureau of Public Information
memobpi

Media pluralism

UNESCO's *New Communication Strategy* gives high priority to encouraging the free flow of information, to promoting its wider balanced dissemination, and to strengthening communication capacities in the developing countries.

UNESCO's mission to promote media pluralism emanates from the *New Communication Strategy* adopted in 1989 to (a) encourage the free flow of information at international as well as national levels, (b) promote its wider and better balanced dissemination without any obstacle to the freedom of expression, and (c) strengthen communication capacities in the developing countries to increase participation in communication processes.

Media pluralism permits the expression of diverse opinions, cultures, languages and groups in any given society in relation to various representations. The media in a democratic society should not only be independent but also should be pluralistic. A vibrant democracy requires an independent and pluralistic media, which is free from governmental, political or economic control and with access to the materials and infrastructure that are needed for the production and dissemination of media products and programmes.

For instance the capacity of community radio to foster democracy involves both the rights of groups and individuals to broadcasting opportunities and the obligations of democratic governments to provide a conducive environment to public participation. Public participation underpins the purpose of community media, which is distinct and different from national media.

The community radio sector's responsibility to expand community involvement in broadcasting and to encourage participation by those denied effective access to, and those not adequately served by other media, squarely falls within the concept of media pluralism. This is one of the reasons why UNESCO has been promoting community radio as the third

tier of broadcasting structure underlining the importance of Public Service and private broadcasting ownerships. As

independent, professional, and viable entities, local media, including community news papers can produce content that reflect diversity within and

between societies also providing sufficient space for issues that introduce social change.

Plurality is reflected through a combination of public, private, commercial, mainstream, alternative, national, and community media with diverse content and possibilities for various segments of the society to engage with different media. Diversified media ownership provides more opportunities for the free flow of information – on public affairs; people's free expression through the mass media; cultural expression, particularly in vernacular languages use, and the arts; popular participation in public affairs discussion; political pluralism, and public demands for transparency. Therefore a pluralistic media environment not only promotes but also



Studio of Radio Huanuni, Bolivia.
(© A. Jonquière/UNESCO)

Media pluralism

Media pluralism

Press Freedom

UNESCO has supported freedom of expression networks to foster press freedom and has played a significant role in Africa in support of the movement for media pluralism and press freedom since the Windhoek Conference in 1991. IPDC played a catalytic role in the establishment of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), which is well-known for its consistent work in promoting press freedom on the continent. Every year, IPDC supported African journalists networks are building solidarity for press freedom and associating closer links with international freedom of expression networks such as IFEX. Support to the Media Foundation for West Africa initiated a Network of African Freedom of Expression Organizations that will contribute to the advancement of democracy in Africa.

assures the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, periodicals, TV and radio broadcasting institutions and reflects the widest possible range of voice and opinion within any society at different level of operation such as global, national and local.

The production and dissemination of mainstream media content involves enormous fixed costs, also called high first-copy costs. To cover these costs, media producers often have a strong incentive to produce content for the largest number of consumers, presenting material that serves larger audiences with a view to attract the advertisers. Therefore the pure economic characteristics of media markets lead natural market forces to discriminate against the preferences of minorities – racial, ethnic, and any other relatively small groups whose tastes in media differ from the majority's.

Eliminating a newspaper or broadcast voice deprives all citizens of an independent voice and will likely diminish the welfare of the “non-majority”; their economic and political need for news, information, and other vital content will be under-served even in a well-functioning market. The deliberate policies to encourage pluralism with the largest number of media ownerships, information sources and segments of media engagement are essential to protect and promote democratic engagement of the society.

UNESCO promoting media pluralism

UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) provides support to enhance media pluralism and to build the capacity of media professionals and institutions. The three priority areas of the Programme are (a) freedom of expression and media pluralism (b) training, and (c) community media development.

IPDC recognizes that freedom of expression and media pluralism are often confronted with indirect or direct attempts to restrict their development. These include various forms of repression of the free exercise of the profession; controls over distribution of government advertisements, restrictions on information sources, attempts by governments to take control of journalists' unions and associations. IPDC plays a vital role by providing opportunities in local media capacity building for free and pluralistic media in developing countries. In the last three years, IPDC implemented 159 projects in 80 countries.

Contacts

W. Jayaweera, Director,
Division for Communication
Development
w.jayaweera@unesco.org

Venus Jennings, Program
Specialist
v.jennings@unesco.org

To Find Out More

www.unesco.org/webworld