



people live in countries with access to a free press

Half the world's people

does not have access to a fully free press

Hunger continues to plague an estimated

press freedom is non-negotiable and of central concern to empowering people living in

are malnourished worldwide

The more the media are free, the weaker is democracy

at birth

Women represent 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people who live

year from curable diseases

The freer the press the lower the percentage of people who

people live without a free press

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AND  
POVERTY ERADICATION

# MEDIA

## DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# MEDIA

## DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

The articles in this book have been adapted from contributions to the UNESCO-sponsored conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka marking

World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2006

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Editor: Barry James

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“...in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press”

Amartya Sen  
Nobel Prize laureate in Economics

*in 'Democracy as a Universal Value', Journal of Democracy, 10.3 (1999)*

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## Foreword

### **Freedom of expression has essential role in human development**

*Message by Koïchiro Matsuura,*

*Director-General of UNESCO*

On World Press Freedom Day, we remind the world of the importance of protecting the fundamental human rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedom of expression and press freedom are central to building strong democracies, promoting civic participation and the rule of law, and encouraging human development and security.

This year, World Press Freedom Day is dedicated to the consideration of how protecting and furthering the fundamental human rights of freedom of expression and press freedom can assist in assuring another human right - the right to be free from poverty. Today, more than one billion people live on less than a US dollar a day. Another 2.7 billion live on less than two dollars a day. To combat these tragic statistics, the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 2000 made poverty eradication the highest priority among the goals of the international development community. The first Millennium Development Goal is that, by 2015, the number of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger should be reduced by half.

It is in this context that the recommendations for action from the World Summit on the Information Society should be seen. UNESCO's elaboration of its concept of "knowledge societies", which is based upon four key principles -- freedom of expression, universal access to information and knowledge, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, and quality education for all -- was an important contribution to the summit. This concept recognizes the crucial role of the media and information and communication technology in creating activities that will expand access to information, contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and enable us to eventually bridge the so-called 'digital divide', which is understood to be far more than a technological issue.

In the five years that have elapsed since the Millennium Development Goals were elaborated, governments, UN agencies, non-government organizations and other international participants have made tremendous efforts to mobilize resources and work together towards realizing these goals. However, despite these efforts, there is growing concern that without moving forward differently, we are not on track to attain them. Thus, we need to think creatively, even as we continue to think in an integral way, about how to achieve these essential goals.

One central component of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals is local ownership and participation. Observing the successes and failures of development efforts has led development agencies, non-government organizations and states to structure development around local participation, recognizing that without the empowerment and understanding of locals, even the best-supported development plans tend to produce negligible or unsustainable results. Free and independent media should be recognized as a key dimension of efforts to eradicate poverty, for two main reasons.

First, they serve as a vehicle for sharing information in order to facilitate good governance, generate opportunities to gain access to essential services, promote accountability and counteract corruption, and develop the relationship between an informed, critical and participatory citizenry and responsive elected officials.

Second, they are associated with a range of benefits that are highly relevant to the challenge of poverty eradication -- including the recognition and strengthening of basic human rights, a stronger civil society, institutional change, political transparency, support to education, public health awareness (such as education campaigns on HIV and AIDS) and sustainable livelihoods.

There is also a strong positive correlation between freedom of expression and higher incomes, lower infant mortality and increased adult literacy. These ideas were reiterated most recently in the document adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in November 2005, where 176 participating States reaffirmed that freedom of expression and the free flow of information, ideas and knowledge are essential for development.

Thus, World Press Freedom Day 2006 provides an occasion for considering the important questions of how a free press can help eradicate poverty and how freedom of expression and press freedom can assist in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In so doing, it becomes clear that the defence of one fundamental human right - the right to freedom of expression - may directly protect several others, thereby showing how rights protections are interwoven intellectually, morally, and in practice.

Of course, for the media to be effective in alleviating poverty, they must be allowed to operate freely and safely. This year, we mark World Press Freedom Day at a time when being a media professional has never been more dangerous.

In 2005, according to the International Federation of Journalists, a record number of 150 journalists and media staff were killed in the line of duty.

This is the largest annual number of media professionals killed in recorded history, and represents a tragic continuation of a statistical trend that has been rising over the past several years; being a journalist is very dangerous and, sadly, is becoming more so. In addition to deaths in the field, journalists and other media professionals continue to face threats and harassment; last year, more than 500 media professionals were detained or imprisoned.

Specific conflicts have also claimed record high numbers of journalists who have been killed or injured, with the war in Iraq claiming 60 lives between March 2003 and December 2005.

UNESCO calls on governments and public authorities throughout the world to end, in particular, the culture of impunity regarding violence against journalists by investigating and punishing those responsible for attacks on media professionals, and by taking the necessary precautions that make it possible for journalists to continue to provide us with the essential knowledge and information that flow from a free and independent press.



## **What UNESCO is doing to support freedom of expression**

*Message by Abdul Waheed Khan,*

*Assistant Director-General for  
Communication and Information,  
UNESCO*

Over the course of the past three years, UNESCO has developed a three-pronged strategy to promote and defend freedom of expression and a free press as a key part of its remit as the United Nations agency responsible for communication and information.

The strategy is concerned with the role of the media in conflicts and post-conflict situations, their contribution to good governance and their role in stimulating economic development and eradicating poverty. Ahead lies discussion on how to reduce the toll of death, violence and intimidation that makes journalism a lonely and dangerous profession in many parts of the world.

UNESCO's thinking has been shaped and refined during the annual conferences marking World Press Freedom Day, which bring together a wide range of opinions from governments, donors, non-government organizations and the media themselves.

The experience of Rwanda and the Balkans demonstrated how nationalistic and one-sided media could actually contribute to conflict, and it was with this in mind that UNESCO organized the press freedom conference in Belgrade in 2004.

If media could be a cause of conflict, it was reasoned that they could also be a cure by presenting information objectively and fairly.

Often it is voiceless and unrepresented groups that think violence is the best way to address their grievances, and in this sense freedom of information can be a factor in halting a slide toward violence. Likewise, silence and fear within communities make violence possible in situations in which open communications might prevent conflict.

Accurate and unbiased information is particularly needed in the period following a conflict to prevent a relapse into violence and build the bases for a tolerant and peaceful society through reconciliation and the re-establishment of social bonds.

UNESCO's role has included the promotion of dialogue among media professionals in conflict zones, and advising authorities in countries where there has been a conflict how to draft legislation promoting freedom of expression.

In common with other UN agencies, UNESCO is committed to the UN Millennium Development Goals, aimed at eradicating global poverty. Free media can contribute to the goals by contributing to effective governance and fomenting economic development. The World Press Freedom conference in Dakar in 2005 was concerned with the question of how free and independent media can assist good governance, an important feature of the Millennium Development Goals, which commit member states to 'spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law'.

Governance depends upon participation, accountability and transparency, all of which require a free press and the freedom of expression guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Freedom of expression is the oxygen on which other liberties depend. Transparency and accountability ensure that public participation can be based on real information. As state bureaucracies grow into large, often opaque entities, the struggles and interests of particular sectors are often kept secret. Transparency allows for checks on conflicts of interest and ensures greater legitimacy for the government.

In addition to promoting accountability and transparency, free and independent media are efficient in uncovering the corruption that erodes government legitimacy, undermines democratic principles and holds back progress.

Enabling access to information, through the enactment of freedom of information laws, helps citizens to participate more fully in governance. By supplying them with reliable information, it allows them to take well-informed decisions and make

better choices about their lives while giving them the opportunity to express their views. In this way resources are more likely to be distributed efficiently.

From Dakar, it was a logical progression to Colombo, where the contributions to the World Press Freedom conference in 2006, included in this book, focused on the role that free media can play in encouraging economic development and security, and eradicating poverty.

One of the most important political and social benefits that freedom of expression confers is the potential for empowerment. It is this that offers the greatest and most far-reaching tool for eradicating poverty because it makes people aware they have rights. As such, they cannot be marginalized or excluded. They have the right to be heard and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

Donors, of course, want to see quantifiable and qualitative results, and more research is needed to demonstrate what the World Bank has been saying for several years: freedom of expression and development go hand in glove. But initial data strongly suggest that free and independent media are critical tools in poverty eradication.

UNESCO seeks to further explore and fortify the understanding of how supporting freedom of expression can bring about measurable improvements in economic development as well as human rights. UNESCO's position as an intergovernmental organization, mandated to develop international standards, raise awareness and build capacities, allows it to facilitate work among member states and other participants in the development process, including media.

It has created effective relationships with non-government organizations, utilizing their expertise in creating projects and policies to assist independent media.

In this way, it demonstrates the new face of the UN - providing a platform, while simultaneously engaging in dialogue with its partners.

# Introduction

## Building the case for media support

by Barry James

*The editor has worked for several major news organizations, including the International Herald Tribune and United Press International, where he was a foreign correspondent and senior editor.*

The world has come a long way from the old but frequently encountered fallacy that democracy and a free press are luxuries that low-income developing countries cannot afford.

Indeed, the research described in this publication shows that these are not luxuries but essential contributing factors in creating sustainable growth and turning back the tide of corruption.

If the *growth first, democracy later* argument has been adduced in support of undemocratic Asian Tigers, it has also been a self-serving excuse for propping up appallingly corrupt and inefficient regimes in Africa.

However, a important point eloquently expressed at the World Press freedom conference in Belgrade in 2004 by Ronald Koven, the European Representative of the World Press Freedom Committee, deserves reiterating.

*One of the first lessons in journalism is that normative or judgemental adjectives should be avoided, that the facts should be allowed describe reality without embellishment. One would think the same principle would apply to attempts to create new forms of adjectival journalism – “peace journalism,” “development journalism,” “civic journalism,” etc. What’s wrong with just plain journalism, pure and simple?*

In other words, it is not the job of journalists to write about economic development in itself. It is their job to write stories that will inform and perhaps entertain readers and listeners, and thereby help build durable and profitable media organs strong enough to stand firm in the defence of freedom of expression.

To suggest otherwise is to play into the hands of dictators who see journalists as useful pawns to be bribed if necessary, and to be ruthlessly slapped down, jailed, tortured and even murdered when they step out of line and start doing their job of being uncomfortable and nosy.

Indeed, as James Deane of the Communication for Social Change Consortium reminds us in this book, UNESCO was torn apart in the late 1970s and early 1980s by exhortations to support development journalism as part of proposals for a New World Information Order. The row led to a dramatic walkout by the United States and Britain amid accusations that the organization was playing into the hands of Soviet and other dictators and providing them with a tool to censor and control the media.

Times have changed and so has UNESCO, which, under the leadership of its director-general, Koïchiro Matsuura, has become the pre-eminent international organization in campaigning for press freedom and freedom of expression.

I think Agnes Callamard, the executive director of the human rights organization, ARTICLE 19, expresses it best when she calls freedom of expression a ‘cornerstone right’ that enables other rights to be protected and exercised.

In other words, the freedom to share ideas, to criticize and delve into corruption help create the conditions in which economic growth can take place. As James D. Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank put it,

*A free press is not a luxury. It is at the core of equitable development. The media can expose corruption. They can keep a check on public policy by throwing a spotlight on government action. They let people voice diverse opinions on governance and reform, and help build public consensus to bring about change. Such media help markets work better – from small-scale vegetable trading in Indonesia to global foreign currency and capital markets in London and New York. They can facilitate trade, transmitting ideas and innovation across boundaries. We have also seen that the media are important for human development, bringing health and education information to remote villages in countries from Uganda to Nicaragua.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Wolfensohn, J. 2002. In *The Right to Tell – The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development*. Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, pg V

If this is the case -- if a free press is as essential to economic development as education or health care systems -- shouldn't freedom of expression be brought into the mainstream of international aid programs rather than being left on the sidelines or treated as an afterthought? All too often, assistance to media is seen as adjunct to thematic issues such as HIV/AIDS rather than as a powerful force for change in its own right. A lack of focus, overlapping initiatives and failure to coordinate means that much of the considerable aid that is already dedicated to media support through various international programmes goes to waste. In fact, since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union,

*Media aid has evolved from relatively modest programs with minor donations of equipment and training tours for journalists to long-term, multi-faceted projects with multi-million dollar budgets.*<sup>2</sup>

There are many projects that should not have been started or should have been dropped a long time ago for lack of profitability, according to Jorgen Ejboel, a Danish publisher writing in this publication. And donors often support media in post-conflict zones only to pull out when the crisis is over. Building reliable, independent and objective media able to trade on a reputation for fairness and impartiality requires investment for the long haul.

There is a sense in which no price can be placed on freedom of information. Nevertheless, a media outlet needs to stand on a sound financial footing in order to be independent. News media, of course, need to stand above suspicion themselves. When they play one side against another, abandon solid reporting for triviality and accept bribes for reporting or not reporting certain information, journalists are letting down the entire profession.

Undoubtedly, the most effective way of supporting freedom of expression would be to persuade governments to abandon the constraints they place upon it. For example, great harm is caused by the laws of criminal defamation under which journalists are sent to prison for factual if uncomfortable reporting.

This is an extremely widespread problem, particularly in Africa, where most countries, in addition to having signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have made constitutional provisions for freedom of expression yet in practice make a mockery of these concessions to democracy. They curb the media with criminal defamation and sedition laws, state security decrees, official secrecy provisions and a welter of other restrictions, along with imprisonment, violence, harassment, intimidation, property confiscation and sometimes even death for journalists who fall foul of dictatorial leaders.

Governments have other, more subtle ways to make sure media toe the line. They require newspapers to have licences that can be revoked at will, choke off advertising revenues

and restrict supplies of newsprint.

Greater adoption of freedom of information laws would help create the climate of trust, accountability and transparency in which economies can flourish and corruption wither. The paradox is that the countries where media assistance is most needed are often run by corrupt governments that persecute the free press.

One of the most puzzling problems is that of reach. Donors can legitimately ask why they should support urban media outlets if they serve only a relatively privileged part of the population in the cities rather than the non-literate and scattered rural masses, who have no voice and no access to information.

Technology now makes it possible to set up small radio stations at very low cost. Staffed by unpaid volunteers, such radios are starting to have a big impact, which would be even greater if governments would reform the regulatory laws that benefit public or private but not community broadcasters.

The radio stations are clearly deserving of encouragement and support, and the volunteer reporters and producers may be doing an excellent job. Even in the advanced industrialized nations, news and pictures increasingly come from amateurs via Internet blogs or through the space that many newspapers now make available to their on-line readers.

Nevertheless, I would argue that volunteer-staffed radio stations and Internet sites should be seen as a complement rather than a replacement for professional journalists, who are (or ought to be) trained to observe events with objectivity and detachment. Professional newsmen and women usually have a curiosity quotient far above the average, thick skins, capacity for hard work, and a nose for what interests their audience as well as, obviously, writing and broadcasting ability.

They are mostly affiliated to professional bodies that care deeply about the deontological aspects of their trade. Above all, at a time when record numbers of journalists are being killed, attacked, tortured and imprisoned, they are sometimes called upon to be very courageous, as evidenced by the awarding of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize this year to May Chidiac, the Lebanese television reporter gravely injured by terrorists who placed a bomb under her car.

We still speak rather quaintly of the free press, although the thundering machines that used to symbolize the big newspapers are a memory to many of us in the profession. Instead, driven by changing economic and social realities, some newspapers are migrating to the Internet as fast as they can, while others gloomily face declining and ageing readerships.

The media today are becoming bafflingly fragmented and complex, ranging from traditional newspapers and network radio and television to newscasts distributed via the Internet or mobile telephones. There is, as *The Economist* put it

<sup>2</sup> Price, M., B. Noll and D. De Luce. 2002. *Mapping Media Assistance*. Oxford; The Programme in Comparative Media Law & Policy, University of Oxford, p1

recently, 'More media, less news'. Nevertheless, this may also be a time of opportunity that could see even some of the world's poorest countries benefiting from the new technologies.

It makes sense therefore for donor and other organization to develop strategies that will ensure developing countries do not lose out in the midst of this communications and media revolution. Above all, as some of the writers in this book argue, it means moving away from patronage to true partnerships with the poor to create sustainable media organs that, it is worth repeating, are capable of standing eventually on their own feet.

There have been some signal successes in the battle to extend freedom of expression. By throwing the spotlight on corruption and maladministration, the media are helping to create legitimacy and conditions for more equitable trading in a number of countries. Walad Al-Saqaf from Yemen reminds us in these pages that even in the repressive Middle East, a wind of change is blowing across the deserts. And since the collapse of Soviet power more than two dozen countries have enacted formal statutes guaranteeing citizens' right of access to government information. Admittedly, some of these gains have slowed or have been reversed following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. Nevertheless,

*As a consequence of globalization, the very concept of freedom of information is expanding from the purely moral stance of an indictment of secrecy to include a more value-neutral meaning – as another form of market regulation, of more efficient administration of government, and as a contributor to growth and the development of information industries.<sup>3</sup>*

However, we should never be complacent about press freedom or forget what it is like to live in a country without independent media. The Committee to Protect Journalists reminded us on World Press Freedom day this year of the countries that are still deep inside an information black hole, under the heel of sinister dictators who alone decide what their subjects will read, view or hear.

They include oil-rich Equatorial Guinea, where the president's son runs the only radio station; North Korea, where "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il suppressed news of a famine affecting millions, and Turkmenistan, where TV announcers start the news by pledging that their tongues will drop off if they slander President-for-Life Saparmurat Atayevich Niyazov.

With such exemplars, it seems that there will be plenty of opportunities for media donors for a long time to come.

<sup>3</sup> Blanton, T. 2002. The World's Right to Know. *Foreign Policy*, 131: 50-58

# I. Linking Freedom of the Press to the Alleviation of Poverty

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*Apart from being a fundamental good in itself, as defined by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, freedom of expression is widely considered as a major contributing factor toward economic development.*

*But are there scientific grounds for believing this? After all, there are exceptions – rich countries with no or low press freedom and poor countries that do allow freedom of expression.*

*The following articles look at the empirical evidence and describe research carried out recently that strongly suggests a free press is a vital contributing factor to a successful economy.*

*Daniel Kaufmann of the World Bank argues that a free press is not a luxury that only rich countries can afford, and that it contributes to rather than derives from a successful economy.*

*Assessing the efficacy of aid efforts is an elusive and contested science in the best of circumstances with the most concrete of facts.*

*However, two research papers presented at the World Press Freedom Day conference in 2006 demonstrated clear links between enhancing freedom of expression and enabling independent media and the eradication of poverty.*

*The statistical study by Pippa Norris confirms that independent media are integral to good governance and have a measurable impact in strengthening political and human development, thereby alleviating poverty.*

*Anne-Sophie Novel, coordinating a group of researchers from the Institute for Political Studies in Paris, conducted a survey of press freedom's impact across several countries.*

*The researchers found that the information presently available is not yet accurate enough to demonstrate the causality between poverty eradication and press freedom. But they did find statistical correlations between press freedom and various aspects of human security, such as access to primary goods, health care, and education, transparent governance, and the avoidance of violent conflict.*

*The researchers concluded that 'freedom of the press does belong to the tool kit for development in the same way education or investments do'.*

*Finally, Mike de Villiers of the International Research and Exchanges Board describes the Media Sustainability Index – a tool used to assess the development of independent media systems over time and across countries. He argues that it is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses within the media and where best to focus attention and development resources.*

## **An empirical perspective on media, governance and development**

by *Daniel Kaufmann*

*Director,  
Global programmes and Governance,  
The World Bank Institute*

Until the mid-1990s, the World Bank believed that its mandate was limited to purely economic issues such as trade reform, privatization, or financial sector management. The Bank underestimated the importance of governance and strong institutions; and the word corruption was not part of our vocabulary.

By the late 1990s the Bank became aware that poor governance and corruption were not only severe impediments to the effective use of development assistance, but that the poor were most affected by these abuses. Gradually the Bank began raising awareness about the issue, conducting research, developing instruments to diagnose corruption, delivering training programmes for government officials and civil society, and working directly on governance issues with selected countries upon request. Most recently, the Bank has focused on the importance of access to information and developing a free media as major components of good governance and ultimately effective development.

To make a convincing case and develop properly designed initiatives, we need to understand the status of press freedom in the world today, including the factors that militate for and against an open media. We believe that the same rigorous analysis and evidence-based policy-making that we have applied to traditional economic and financial decisions should apply to governance issues as well.

We are supporting initiatives to collect and assess the current state of the media that can then be shared with clients around the world. This includes, for example, the development of country-level and internationally comparable indicators of media freedom and governance. Much of this data is available, but has not been widely publicized.

Data on the media industry also need to be collected and disclosed, including accurate information about real ownership structures. Similarly, assessments need to be carried out on the political environment (for example, freedom of expression), the legal and regulatory environments and their effect on the media, the competitive environment, and a number of other factors that help determine the effectiveness and viability of a free and open media.

More specifically, our evidence-based approach begins by challenging a set of ten myths (or popular notions) on press freedoms, namely:

Freedom of the press ought to be viewed from a strictly political perspective.

We reject this view, and instead we suggest the importance of viewing media development and freedoms from a governance and development perspective.

Press freedom should be seen as an outgrowth (or result) of a country's industrialization process and higher incomes, rather than as a contributor in itself to economic development and growth.

Our answer to this is that, in fact, a free press is not a luxury that only rich countries can afford.

Data on media and governance is scant, and the limited existing data is unreliable and not useful.

We challenge this notion as well, pointing to the progress made on governance and media-related indicators, and the solid empirical analysis based on this data. It yields evidence-based lessons, and helps inform future strategies.

The impact of press restrictions on corruption, poverty, and underdevelopment is vastly exaggerated.

This is not the case. The evidence indicates that it matters enormously.

The written laws are the crucial determinant of the existence or absence of press freedom.

Written laws do matter as the de jure codification of rules and regulations, but they are far from sufficient. The application of such legal and regulatory frameworks, the effective implementation of Freedom of Information Acts, and the de-monopolization of the telecommunication sector matter fully as much.

Broad press restrictions, including official secrecy acts, and limitations to private media ownership, are often justified on the grounds of national security considerations.

Although there are legitimate concerns about confidentiality and national security, they require rather narrow and specific areas of caution rather than broad restrictions, and ought not justify restrictions on the type of ownership.

Significant state ownership of the media, and subsidies to the media, are often rather beneficial.

The evidence suggests the contrary: large-scale state ownership is usually associated with a more restricted and ineffective media. More generally, high levels of ownership concentration are associated with less media effectiveness. This also applies within the private sector where more competition should be encouraged, a process that can be aided through new technologies.

The media are not to be treated as business undertakings. They are so distinctive in their mandate and objectives, that they ought not be viewed as an industry.

Although it is important to recognize some particular characteristics and (among others, social) objectives of the media, it is also important to view them as businesses in which financial viability is essential.

Holding elections in a country guarantees press freedoms.

The evidence suggests that elections, while associated with a higher degree of press freedom in general terms, do not in themselves guarantee media development and press freedoms.

The international community and the World Bank can do very little in the field of media.

We suggest that this is not the case. In fact, a number of ongoing initiatives exist; and many others may be contemplated in the future.

The World Bank and other development and donor agencies are practising what they preach by increasing public access to information, documents, and decision-making processes.

We are treating the media as an important partner in our governance, anti-corruption, and poverty alleviation efforts by including them at the early stages of project work in countries and in poverty reduction strategies.

To help develop media capacities, we deliver learning programmes on topics not covered by other institutions, such as business and economic journalism and media management.

We are also providing support to nascent media in fragile states, and in countries that are implementing freedom and access to information, acts such as Mexico. We are sharing good policy practices for building competitive media and telecommunication sectors, with more limited state interference.

In collaboration with other organizations, we are deepening our research and analysis on worldwide ratings and indicators to assess the development of media.

Finally, the Bank has been commenting publicly on media developments in our partner countries, highlighting achievements and actively discouraging abuses.

A graphic presentation accompanying this article is on line at: [http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pdf/press\\_freedom\\_day\\_colombo\\_5\\_06.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pdf/press_freedom_day_colombo_5_06.pdf)



## **Free press and development – what is the evidence?**

by Pippa Norris

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Liberal media are widely regarded as strengthening democratization and good governance directly, and human development indirectly. But what evidence supports these contentions? Despite case-studies focusing on the role of the press in specific countries and regions, it is somewhat surprising that relatively little comparative research has explored the linkages in the process.

Much of the existing research has focused on assessing media access, such as the diffusion of newspaper readership or television viewership, rather than on press freedom.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, modernization theories assumed a fairly simple and unproblematic relationship between the spread of access to modern forms of mass communications, economic development, and the process of democratization. It was widely held that urbanization and the spread of literacy would lead to growing access to modern technologies such as telephones, newspapers, radios and television, all of which would lay the basis for an informed citizenry able to participate effectively in political affairs.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the assumption that the modernization process involved a series of sequential steps gradually fell out of fashion. Scepticism grew, faced with the complexities of human development evident in different parts of the world, and the major setbacks for democracy in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.

There was growing recognition that widening public access to newspapers, radio and television was insufficient by itself to promote democracy and development, as these media could be used to maintain autocracies, to reinforce crony capitalism, and to consolidate the power of media oligopolies, as much as to provide a democratic channel for the disadvantaged.

Access remains important, but the media are probably most effective in strengthening the process of democratization, good governance, and human development where they collectively function as a watchdog over the abuse of power, as a civic forum for political debate and as an agenda-setter for policy-makers, strengthening government responsiveness to social problems.

In their watch-dog role, the media can ideally promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers. They can highlight policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption in the judiciary and scandals in the corporate sector.

By contrast, control of the media is used to reinforce the power of autocratic regimes and to deter criticism of the government by independent journalists through censorship, state ownership of the main radio and television channels, legal restrictions on freedom of expression and publication (such as stringent libel laws and restrictive official secrets acts), limited competition among commercial oligopolies, and the use of violence and intimidation against journalists and broadcasters.

Equally vital, in their civic forum role, the free press can strengthen the public sphere, by mediating between citizens and the state, facilitating debate and informing the public about its leaders.

If the channels of communication reflect the social and cultural pluralism within each society in a fair and impartial balance, then multiple interests and voices are heard in public deliberation. This role is particularly important during election campaigns, as access to the airwaves by opposition parties, candidates and groups is critical for competitive, free and fair multi-party elections.

During campaigns, the media can provide citizens with information to compare and evaluate the retrospective record, prospective policies and leadership characteristics of

parties and candidates, providing the essential conditions for informed choice. The collective role of the news media as a civic forum remain deeply flawed where major newspapers and television stations heavily favour the governing party.

By contrast, where the media fail to act as an effective civic forum, this can hinder democratic consolidation. State ownership and control is one important issue, but threats to media pluralism are also raised by over-concentration of private ownership of the media, whether in the hands of broadcasting oligopolies, or of major multinational corporations with multimedia empires.

Media mergers risk concentrating excessive control in the hands of a few unaccountable multinational corporations, while the quality of democracy remains limited where state ownership of television has been replaced by private oligopolies and crony capitalism in nations such as Russia, Brazil and Peru that have failed to create fully independent and pluralistic media systems. Broadcasting cartels, coupled with the failure of regulatory reform, legal policies that restrict critical reporting, and uneven journalistic standards, can all limit the role of the media in their civic forum or watch-dog roles.

As agenda-setters, the media can provide information about urgent social problems and thereby channel citizens' concerns to government decision-makers. Particularly in cases of natural disaster, public officials often suffer from a breakdown in the usual channels of communication. As illustrated by the dramatic failure of government over the Katrina debacle in the United States, timely and accurate information about the scope and nature of a disaster is vital if officials are to respond effectively.

In such situations, independent reporters can act as a vital channel of information for decision-makers, helping to make democratic governments more responsive to the needs of the people. For example, researchers found that in India, regional states with higher levels of newspaper circulation proved more active during an emergency in responding to food shortages.

Overall, the analysis lends considerable support to claims that the free press is one of the major components of both democracy and good governance. Nevertheless many questions remain for future research.

It is plausible that the effectiveness of the press as watchdogs should have the greatest impact upon stamping out corruption, while their function in calling attention to social problems should influence government effectiveness. Case studies, focusing upon how the news media work in particular countries, are probably required to flesh out these linkages.

It also remains plausible, as many studies suggest, that improving democracy and good governance will ultimately contribute towards the eradication of poverty, particularly by making governments more accountable and responsive to human needs.

Policies that eradicate limits on the free exchange of information and communication -- whether due to state censorship, intimidation and harassment of journalists, or private media oligopolies -- have important consequences for those seeking to strengthen both good political and human development.

The role of the free press in promoting democratization, good governance, and human development is available at greater length with charts at : [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=21475&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=-465.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=21475&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=-465.html)

## **Study probes correlation between press freedom and poverty reduction**

*by Anne-Sophie Novel*

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This article summarizes the conclusions of a research project carried out for UNESCO by the Centre for Peace and Human Security at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris, which analysed correlations between freedom of the press and various aspects of human security, poverty and governance issues.

Five researchers at the institute collected and organized quantitative and qualitative evidence of correlations between indicators of an environment favourable to free and independent media, and indicators of human development, human security, poverty reduction, good governance and peace.

The main idea was to see if it is possible to find any logical process in the development process in which a free press can play a role.

Diversity in its various forms is at the core of democracy and freedom of expression is as necessary to any other form of freedom. Where liberty to express oneself does not exist, there is only very restricted access to other liberties and thus human rights cannot be respected.

Political stability is positively correlated to freedom of the press. If people have a free press, they have a possibility to debate in a non-violent way. Governments thus have a tool to manage social tensions.

Freedom of the press is strongly associated with government effectiveness. The press helps see if government policies attain their goals or not, and assists the population in assessing and judging public policies and services.

The correlation between regulatory quality and freedom of the press is one of the most essential as it shows very clearly how economic development and press freedom are related to each other.

The regulatory quality concerning business transactions and public services is crucial for individuals to work in a confident economic environment. A free press helps to guarantee such an environment. Rules and reliability of the system are observed through the press.

The rule of law corresponds to the independence of the courts and to the enforceability of contracts. It is also positively related to freedom of the press, since respect for and application of the law, assessed through the press are guarantees of good governance.

The research shows that freedom of the press is generally strong when corruption is weak. Only Singapore conjoins a low level of freedom of the press with a strong control of corruption, showing how the press can also be used to reinforce the power of an autocratic regime.

According to the research, the poorer the country, the less freedom of the press it has in general. But there are exceptions, mainly in the Middle East. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates and, again, Singapore are economically rich but a lot of restrictions weigh on their press. They show that income is not enough for a country to develop a free press.

Freedom of the press can exist only with great difficulty in situations of extreme poverty. The freer the press, however, the lower the percentage of people living under the poverty line. But again there are exceptions. Countries like Belarus, Iran and Tunisia lack a free press but have a low level of poverty. On the other hand, some countries also have both press freedom and a high level of poverty.

Freedom of expression appears to be a guarantee against malnutrition and famine. In the research, no country was found to have both press freedom and a high degree of the population suffering from under-nourishment. The same observation holds for

access to clean water.

But several countries, such as Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Turkey, Tunisia, Malaysia, Cuba, Egypt and Iran have good water access and a low level of under-nourishment along with limited press freedom. This means that even when access to resources is ensured, nothing guarantees that the press is free.

The research showed that the more the media are free, the weaker is the infant mortality rate and the better is life expectancy at birth, suggesting that press freedom has a positive impact on the health situation of a country. It can help fight against diseases and predict constraints on life expectancy.

Where the media are not free, they cannot play any role with regard to health issues. The press cannot help public needs, while public policies lack information on the real state of health. A free press is necessary to promote the fundamental right of every human being to have access to health care.

When looking at the correlation between media freedom and medical personnel and vaccination rates (vaccination against tuberculosis and the number of physicians per 1000 people), it appears clearly that freedom of the press helps underline the fact that some countries lack medical assistance and personnel. But the level of education has a stronger effect on the number of physicians and then on the number of children that are vaccinated.

The countries with the worst freedom of the press and the lowest number of physicians are mostly in Africa, where poverty is exacerbated by conflicts and an insecure environment

Freedom of the media certainly helps in the fight against HIV/AIDS but some countries, despite some significant press freedom, are still confronted with a high prevalence.

Freedom of expression has some effect on education, but education has even more effect on freedom of the press and is an essential component of it. When looking in more detail at literacy rates and the secondary school enrolment ratio, it appears again that the more people are educated, the more they can also act themselves to defend the freedom of the press.

To sum up, a free press is strongly associated with a good level of development and reduced poverty. Access to primary goods and better nutrition also coincide with strong freedom of the press. However, some countries, even if they do reach decent standards of living, still do not have a free press.

Free media contribute to decent health care. Where medical staff are in short supply, a free press can spread the word about it, and help improve the situation.

Education seems to have more influence on freedom of the press than the other way around.

Overall, our research indicates that a free press is crucial in the reduction of poverty, and for development in both its social and economic aspects.

It helps to show or remind governments where their true responsibilities lie. A free press is not a luxury only available to developed and rich countries – indeed, some rich countries do not have a free press. But as a development tool, the free press is as effective as investment or education.

The report in full and accompanying graphs is available at [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/fr/ev.php-URL\\_ID=22020&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/fr/ev.php-URL_ID=22020&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

## Index shows ownership patterns and strengths, weaknesses of media

by Mike de Villiers

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The UN Development Programme,<sup>1</sup> describes infrastructure as a broad concept that includes the obvious physical things such as roads and bridges, power and water supplies, and sanitation, but also schools and health care. The idea is that infrastructure provision on the small, local and community level can make a significant impact on society, and on alleviating poverty.

I want to take that one step further and propose that media too should be part of the infrastructure.

Poverty is also increasingly recognized as not being only about income, but also about lack of health, education and participation in society. If that is so, then media are very much part of the equation.

Media work on the national and the local level. Ideally they can be a source of information, education and access to society. In times of crisis, such as the tsunami that struck this region, media should provide warning to the population before a major disaster, and vital relief information afterwards.

On a national level the media can play a crucial role in elections, as seen in the recent Liberian elections, giving information on candidates and motivating participation in remote areas. In Iraq, the relative success of the constitutional referendum and the dissemination of information on the referendum were largely due to the media.

The media, though, are like a two-edged sword. Too often the lack of free and independent media or their manipulation has caused increased poverty and suffering. The collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the ethnic killings that followed, and the resulting impoverishment of large swathes of the population is the best-known example.

In the hands of the corrupt the media are an equally powerful means of spreading misinformation, and creating isolation ignorance, inequality, violence and poverty.

If the media can be a means to alleviating poverty, or equally to creating poverty, and the difference between the two is largely *who* is controlling the media and to what extent the media can be controlled, then it must be important to understand the state of the media in vulnerable societies. It must also be important to be able to assess the direction in which the media are moving -- toward freedom and independence or headed toward control by the state, or an elite minority or a combination of the two.

Equally, it must be important to understand the strengths and weaknesses within the media and where best to focus attention and development resources.

The International Research and Exchanges Board, IREX, and its sister organization IREX Europe<sup>2</sup> publishes an annual analysis of the state of the media. Its Media Sustainability Index -- a tool drawn up by panels of experts representing local media, non-government organizations, professional associations, international donors and media-development implementers -- assesses the development of independent media systems over time and across countries.

The index looks at five objectives in shaping a successful media system, including legal and social norms, journalism standards, diversity and independence of media and the effectiveness of supporting institutions.

Country chapters describe the state of the media according to these objectives.

The index shows, for example, that Belarus is going backwards, becoming less and less free. Its independent media are increasingly unable to function. Its people are not impoverished in the popular sense as in Liberia but they are impoverished in the broader sense -- lacking choice and access to information and increasingly so.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2006. Making Infrastructure work for the Poor. <http://www.undp.org/poverty/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.irex.org> and <http://www.europe.irex.org>

Should there be regime change or civil strife in Belarus it is clear that the independent media would be in a very weak position, along with free speech and plurality of news sources. The legislature and the judiciary are totally controlled by the executive authority of the president. What the Media Sustainability Index helps show is the need to retain and sustain what little non-government media remain and to focus on supporting free speech.

Russia too is in retreat, but its sheer size and the momentum from earlier years of progress and reform mean that dialogue and plurality continue. It is clear, though, the direction in which the country is currently heading.

The bright spot in the region is Ukraine, which since the Orange Revolution has significantly advanced. Change has not been as profound as many had hoped for, but there has been no return to the repressive tactics of the former Kuchma regime and the opportunity for further reform and progress remain strong.

Southeast Europe is also interesting to look at as a region. It has advanced considerably since IREX drew up a Media Sustainability Index there in 2001. The possibility of joining the European Union, which would require reform of the media, has been a powerful motivator. The Media Sustainability Index here gives an indication of the strength of the independent media and the checks and balances in place.

This is especially significant where the media was such a dangerous tool in the hands of the likes of the late president Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia. After Milosevic's downfall in October 2000, there has been improvement in the state of the media, although perhaps not as hoped.

Freedom of speech has increased significantly, but the professionalism of the media remains weak. Plurality of the media and the strength of their supporting institutions such as the union of journalists are relatively strong,

Uzbekistan in Central Asia provides a similar picture to Belarus. Free press and free speech are virtually non-existent. Plurality of the media scores are even lower than in Belarus.

Going back to the notion that poverty is more than lack of income, but includes poverty of choice, rights and the ability to participate in society, Iraq provides interesting insights. IREX Europe has conducted the first Media Sustainability Index of Iraq, with funding and support from UNESCO.

There has been a radical change in the media since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, and a tightly controlled propaganda machine has given way to a wide array of media sources. Media outlets may now be privately owned and journalists are allowed to ask questions and publish dissenting views. Satellite dishes, printing presses and international media are legal for all and the Internet can be freely accessed.

Although Iraqis have many ways to access information now, media outlets are highly partisan, and censorship is still very present, both overt and self-imposed.

What the Media Sustainability Index demonstrates is the fragility and vulnerability of the media in Iraq. The Index panelists of more than 50 Iraqi journalists, editors, media managers and civil society workers, described a media scene that is pluralistic but partisan, with media outlets developed and supported to present the views of specific power groups.

Journalists are frequently subject to significant pressure from higher-ups whose positions are linked to factional elites. Community or religious pressures also have an impact on coverage.

The media are very vulnerable in Iraq and could easily become tools to promote dissent and division, and to fuel conflict. But with development, the opportunity that free and independent media in Iraq offer is huge.

## 2 . Freedom of expression's potential to empower

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*Freedom of expression is not only a basic right in itself under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it also leads to the expression of other rights.*

*By enabling people to demand openness, honesty and responsiveness from their governments, it opens the way to greater public trust, more effective exercise of democracy and the implementation of measures to develop the economy and reduce poverty.*

*Agnès Callamard, executive director of the freedom-of-expression organization Article 19, argues that a free flow of information helps balance the unequal power dynamic between poor communities and their governments, and that free and professional media play a key role in providing knowledge and in giving voice to the marginalized.*

*Much development policy rests on the theory that citizens should hold their governments to account, yet James Deane, of the Communication for Social Change Consortium, says it is curious that so few development agencies include support to media and communications as part of their overall strategy.*

*He suggests that the debate on media and development should rest on two pillars – the first being that press freedom is non-negotiable and the second that development policy requires a free and plural media engaged in development issues. But the agenda for such a debate must be shaped by media and civil society organizations rather than governments.*

*Joe Thlooe, chairman of the African Publishers Association, explains the harrowing path that South Africa has followed from the grim days of apartheid, when many journalists were jailed or killed, to the situation today, when freedom of expression is guaranteed in the Constitution.*

*Finally, Chang Teck Peng, a Malaysian journalist, pleads for an end to official secrecy and the adoption of a freedom of information act in his country. That would make it possible, he says, to discuss the causes of poverty in a comprehensive and rational way, and would make it more difficult for corrupt politicians to plunder public wealth.*

## **Development, poverty and freedom of expression**

*by Agnès Callamard,*

*Executive Director,  
ARTICLE 19 Global Campaign  
for Free Expression*

ARTICLE 19 holds freedom of expression to be a cornerstone right -- one that enables other rights to be protected and exercised.

It allows people to demand the right to health, to a clean environment and to effective implementation of poverty reduction strategies. It makes electoral democracy meaningful and builds public trust in administration.

Access to information strengthens mechanisms to hold governments accountable for their promises, obligations and actions. It not only increases the knowledge base and participation within a society, but can also secure external checks on state accountability, and thus prevent corruption that thrives on secrecy and closed environments.

More specifically, freedom of expression and freedom of information are critical to achieving and sustaining poverty eradication and human rights.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and successful development in general, relies on an enabling legal and policy environment in which freedom of expression, access to information and an independent media are respected and can thrive.

ARTICLE 19 calls for the developing and adopting of freedom of information laws and the decriminalizing of defamation. It seeks an end to the abuse of defamation laws by those in power to stifle legitimate criticisms and investigative journalism.

We seek constitutional guarantees to freedom of expression; the vetoing or withdrawing of laws that repress the media; and the elimination of laws designed to exclude or marginalize ethnic, linguistic, religious or other minority groups. In particular, we demand the removal of discriminatory laws and practices that prevent women, among other things, from working as journalists.

If development is to be realized, people need the freedom to participate in public life, to put forward ideas and potentially have these realized, and to demand, without fear of recrimination or discrimination, that governments uphold their obligations. The lack of effective voice of the most disadvantaged groups perpetuates inefficient, and sometimes corrupt, forms of governance and service delivery that keep the poor in a subordinate position.

Freedom of expression affords individuals and communities the possibility of becoming active in the development process, thereby increasing its long-term suitability and sustainability.

The knowledge and experience of people living in poverty are often undervalued, and their perspectives on their needs and on solutions to their own problems are ignored.

Poverty eradication entails fundamental reforms to promote broader political participation, to ensure accountability and transparency of government, and to create a strong role for community groups in policy-making.

It also requires that poor people have access to relevant information to take their own informed decisions and realize their rights.

A free flow of information strengthens accountability and transparency, prevents corruption, and increases the capacity of community groups to participate in policy-making.

In societies where information flows widely and access to communication services is widespread, markets and government institutions are likely to become more efficient, transparent and accountable. The institutions and organizations that serve the poor and defend their interests can be more effective. Information and knowledge that are vital



to the poor can be more easily and widely accessible.

It is those communities most affected by poverty that are least able to impart and obtain information, especially relating to basic services. As a result, they are excluded from public debate and unable to influence decisions that have a profound effect on their everyday lives.

The alienation of poor communities from the public sphere prevents them from being able to represent their interests at national level, rendering them vulnerable to misguided policy-making.

Information empowers communities to battle the circumstances in which they find themselves and helps balance the unequal power dynamic between them and their governments.

In a 2004 report issued by the United Nations Development Programme on democracy in Latin America, the authors argued that democracy must extend beyond the ballot box and be deepened through an expansion of *social citizenship* and an intensification of efforts to combat poverty and inequality. Democratic reform should not only be focused on government but also tailored to create the mechanisms necessary for citizens to adopt an active role in public life.

The media have a specific task of informing the public; they can enhance the free flow of information and ideas to individuals and communities, which in turn can help them to make informed choices for their lives.

ARTICLE 19 work shows that free and professional media, using investigative methods, play a key role in providing knowledge and in giving voice to the marginalized, by highlighting corruption and developing a culture of criticism in which people are less apprehensive about questioning government action.

ARTICLE 19 also insists that development information and the role of the media is not restricted to mainstream models, and that there is an increasing role for alternative media and informal communications networks that need to be strengthened and included in any infrastructural development plan. In addition, the informational role of the media is of use to the public and to governments.

Freedom of expression, access to information and participation are often regarded with suspicion by those involved in a conflict. While secrecy may be required for a period during peace-making, our experience has shown that this must be for a limited time. Information blackout or inappropriate communication strategies by governments and inter-governmental agencies can lead to mistrust, misrepresentation and disinformation, thus exacerbating tension.

The media especially are a decisive factor in peace processes and post-conflict situations. They can take on a strong,

supportive role vis-à-vis the peace process, helping to inform the public of the peace agreement and its implications. They can facilitate public participation and reconciliation and give information about threats to progress.

Or they can fail to do this, cater for divisive elements within the warring camps, fuel tensions and deepen dangerous divisions.

The poor bear the greatest burden of the corruption that allows malpractice to continue unchecked, due in part to the lack of access to information about the acquisition and use of public funds.

Corruption, broadly defined as the abuse of public power for private gain, allows inefficiency to persist and distorts the potential for growth. It discourages foreign investment and corrodes the budgets allocated to public procurement that enable basic infrastructure in poverty stricken areas to be built, such as roads, schools and hospitals.

When corruption misdirects the assignment of unemployment or disability benefits, delays eligibility for pensions and weakens the provisions of basic public services, it is usually the poor who suffer most. In a corrupt society, the maximum resources available for public services and anti-poverty programmes can never be fully utilized because a percentage is always lost to individual gain.

High levels of corruption both reduce the effectiveness of aid-funded projects and weaken public support for assistance in donor countries. Freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and access to information laws, constitutes a critical tool in the fight against the corruption that is having a pernicious effect on development and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

If a public administration has to publish regular accounts, including the particulars of specific deals that have been negotiated, if companies are forced to set out their side of the arrangement for public scrutiny and if businesses know that wrongdoing can be exposed, the margin for corrupt activity is dramatically reduced.

Access to information and freedom of expression are vital to effective strategies to promote and protect the right to reproductive and sexual health, and to a sustainable environment. ARTICLE 19 first made this policy link through research and publications, and which, over the past two years, we have applied in a practical context.

In Peru, with our partners *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad* (Press and Society Institute) and *El Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán*, a women's advocacy group, we have tested the impact of the new access to information law on sexual and reproductive health rights, and strengthened the capacity of groups working with women in poor areas to use the legislation. We have also trained health officials and ensured a thorough implementation of the legislation. Due to the

success of our project in Peru, we have transferred lessons learned to Mexico, with a focus on the promotion and protection of the reproductive and sexual health rights of young people.

In Malaysia,ARTICLE 19 together with the Malaysian Freedom of Information Coalition has launched a project seeking to increase awareness of the public's right to information, and to build the capacity of civil society to campaign for better access to environmental information.

Over the next year and a half,ARTICLE 19 and its partner will conduct research on access to environmental information, organize a series of public awareness campaigns, provide training,and draft and advocate the introduction of a freedom of information act.

In Ukraine,ARTICLE 19 is currently working with EcoPravo to empower civil society to exercise its right to access to environmental information through the use of both domestic legislation and international standards of freedom of information -- particularly the 1998 Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention), to which Ukraine is a signatory.

The target groups are groups of women, youth and people negatively affected by lack of environmental information,who, through focus groups discussions and training events, will be better equipped to participate in relevant decision-making, as well as workers for non-government organizations, who will receive training on the effective promotion of access to environmental information.

The project also seeks to build the capacity of relevant institutions to act more transparently and disseminate environmental information in the public interest. In the Abkhaz Republic, we are working with local organizations to promote the development of consultative and responsive people-centred decision-making, with a focus on issues of particular relevance to women.

## **A ghost is exorcised ... but what comes next?**

by James Deane,

Managing Director of Strategy,  
Communication for Social  
Change Consortium

World Press Freedom Day in 2006 sees UNESCO adopt a declaration on “media, development and poverty eradication”.

Another conference, another declaration it might be argued, another piece of paper to add to the mountain of other declarations emerging from the cacophony of conferences and meetings that take place in the development world each year.

There are several reasons why this declaration should merit more attention, and why it perhaps adds up to more than the words it contains. One is that this is one of a series of declarations from recent World Press Freedom day meetings, with earlier declarations focusing on the role of media in conflict situations, and the role of media in relation to governance.

Together, they provide at least the beginnings of a set of coherent recommendations outlining how media organizations – or at least those who have engaged in such meetings - see their role in relation to the twenty-first century development agenda.

A second, and perhaps ultimately more important reason, is that the UNESCO Colombo declaration has helped banish a ghost that has haunted debates about issues of media and poverty for more than 20 years.

This issue – how the media assumes responsibility for covering issues of development – was the spark for a major crisis in UNESCO’s history that saw both the United States and Britain leaving the organization.

Ever since the New World Information and Communication Order debates of the 1980s, international discussions of the role of the media in covering development issues have been inextricably bound up with issues of freedom of expression.

Attempts to counter western domination of media institutions came to be seen as an assault on fundamental principles of press freedom as well as being an endeavour to ensure that the states should determine what media could and could not report. Press freedom organizations have rightly been acutely suspicious of any attempt designed to persuade the media to fulfill their social responsibilities.

Now, with relative ease and little controversy, a UNESCO World Press Freedom day meeting has passed a declaration that clearly spells out how important the media’s role is in relation to poverty reduction. Why, when this debate has been so contentious in the past, has it become so much more harmonious now.

It is important not to overstate the case. There are still plenty of difficult issues to unpick here but nevertheless, there is now a clearer, stronger consensus on the twin pillars that can underpin this debate in future.

The first is that freedom of expression is fundamental and non-negotiable and that there is not a necessary tension between encouragement and support to media to engage in poverty related issues and promoting freedom of expression. Indeed, as a declaration bringing together media freedom advocates and social activists agreed in 2003 argued:

*Freedom of expression, as expressed in Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental right which underpins all other human rights, and enables them to be expressed and realized. The eradication of poverty is essential to the realization for all peoples of the aspirations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. People living in poverty face particular obstacles to achieving freedom of expression and access to the media which are associated with the conditions of poverty.<sup>1</sup>*

This is different to the debate of 20 years ago where attempts to ensure that the media covered issues of poverty were seen as being sometimes overt, and sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Panos. 2003. *Bellagio Statement on Media Freedom and Poverty*. [www.panos.org.uk](http://www.panos.org.uk),

disguised attempts to place state limitations and censorship on the media.

Very few social activists argue that the route to a more socially engaged media coverage is greater state control of the media. Many media and freedom of expression advocates recognize that freedom of expression cannot truly be said to exist in countries with a nominally free press if only one in five of the population are in a position to exercise it. This is a situation that is reality in many countries where the media neither reaches nor reflects the realities of the vast majority of the population outside the middle classes and urban elites.

The second pillar is that strategies to tackle poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals are unlikely to succeed without an engaged and plural media.

Current development policies are founded on two key assumptions. The first is that national development strategies are rooted in and owned by the societies they are designed to benefit. There is a strong consensus among bilateral donors, multilateral organizations and the governments of developing countries that strategies that are imposed on governments and societies tend to be unsuccessful.

The World Bank's poverty reduction strategies (PRSPs) are rooted in principles of national ownership and participation by those most affected.<sup>2</sup> Reviews of PRSPs to date have tended to make a clear connection between their success (or otherwise) and the degrees to which they command broad degrees of political and public acceptance.<sup>3</sup>

Such acceptance is dependent on people, including those most affected, having information on, understanding of and an opportunity to debate the policies at stake. Such public understanding and public debate is impossible without media that have both the capacity and interest to engage in poverty-related issues, and a structure that enables a variety of perspectives to be aired. Without such media, it is very difficult to root development policy in effective public understanding and debate.

The second assumption is that free media are able to hold governments to account. Most donor agencies are channeling increasing funding on budget support to recipient governments, entrusting policy decisions on where to prioritize and allocate funds to them. There is a broad consensus that the governments of developing country have become more accountable over the last 20 years to donor organizations and international financial institutions than they have to their own citizens. The Commission for Africa argued in 2005, for example, that

*Excessive conditionality together with demands for constant reporting risk making African governments feel more accountable to foreign donors than to their own people.*<sup>4</sup>

This is seen as being unsustainable. Since the G8 conference in Britain in 2005, which itself built on earlier commitments to increase development assistance and write off more debt, substantially greater resources are being invested in development assistance. At the same time donors, keen to foster greater responsibility by recipient governments, are placing fewer conditions on these funds.

It becomes imperative in such a climate that, if governments are to become less accountable to donors, then the mechanisms that make them accountable to their citizens work. Many donors see the media as being a major source of such accountability.<sup>5</sup> Hilary Benn, the British secretary of state for international development, argued recently that:

*In developing countries, it's not about me or other donors being accountable - it's about developing country governments being accountable to their own people. A free and open media plays a hugely important role in helping to make this happen. In Kenya, the media - from newspapers to private radio stations to mobile phones - are doing a lot to uncover and expose malpractice at the highest levels of the state.*<sup>6</sup>

Here are two pillars, then, of a future debate on media and development. The first that press freedom is non negotiable and of central concern to empowering people living in poverty. The second that current development policy needs a free and plural media engaged in issues of development. On these two points, the UNESCO Colombo conference perhaps provides us with a clear consensus.

This still leaves formidable challenges. It is not clear how well equipped are the media to play this role, or even the degree to which the media are increasingly or decreasingly inclined to do so. The media over the last decade in most developing countries have been transformed through a myriad of factors including liberalization (particularly of broadcasting), new technologies, changing political structures and power dynamics, international donor pressure and shifting market structures. Research and mapping of these changes in relation to poverty is quite primitive and limited, particularly when it comes to analyses of access of people living in poverty to information about issues that shape their lives.

It is, at the least, questionable that strong incentives exist for media to make the holding of government to account a major priority. That so many journalists and editors do so is a tribute to enduring courage and the social commitment of journalism as a profession, but greater profits often lie in chasing consumer and lifestyle-oriented advertising money, and the disincentives for strong investigative journalism can be extreme. Free media are not necessarily socially engaged media, and development organizations should perhaps be making fewer assumptions of what media organizations will do to hold government to account, and be rather more active about working out strategies that can support them to do so.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.worldbank.org/poverty](http://www.worldbank.org/poverty) for more information on PRSPs

<sup>3</sup> Mozammel M. and S. Odugbemi. 2004. *With the Support of Multitudes: Using strategic communication to fight poverty through PRSPs*. <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/strat-comm-prsp.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Commission for Africa. 2004. *Our Common Interest*. <http://www.commissionforafrica.org>, 94

<sup>5</sup> Deane, J. 2005. *Why the Media Matters*. Global Forum for Media Development.

<sup>6</sup> Benn, H. 2006. Speech to Royal African Society. <http://www.dfid.gov.uk>

Given how much development policy rests on governments being held to account by their citizens, it is curious that very few development agencies currently have a clear strategy of support to media and communication efforts as part of their development strategies. Indeed, as donors have allocated more investment to governments in the form of budget support, and as they have decentralized, support to media and communication initiatives have generally become more uneven and confused.

Given the compelling arguments that support a greater order of priorities in this area, this is likely to change, and there are signs of a renewed interest in support to media and communication efforts. There are a multiple and complex challenges facing those organizations planning to support media. A central question emerges as to whether there is a clear strategy of what needs to be done to support the media in the context of future development.

The declarations that exist, including those from the World Press Freedom Day meetings, provide an important foundation for future action. They do not, however, currently amount to a clear strategy.

Several things need to happen for such a strategy to emerge.

The first is a clear recognition that any agenda on media and development needs to be shaped first and foremost by the media not by government. If there is one central lesson to emerge from the last three decades of debates concerned with the "responsibilities" of the media, it is that productive and constructive debate becomes very difficult unless the agenda is shaped by media and civil society organizations rather than government.

Government clearly has a major role, particularly when it comes to issues such as public service broadcasting, and in guaranteeing freedom of expression, but debates on the role of media in society are best driven by and held in forums that are wholly shaped and trusted by the media and those that support them.

This has important implications. It has implications for donor organizations, which are channeling increasing funds through budget support to governments and which, if they are to support media and communication seriously, will need to find ways of doing so outside of these budget support mechanisms.

It has implications for multilateral organizations, including UNESCO. World Press Freedom day meetings, for example, are held in partnership with a host government (as well as partner media institutions), and this can lead to uneasy dynamics.

UNESCO, the UN Development Programme and other members of the UN family have a critical and increasing role to play in the future of media development, not least

because they are able to straddle the government, media and development sectors. The actual shaping of the role of the media in development is a debate and an effort that needs to be decisively and clearly shaped by media organizations in their own right.

Furthermore, it is the developing country media that should be in the lead in shaping their roles and responsibilities in the context of their own realities. Most debates in this area have tended to be shaped either at the international level (within the multilateral system) or by northern-based media-support institutions. Such efforts have often been important and valuable, but now there are unprecedented opportunities for media in developing countries to shape their own agendas concerning media freedom and development.

The Strengthening African Media process is one example of this. With the support of the British Department for International Development and the Open Society Foundation, it is catalyzing a major consultation process in Africa designed to map out a strategic framework for media support on the continent.

In a series of email debates, regional consultations and other dialogues, it is engaging with media practitioners and trainers, media owners, media-support organizations and special-interest groups in articulating a strategic framework for support to the media. It has joined together with another proposal emanating from the recent Global Forum for Media Development in Jordan 2005 for an African Forum for Media Development.

The opportunity here is for media in developing countries to construct a clear and coherent strategic framework within which other development participants -- donors, multilateral organizations and media-support organizations, as well as governments -- can operate.

A second challenge and opportunity is for much greater coordination and communication between organizations that are working to support media and communications in developing countries. There has, in fact, been a remarkably strong commitment from many media-support organizations to work as closely together as possible, which was demonstrated by the Global Forum for Media Development.

However, most funding mechanisms seek to foster competition rather than coordination between media-support organizations, often to the extent of causing duplication and incoherence.

Within the multilateral system, clarity and transparency about the responsibilities and roles of different organizations in regard to support of media and communication could be improved. Most critically, at a national level there is often significant confusion about which organization (UN or otherwise) has the responsibility for ensuring coordination, or at least lack of duplication, of media and communication

efforts.

As donor budgets grow and decision-making on these budgets increasingly is decentralized to national level, such lack of coordination can greatly reduce effectiveness. Strategic commitment and clarity by most bilateral organizations in this sector has been lacking in recent years, and this too has tended to create a sense of strategic confusion and incoherence.

A third challenge is linking media and communication-support strategies into other development strategies. This goes beyond *mainstreaming* media and communication. Much of the current debate in this area has shifted from a focus on educating people towards empowering them, away from a focus how to deliver a message and more towards providing a voice, particularly to people living in poverty.

Yet there is still too little connection between the different organizations engaged in pursuit of similar objectives. Many civil society organizations also argue that they exist to provide a voice to people living in poverty.

Organizations supporting media and communication have not tended to create effective links with the civil society groups. Taking this agenda forward will require building alliances and partnerships not simply within the media and communication sector but across other sectors.

Finally is the long-standing issue of evidence. A good deal of evidence already exists for the links between media freedom and good governance, and of the impact of media and communication on development. But it is poorly articulated and organized. Evidence alone will not persuade policy makers and donors to make this area a higher priority, but it is necessary for a major change in policy attitudes.

There is now a historic opportunity for a free and plural media in developing countries to develop and flourish. It requires donor and multilateral organizations to become far more organized and serious in support of this sector, and for them to acknowledge how dependent the success or failure of development strategies are on a genuinely free and plural media. The World Press Freedom conference of Colombo 2006 is important for many reasons. Perhaps its greatest significance is the closing of one chapter on media for development, and the opening of another.

## **What you can't see can hurt you**

by Joe Thloloe,

Chairman,  
African Publishers Association,  
South Africa

If you were in South Africa today, you could be listening to a radio advert that states:

*This is an ad about media freedom.*

*So let's talk about sharks.*

*As any diver will tell you, don't worry about the sharks you can see – worry about the ones you can't.*

*Shark attack survivors always say –*

*I felt something hit me.*

*I felt a tug on my leg.*

*I felt something pull me under.*

*I felt.*

*Never I saw.*

*They never saw it coming.*

*So what's that got to do with media freedom?*

*Well, this is an ad about making sure you can see what's coming.*

*The media are your eyes and ears on the world.*

*Media freedom guarantees your right to know, and participate in, your country. And that's real democracy. Media freedom is your freedom. Insist on it.*

This is part of a campaign of print, radio and television advertisements mounted by South African National Editors' Forum to mark World Press Freedom Day. The pay-off line in the campaign is: "What you can't see, can hurt you."

It is our way of celebrating the fact that we've come a long way from the grim days of apartheid when many of us were jailed or killed because we told the true story of what was happening in our country.

We also use this day to pledge our support for those around the world who are still under attack for telling the stories of their countries.

For us, time is measured before 1994 and after 1994. But in truth, the unforgettable victory came in December 1996 when South Africans defined their mission in a new constitution.

The explanatory memorandum that accompanied it stated:

The process of drafting the Constitution involved many South Africans in the largest public participation programme ever carried out in South Africa. After nearly two years of intensive consultations, political parties represented in the Constitutional Assembly negotiated the formulations contained in this text, which are an integration of ideas from ordinary citizens, civil society and political parties represented in and outside of the Constitutional Assembly.

The preamble of the constitution spells out South Africa's vision, and says it is to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and media freedom. Article 16, an echo of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reads:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media; freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; freedom of artistic creativity; and academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.*

Society has thus reserved a special place for the media. But we should always remember that our special rights are embedded in the right of every member of our society to freedom of expression.

The media in South Africa are part of South African society and are therefore obliged to strive for the goals spelled out in the preamble to the constitution.

We also have three other responsibilities:

- To hold up the vision that is in the constitution, and remind South Africans of their commitments;
- To hold all those in power – including ordinary citizens - accountable for turning this dream into reality;
- And. to tell the daily story of the bumpy journey to this new world.

We will be judged on how well, collectively, we meet these responsibilities.



## **In Malaysia, poverty debate is shackled by Draconian laws**

by *Chang Teck Peng*

*Editor-in-Chief  
Merdekareview.com,  
Malaysia*

How can Malaysian media help fight poverty? That is an interesting question and an arguable one for which the government, backed by draconian secrecy laws, has an answer.

From the government's point of view, the media can and must play a part in eradicating poverty. But this is not as simple as it first sounds, for the government's view is that people bring poverty upon themselves.

Former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, who banged the drum for "Asian values" and presided over a period of rapid modernization, kept saying that if people were hard-working, innovative and pulled in their belts, they would enjoy good prospects in life. The government's view was that the role of the media was to support the official position and persuade people to change their attitudes.

Under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, the tone remains the same. For example, after his government introduced an unexpected increase in fuel prices, the response to protest was to tell people to practise austerity and use public transport.

In reality, the poor should not be blamed for being poor. In Malaysia, poverty is a question of uneven wealth distribution rather than personal attitude. The political and economic elites have utilized their advantageous position to accumulate capital while the poor have been increasingly marginalized in the sharing of the economic pie.

Following Mahathir Mohamad's retirement in 2003, crony capitalism, nepotism and corruption continue under the Badawi regime. But the public, especially the less educated rural populations, do not get to hear about this because the mainstream media fail to lift the lid. Even if opposition politicians expose alleged scandals and wrongdoings, the issues rarely get sufficient attention from the media.

The reason is not hard to see. The media in Malaysia are controlled by severe laws, including the Official Secrets Act and the Sedition Act, that are blamed for the lack of courage in checking the government's alleged wrongdoings and allowing the public to voice discontent.

The Official Secrets Act was originally brought in by the British in 1911. Since 1972 it has been imposed across the nation, hampering the work of journalists and impeding of investigative journalism more than any other piece of legislation.

A 1986 amendment introduced by Mahathir allows ministers or any officers authorized by them to classify any documents as top secret, secret, confidential and restricted. Those who have access to, obtain or publish these so-called "official secrets" are subject to a mandatory jail sentence of at least one year.

The Mahathir administration used the law to cover-up a barrage of financial scandals, particularly the Bank Bumiputra Finance affair, which has caused the loss of billions and the murder of an investigation officer.

The 1948 Sedition Act, also a legacy of colonialism, places tight limitations on freedom of expression, particularly on so-called sensitive political subjects and issues such as the status of Malay as national language, or the citizenship of non-Malays. The law states that any act, speech, word or publication is seditious if it has a seditious tendency -- the definition of which is extremely broad and open-ended.

Instead of such restrictive legislation, civil society groups in Malaysia call on the government to pass a comprehensive freedom of information law, but these efforts have been snubbed. In 1999, the then deputy minister for internal security told a UN Development Programme conference on The Future of the Media in a Knowledge Society: Rights, Responsibilities and Risks, that a freedom of information act was not suitable for Malaysia.

The legal controls are not the only factor restricting the media from doing their part in poverty eradication. The mainstream media are becoming more and more commercialized. Almost all major media groups in Malaysia are public-listed companies and making profits has become their most important mission.

In order to maximise advertising revenue, the mainstream media chase the readers or audiences with strong purchasing power, by introducing supplements promoting consumer goods, travel, housing and decoration, fashion and cosmetics. But such lifestyle features aimed at the middle classes marginalizes those stereotyped as unmarketable content and valueless public.

It is not fair to say the media do nothing to help the poor. They allocate some space for disadvantaged individuals and families in programmes such as TV3's "Bersamamu" (Together with you), or NTV7's "Finding Angels", while Chinese newspapers devote space to people seeking donations to pay medical expenses.

However, such goodwill coverage gives little help to poverty eradication. Since poverty in Malaysia is socially and politically structural, helping individuals and families does not bring about a big change.

A freedom of information act would make it possible to discuss the cause of poverty in a comprehensive and rational way. Such an act would contribute significantly to poverty eradication. By exposing the classified data and documents, it would make the public aware that poverty is not a communal issue, and put an end to inter-ethnic misconceptions.

If a freedom of information act were in place now, the mismanagement of public wealth would have been discovered at an earlier stage, preventing public assets from feathering the nests of corrupt politicians.

Obtaining an act will be a long and difficult struggle because the government still has much to hide and the opposition and civil society are weak. But for Malaysia, it would be a step worth taking.

### 3 . Access and participation: the community perspective

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One of the simplest and most direct forms of mass communication is community radio, which has grown rapidly in some countries in recent years. Equipment needed to set up a radio station serving tens or even hundreds of thousands of listeners costs only a few thousand dollars, and, because volunteers provide most of the programme material, the stations can operate on a shoestring.

But development of the sector is often obstructed by the failure or unwillingness of many governments to pass legislation giving community stations the necessary bandwidth, which is handed instead to state or commercial broadcasters.

According to Steve Buckley of the World Association of Community Radios, new technologies can give remote communities instant access to global information. Often the local radios are their only source of information. Without them, many poor people would be unable to participate in debate or express their opinions on public policies that affect them directly. Without information, they are unaware of their rights and lack the knowledge they need to take action to improve their conditions.

In India, a colonial-era Telegraph Act makes it impossible for community broadcasters to use public radio and television bandwidth. Nevertheless, communities are getting around the restrictions by using so-called narrow-casting techniques, including limited cable distribution or sending programmes to villages on tape.

These initiatives have the vision of ensuring that community broadcasting becomes a reality, says Ashish Sen of Voices, a non-government organization in Bangalore specializing in development communications. Unlike mainstream broadcasters, they have all promoted the voices of women, who help run media centres and studios. Much of the programming focuses on women's issues, including their participation in politics, their right to education, dowry deaths, domestic violence and female foeticide.

Alex T. Quarmyne of Radio Ada in Ghana explains how community radio is having an impact on some countries in Africa, such as Mali, Senegal and South Africa. But he says there are still a number of African countries where authorities have refused to empower communities for fear this would lead to demands for good governance and accountability.

## **Listening to your neighbours**

by Steve Buckley,

Director,  
World Association of  
Community Radios

Community radio has come to the fore as an accessible, popular, participatory and low-cost medium. Its growth in most parts of the world is the story of people and communities striving to speak out and to be heard. It provides empowerment and of self-reliance, encourages dialogue about their conditions and livelihoods and contributes to the defence of cultural and linguistic diversity.

It is a story in which the pursuit of social and development goals has been deeply entwined with the struggle for human and political rights and particularly the right to freedom of expression.

Community media can be understood as referring to media projects and organizations that act independently, are grounded in civil society, and operate for social objectives rather than for private financial gain. They are normally operated by groups based in the community, such as non-government and workers' organizations, educational institutions or religious and cultural associations.

The growth of the global network of community broadcasters over the past two decades has been accompanied by the development of new communication technologies that enable instant and global access to information, which has rightly been compared to the industrial revolution.

It has contributed to economic globalization and has enabled new international social movements to proliferate. But it also threatens to amplify the gross asymmetry in people's access to information and communication. While enthusiasm for the liberating potential of the Internet rose alongside its stock market success – and perhaps waned with it too – it has also brought a wider awareness of the importance of access to knowledge and information that has in turn brought a renewed interest in a traditional medium like radio.

In recent years there has also been a significant shift in the thinking of development professionals and development institutions from an excessive emphasis on market-driven economic growth and technology transfer to discourse that is more focused on people.

From such a perspective, voicelessness and powerlessness have come to be seen as key dimensions of poverty, while democracy, equity and civil rights are seen not only as intrinsically desirable but as direct contributions to the realization of human security, well-being and opportunity.

Thus communication policies that guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and access to information can contribute directly to the achievement of development goals. Policies that suppress these rights can have a detrimental effect.

Without access to a voice poor people are unable to participate in debate or to express their opinions on public policies that affect them directly. Without access to information poor people are unaware of their rights and entitlements, are unable to challenge decisions and lack the knowledge to take effective action to improve their conditions.

The ground-breaking study, *Voices of the Poor*, published by the World Bank, set out to listen to poor people's own voices on the experience of poverty. It started from the recognition that poor people's own views have rarely part been part of the policy debate. The study noted that poor men and women are themselves acutely aware of their lack of voice, their lack of information and their lack of contacts to access information. The study showed how this puts poor people at a disadvantage in dealing with public agencies, non-government organizations, employers and traders.

Poor people face many barriers to expressing their views and gaining access to information that are directly associated with the conditions in which they live, according

to the Bellagio statement.<sup>1</sup>

These barriers encompass costs such as the purchase or rental of communications services and equipment, discrimination in access to services, illiteracy and lack of education, and the penury of basic infrastructure including electricity and transportation.

They also include political obstacles including repression and lack of will of states to allow democratic access to information and voice for the most marginalized groups as well as direct forms of censorship and lack of information about knowledge and information systems. This asymmetry is frequently called the “digital divide” but it is more accurately understood as a “communications divide” that pre-dates the new digital technologies. It is a divide rooted in poverty and one whose effects are to sustain poverty through lack of access to voice, information, knowledge and power.

Local and community-based media have become recognized as having a particular role to play for people and communities facing poverty, exclusion and marginalization. They can assist in providing access to information and voice, including in local and vernacular languages. They can reinforce traditional forms of communication such as storytelling, group discussion and theatre and they can enable grass-roots participation in policy-making and democracy. They use technologies that are appropriate and affordable. In doing so, they reach out to the most remote communities and to people from all walks of life.

One of the most widespread and accessible communications technologies is radio – low cost and already receivable by 90 per cent of the world’s population. For just a few thousand dollars’ worth of equipment, a community of 100,000 people or more can be served by a community radio station.

To understand the particular role of community radio we have to recognize the two dominant broadcasting forms in the world today, public or private. There are some good models of publicly owned broadcasting with independent governance and editorial arrangements and a range of public-interest programming.

But many state-owned public media are still not sufficiently independent of the government. Instead of truly serving the public interest they remain the instrument of the government in power. Instead of dialogue with their audience they maintain a one-way mode of communication.

Community broadcasting, has emerged from civil society to find a place alongside the established public and private media. Community broadcasting can be considered a third sector of the media landscape -- independent, with social and not commercial objectives. It is a form of public service broadcasting, but from the grass roots, up rather than from the top down.

Despite widespread acceptance that the media can make a

positive contribution to development, this is by no means assured. In the hands of governments media have been used as instruments of propaganda and indoctrination. In the hands of private oligarchs they have become vehicles in the service of elite interests. In the hands of political organizations they have been tools for division and sometimes conflict. In the hands of religious institutions they have been used to proselytize. Even where it is possible to show correlation between development goals and media activity, proving causality can be difficult.

There are, on the other hand, many case examples where community media have been linked directly to the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals – improved livelihoods, promotion of gender equality, better health and education, combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and contributions to environmental awareness and sustainability.

But it is not always helpful to think of community media only in instrumental terms or to assess impact against a narrowly defined set of quantitative indicators. The most frequently stated benefit of community broadcasting is its impact in empowering poor people to speak for themselves.

Such empowerment is directly measurable through participation but its consequences for development are neither easy to measure nor possible to predict. There are some 10,000 community broadcasters in the world today. Most of them broadcast to rural communities or poor urban neighborhoods. They typically have hundreds of direct participants – staff, volunteers, guests and listeners who phone in -- and audiences measured in the tens or hundreds of thousands.

Empowerment through community media can contribute to good governance by identifying corruption and holding leaders to account, and it can assist sustainable development by enabling people to take control over their own livelihoods, by identifying their needs and problems and by providing access to knowledge and information to enable informed choices.

By giving people a voice, community media can also have important but less tangible impacts on quality of life, sense of community, shared culture and values, and perceived security.

In times of political turbulence and transition, community media can provide an outlet for ordinary people when state or commercial media look the other way. In Nepal, community broadcasters have been at the forefront of the defence of democracy in the face of an autocratic king while the state media has continued to relay government propaganda. In Venezuela, community broadcasters were among the first to report on an alleged military coup, news of which was suppressed by mainstream commercial media. Despite the growing recognition of community broadcasting, there remains a need to raise awareness and acceptance of the idea that communities have the right to own and operate

<sup>1</sup> Panos. 2006. *Bellagio Statement on Media Freedom and Poverty*. <http://www.panos.org.uk>,

their own media. There is still much to be done in many countries, to establish policies, laws and regulations that enable and encourage community broadcasting.

There is also a need to build capacity among community-based organizations to develop sustainable models of media that contribute to social and economic well-being of communities.

The policy, legal and regulatory framework remains the single most persistent obstacle. This should not be so. There is worldwide experience today of legislating and regulating community media from which we can see what works and what does not.

Twenty years ago there was almost no broadcast community media outside the Americas, a few Western European countries and Australia. State monopolies were the norm in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Now the situation has changed dramatically. In the last ten years, community broadcasting has gained a presence across the African continent, in most European Union countries and in many countries of Asia and the Pacific. Many governments are reforming their media laws to recognize community media, including in Argentina, Bolivia, Uganda, India, South Korea and Britain.

There is growing recognition in the international human rights system of the value of community media.

For example, the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated in his 2002 annual report,

*Given the potential importance of these community channels for freedom of expression, the establishment of discriminatory legal frameworks that hinder the allocation of frequencies to community radio stations is unacceptable.*

The Africa Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights recommends,

*Community broadcasting shall be promoted given its potential to broaden access by poor and rural communities to the airwaves.*

The Council of Europe Steering Committee on the Mass Media calls on member states to

*Encourage the development of the contribution of Community Media in a pluralistic media landscape.*

From the countries in which community broadcasting is successfully established some common characteristics of good practice can be quickly identified.

There should be clear and explicit recognition of community broadcasting as a distinct sector. It should not be run for profit but for social gain and community benefit, it should be owned by and accountable to the community that it seeks to serve, and it should provide for participation by the community in programme-making and in management.

There should be a straightforward and transparent process for the allocation of broadcast spectrum and licencing. It should be responsive to demands from community-based organizations that meet the essential requirements. There should be no unnecessary obstacles that would exclude or deter communities from seeking authorization. And the process should be independent of political interference.

The regulatory framework for community broadcasting should have regard to the sustainability and resourcing of the sector. Licence fees should be set at a nominal level so as not to exclude communities with few resources. There should be no unreasonable restrictions on sources of revenue. Community broadcasters should be encouraged to develop economic support from within their own community but assistance should also be provided through independently administered public funding mechanisms.

Reform of the legal and regulatory environment should be supported by the building of capacity to assure the sustainability of community broadcasting initiatives. This includes training in production and management, technical advice and guidance, investment in social and development content, and support for country level associations that can speak on behalf of community broadcasters and provide a forum for sharing of experience and best practice.

Taken together, in countries that are receptive to media pluralism and empowerment of the poor; these measures can contribute to the further growth of community broadcasting and strengthen its unique contribution to equitable and sustainable development.

## **Voices: a critical ingredient in eradicating poverty**

by Ashish Sen,

Director,  
Madhyam Communication Voices,

Thanks to Amartya Sen's seminal work, Democracy as Freedom, voice is increasingly acknowledged as a critical ingredient in poverty eradication. The crucial question, however, is: whose voice?

The voices of ordinary people struggle to be heard and often are compelled to fight for legitimacy. In India, the problem is illustrated by these two quotations by non-literate Dalit women, from the group sometimes referred to as untouchables, who manage the Pastapur Community Media Centre in Andhra Pradesh.

*If we have our own radio, the issues that we talk about will reach a larger community of women. Radio will enhance the credibility of our messages by lending them the weight of the medium.*

- Bidakanne Samamma

*Why won't the government issues us a licence for our own radio? They invite us so many times to their meetings and listen to our views. If they want to hear us, why not give us a radio licence?*

-Algole Ratnamma

Good governance, right to information, transparency and accountability are the key buzzwords in today's development model, and they have brought the question of community participation to the fore. But while this is acknowledged as a critical ingredient for sustainable development, its complementary component – community communication – remains to find an effective and judicious response from the state.

Amartya Sen's powerful concept of development as freedom underlines the critical role of free and independent media in social change and underpins the strong co-relation between community media, freedom of expression and development.

Development agencies have increasingly postulated that enabling people's voices to be heard is a critical ingredient in poverty eradication. More often than not, however, community voices remain on the periphery of the media scene.

The struggle for community radio legitimacy in India is a case in point. More than a decade has passed since the Supreme Court judgement of 1995 that declared the airwaves are public property. Yet the colonial-era, fossilized Indian Telegraph Act of 1883 continues to hold sway over broadcasting.

Admittedly, a decade of lobbying and advocacy has somewhat opened windows to legitimacy as far as community broadcasting is concerned. In 2003 New Delhi allowed applications for campus radios. But the draft document on community radio has for months been in the hands of a group of ministers for consideration and recommendations.

For how longer must communities continue to wait in the wings? In a country like India -- which confronts daunting diversities in languages, dialects and cultures as well as divides between rich and poor, urban and rural dwellers or the literate and non-literate – community radio offers enormous potential.

There are sufficient examples of community-based initiatives in the country that have used audio and radio with transforming impact, particularly in the rural areas where about 70 per cent of the country population resides.

Here are two models on which a community radio of the future could be based.

The first is an initiative in Gujarat that reaches 150 villages in Kutch district, and a similar venture that covers 45 villages in Bihar. The community ventures buy air time from an existing broadcaster in Bangalore and send out programmes on a weekly basis at a particular time slot. They receive support from local media collectives and material

from teams of community reporters. One of the Gujarat programmes, the Story of the Saras Crane received the Chameli Jain award in 2001.

The second model reaches 35 villages in the Kolar district of Karnataka state and 75 villages in the Medak district in the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state. These initiatives are rooted in community participation and have community ownership as their goal. They have their own production centres managed by volunteers and community reporters and programmes are disseminated by tape recordings played at village meetings and over loudspeakers.

More recently, 36 women's self-help groups assisted by UNESCO established a cable radio network connecting all the 750 households of Budhikote, a village 150 kilometres north of Bangalore. Subscribers receive two hours of programming every day in four languages.

Notwithstanding differences in their approach, all these initiatives have the vision of ensuring that community broadcasting becomes a reality. They have all promoted the voices of women. Women help run the media centres and studios and assert that they would be ready to run a community radio station on their own. Many of the programmes have focused on women's issues, including their participation in politics, their right to education, dowry deaths, domestic violence and female foeticide.

Ippapally Mallama, who works at the Pastapur media centre, said 'We want people outside to know about issues that concern us'.

The media venture in Gujarat is the initiative of Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, a grass-roots rural development organization of Kutchi women, which has been successful in using radio as a vehicle by which to reinforce ethnic identity but also to promote community cohesion and harmony at the height of the Gujarat riots.

During the riots, KMVS called upon the people of Kutch to practice the values of tolerance and plurality which are a part of their way of life and faith. The KMVS magazine programme, Musafari resurrects Kutch history, art and culture and also attempts to reinterpret them in a contemporary context. Time has also been found to feature dying art forms such as Vai singing.

The Namma Dhwani (OurVoices) media centre in Budhikote village, on the border of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh states, includes special programmes by and for the children of the local high school in its cable programming, including newscasts, plays and skits. As one of the pupils, Sundar Reddy, said, 'We want to hear the news. We want to know what is happening in the country and the world today'. Another, Usha Rani, added, 'I have made programmes on healthy foods. If through this people can gain some knowledge, then I will be very happy'.

Thanks to cable audio, a range of community clubs have started at Namma Dhwani, for children, people with disabilities and women. They meet weekly to discuss relevant issues and how these can be developed into audio programmes.

Through the loudspeaker narrow cast, Ambedkar Colony which is entirely inhabited by Dalits, has access to information, education and employment opportunities at Namma Dhwani.

The models of community radio that we have talked about have been supported substantially by agencies like UNESCO, the UN Development Programme and the National Foundation of India. But underlying this support have been initiatives from the community themselves as well as other partnership efforts which are easily replicable and worthy of discussion. The Namma Dhwani management committee has, for instance, a community base fund where the community contributes a small amount towards the programming costs.

So where do we go from here? How long must these voices continue to wait in the wings?

India does not have a tradition of pirate radio. But recent indications suggest that community patience is wearing thin. The recent closure of "Raghav entertainment FM- I Radio station" in Mansoorpur, Bihar, underscores the point. Raghav Radio was started by Raghav Mahto who picked up the tricks of the trade through the repair of radio sets. He launched his own FM radio station for as little as 50 rupees.

The station, with an infotainment format of practical advice laced with Bollywood film music, touched a huge chord among the local population, but it broke the law and despite protests from the local community was closed down under the Telegraph Act.

However, in many ways, both it and the Namma Dhwani community media centre in Budhikote village share the same goals - to give community broadcasting its legitimate place in the sun. While Namma Dhwani's model of cable audio conforms to the cable TV operator's act, its desired goal is the same as Raghav Radio - to have a radio station of its own.

Media technology has outstripped the pace of media reform and has enabled many of these local initiatives to transform themselves into community media centres.

Security is often raised as an excuse to prohibit community media. But travelling with a media mission to Nepal recently brought home to me the vibrancy of community radio despite a clampdown on democratic norms and freedom of expression. In fact, discussions with the local communities merely served to heighten the perception that community radio provided a vital information outlet that could not be stopped even amidst increasing terrorism and suspension of civil rights.



India's experience in the struggle for community radio resonates across the south Asia region and in many other parts of the world. This experience leads to the following conclusions.

- Legislation needs to encompass a public, private and community broadcasting on a basis of equity and inclusiveness.
- There is a need to build and strengthen community media networks.
- The linkage between information and communication, characterized by community management and ownership, needs to seek synergies and be strengthened

If the right to information is to become truly meaningful, it needs to be complemented by the right to inform. Communities that are producers of information should have a right to communicate it in a manner they deem appropriate.

In many ways, the role of radio in the context of community communications was aptly envisioned by Gandhi. In his radio address to the refugees of Kurukshetra on November 12th 1947, (subsequently National Public Broadcast Day), he emphasized that he saw in radio, "a miraculous power." In his words, "I see Shakti, the miraculous power of God in it".

But Gandhi's vision will only be realized when the voices of the excluded and the marginalized move from the periphery to the centre.

## **A tale of two pioneering community radios in Africa**

by Alex T. Quarmyne

Executive Director,  
Radio Ada,  
Former UNESCO Regional  
Communication Adviser for Africa

When it was established in the early 1980s, *Homa Bay Community Radio* did not correspond to the organizational profile of a community radio station.

It was established under the auspices of the government of Kenya as part of the Voice of Kenya, a state monopoly. Even so, there was considerable resistance to the idea of an independent radio station to be operated by non-government personnel in a relatively remote area of the country.

The lengthy discussions and negotiations finally had to be raised to the level of the minister of information. He was immensely attracted by the educational and community development potential of the station as presented to him and was keen to have it established during his stewardship at the ministry.

Coincidentally, the community selected by UNESCO for the station was in his home area, Homa Bay. The result was his personal intervention which led to a partnership arrangement with the state radio. The station was to operate on an idle Voice of Kenya FM frequency and Voice of Kenya staff were to be responsible for technical operations.

Across the continent, the original application for a broadcasting licence for the establishment of *Radio Ada* in Ghana was made in 1974, when broadcasting was a state monopoly and the country was under a military government. Nevertheless, the idea of a non-government-funded, educational and development-oriented radio station gained such strong support from the then commissioner (minister) for information, that it was expected that some special accommodation would be arranged to allow the establishment of the station.

The issue was accorded enough attention to warrant a cabinet decision even if it was negative. The decision was never officially explained, but many years later, long after *Radio Ada* had been established, we learned that the reason was that the people around the table, who were steeped in the BBC tradition, found it preposterous that a station could be anything but a state or a public corporation.

By the time the second application was made 21 years later, in 1995, the climate had changed. Constitutional rule had been reinstated three years earlier and deregulation had just been introduced.

Prior to deregulation, the responsible ministry had made several attempts to develop a broadcasting policy, but this did not materialize. Responding to pressure from would-be independent broadcasters, deregulation was put into effect in the absence of clear policy. The frequency application process, for example, did not distinguish between different kinds of applicants, and it was the application of *Radio Ada* that introduced the concept of community radio.

A few months after the first round of applications closed, 10 frequencies were awarded, all to commercial radio stations in the three most populated urban cities. It would take another 12 months before frequencies were awarded to *Radio Ada* and two other community radio applicants (*Radio Peace* and *Radio Progress*) that subsequently submitted applications.

The inauguration of the stations was a cause for celebration in both Kenya and Ghana.

*Homa Bay Community Radio* fundamentally represented two things. Firstly, at a time when radio in Africa was largely locked away in the capital city or at best a few regional centers, it meant taking radio to the people in rural communities. Surveys undertaken before the start of broadcasting showed tremendous expectation and enthusiasm for the radio.

Secondly, it was a challenge to African indigenous technical capability. The major items of equipment were specially designed to be locally assembled. They were to be low-

cost in manufacture and in operation. The audio mixer was assembled by Voice of Kenya technicians under the supervision of a Ghanaian UNESCO engineering consultant while the transmitter was by a UNESCO consultant specializing in the design and manufacture of low-cost transmitters.

The completed station was low-power and low-cost, with low operational overheads. At the time, when the personal computer had just been introduced, this was heady stuff.

*Homa Bay Community Radio* was an innovation. The driving force behind it was the sense that the air waves should be used for community development – a quite novel concept where the bandwidth until then had mainly been used for communicating government information.

Its programming and operations were rare, for example, in the use of the local language, Luo, and the partnership with extension workers, including teachers and nurses, in the production of programmes. The station was, however, limited by the dominant development and development communication thinking at the time.

Community access and participation were then barely in the development lexicon. Without fully articulating it, the design of the station's programming and operations was based on the assumption that an information deficit was at the root of underdevelopment.

The station represented a breakthrough in seeking to localize information, but "community access" was still largely understood as the broadcaster having access to the community and not the community having access to broadcasting as a resource. *Homa Bay Community Radio* was committed, vibrant and open, but it is hard to say whether with the passage of time, it might have become sufficiently open or whether it would have atrophied as an institution.

*Radio Ada*, on the other hand, began from a consciously participatory view of development. From the start, it made a deliberate effort to translate participation into every aspect of its operations. Pre-broadcast research shaped the priorities and character of the station and was carried out with participatory research tools by community volunteers.

The criteria for volunteers were kept to the minimum, with primacy given to competence in the local language, culture and mores. This extended to programme volunteers, starting from the premise that every community member is a potential producer. Indeed, the recruitment of people trained or experienced in conventional broadcasting was deliberately avoided.

The station broadcasts 17 hours a day exclusively in the local language to the unlocking of indigenous knowledge and promote intra-community dialogue. Programmes are developed in the villages by different occupational groups who design the format and drive its content from week-to-week. To ensure that women are given a voice, they have

their separate programmes.

This participatory approach imbued the station with a strong sense of credibility. For example, a student at Guelph University in Canada, who did the research for her MSc. degree at a local fishing village, asked respondents to rank those they trust. One respondent said: 'Next to my mother, I trust *Radio Ada*'.

It has also engendered a strong sense of ownership among its listening community. At a participatory evaluation workshop involving community members participants were asked what would happen if the station were to be taken away from them.

One woman got up in a passion and said, 'If you take it away, we would lose our language, we would lose our identity, we would lose who we are!' At the same time, government extension workers, for example, constantly attest to how their work would have been impossible without *Radio Ada*; indeed, some of the station's staunchest volunteers are dedicated government workers who see the station as a vehicle for achieving what they ordinarily could not do.

But, constantly, *Radio Ada* has asked itself: Is it enough? Over the eight years of its on-air life, the station has come to grow in its understanding of community access and participation. Increasingly, it is taking a more rights-based approach. It is partnering, for example, with another grass-roots civil society organization in participatory assessments of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Using tools such as the community scorecard, it has enabled communities to assess the priorities and performance of providers and integrates the findings with on-air programmes. This has led to redress of deficiencies, sometimes overnight.

It was only in the 1980s, after *Homa Bay Community Radio* had gone on the air that the highly influential works on participatory methodologies of Robert Chambers transformed the way research tries to reach the poorest of the poor to enable them to express what they know.

It was not until about the time *Radio Ada* started broadcasting that lightweight, user-friendly and hardy field equipment began to be available.

In fact, *Radio Ada* was probably the first station in Ghana to use portable MiniDisc recorders. *Radio Ada* is currently working on narrow cast programmes with people with disabilities and mentoring their selected producers, including the visually impaired, in the use of solid-state recorders.

With the support of UNESCO, *Radio Ada* has embarked on the development of a community media centre. Again, the challenge here will be to ensure that listening communities are not only consumers of information, however rich and appropriate, but providers of information, enabling enable the listening communities, especially the most disadvantaged

groups, to contribute and increase their own knowledge.

The participatory approaches of *Radio Ada* have been extended to (and, in the process, enriched by) other members of the Community Radio Network, the association of community radio stations and initiatives in Ghana.

Series of participatory programmes are designed jointly by the production teams from the participating stations, drawing from research in pilot communities. They involve programmes featuring a different community each week setting its own agenda. Using these participatory approaches, the community radio stations in Ghana have unfailingly deepened community access and participation.

The programme series include:

- Community Participation in Local Governance, which focuses on local government institutions.
- Community Participation in Natural Resource Management, which addresses community rights to forest resources.
- Community Participation in Law-making, which brings listeners into the parliamentary law-making process and seeks to enlarge their voice in advocating for a broadcasting law.

This is a law that should have been enacted even before broadcasting was deregulated in 1995.

The tremendous good being done by community radio stations in Ghana is widely recognized. But in the absence of a law, the space that was painstakingly won by the initial community radio stations has remained static. From 1996 to 2006 only two community radio stations were licenced bringing the total number to eight, while there are over 80 commercial radio stations on the air.

Best practice examples can be found in countries like Mali and South Africa where policy and legislation safeguarded community access and participation from the onset. Thus there are 150 community radio stations in Mali while South Africa has 92 community radio stations but only 13 commercial radio stations. Senegal has 35 community radio stations, and Mozambique has 25.

On the other hand, there are still a number of African countries where, due to the lack of appropriate legislation, and, in some cases, reluctance of the authorities to empower communities for fear of demands for good governance and accountability, there are no community radio stations at all.

In most of these countries, however, particularly in Nigeria, there is strong well-organized advocacy for access and participation through community radio. These efforts require support.

The hundreds of community radio stations currently on the air in Africa are quite diverse. Some are well established, firmly policy-rooted and competently managed. Others barely stand up to the definition of community radio. Some are fully participatory in all their operations, including the development and production of their programmes while at many stations, much thinking on radio and development is still where *Homa Bay Community Radio* was a decade and-a-half ago.

The challenges notwithstanding, the comparison between 1982 when Homa Bay stood alone as Africa's first community radio station and the community radio scene in Africa today signals that the time for these media in Africa has finally come.

## 4 . Linking governance, freedom of expression and poverty eradication

*Donors and non-government organizations involved in assisting the media come from a variety of different backgrounds and with many different agendas. Nevertheless, there is broad agreement that news media need to be self-sustaining and profitable in order to be able to remain independent and to be able to pay journalists a living wage.*

*If they are to receive foreign assistance, media organizations need to be above suspicion themselves. They have to clean up corrupt practices in their own ranks as well as turning the spotlight on corruption elsewhere, argues Christopher Warren, of the International Institute of Journalists. Corruption, he says, corrodes democracy, and threatens free and effective societies,*

*Well-paid journalists working for independent and economically viable media are more likely to be professional, dare to write their stories and will refrain from the kind of dodgy practices described by Daoud Kuttab of AmmanNet in Jordan. It must become unacceptable, he writes, for journalists, editors and publishers to receive or tolerate the acceptance of financial rewards, gifts or any other incentives.*

*At the same time, he calls for an end to government media monopolies and propaganda outlets, legal reform to prevent the arrest of journalists for doing their jobs and an end to restrictive government-controlled, closed-shop journalists' unions.*

*The professionalism of journalists also makes it more likely that a media outlet will be profitable, a point emphasized by Jorgen Ejboel, a publisher from Denmark, who says effective aid needs to be fed through media companies that have good managements and reasonable possibilities of sustainable economic success, which requires donors also to think in the long-term. He describes much current aid to the media as unfocused, disorganized and wasteful.*

*Larry Kilman of the World Association of Newspapers adds that the amount of assistance available for media development remains modest and if security and sustainable economic development are the goals then more aid needs to be directed into the media sector.*

*Independent and professional media can have a major effect in changing societies. Even in a region that has been more noted for press repression than freedom, the winds of change are beginning to blow across the desert, according to Walid Al-Saqaf of the Yemen Times.*

*In the remotest corners of his country, he says, people have access to information on a global scale. In the Middle East, people are aware that 'something is wrong' and are beginning to demand accountability from their governments, although officials still tend to respond with arrogance and stubbornness.*

## **Fighting corruption begins at home**

*by Christopher Warren,*

*President,  
International Federation of  
Journalists*

Corruption corrodes democracy. It threatens free and effective societies. It discredits the key institutions of democracy – including the media themselves.

In demanding transparency and accountability, journalists understand that exposing corruption is fundamental to our role in a free society. But our concerns go beyond our role as reporters, editors and writers. We have a responsibility, as individuals and collectively, to battle corruption within the media themselves, including that which flows from commercialism and in corporations that use their media interests to advance their corporate interests.

The International Federation of Journalists, the global voice of journalists, is committed to working with the half a million journalists organized in the 138 independent organizations in 117 countries that are affiliated with us in resisting the continued pressure on our profession from governments, insurgents, terrorists and thugs.

Investigative journalism is fundamental in combating corruption. Without it, inefficiency, waste, crime and secrecy thrive. Media organizations must commit themselves to provide adequate resources to investigative journalism to provide accurate, comprehensive and timely information in the public interest, and ensure an open, transparent and effective system of government.

But investigating corruption is a risky and even fatal business. Here in Sri Lanka, four journalists have been murdered in the past year. No-one has been arrested, much less prosecuted or jailed. It is this sense of impunity – that you can kill a journalist and get away with it, even if you are linked to the state – that undermines a free media.

In the past 12 years, more than 1,100 journalists and media staff have been killed in the line of duty, often for reporting what someone did not want known. Many more are detained, harassed or abused for their reporting. Corrupt officials, businesses, insurgents, terrorists, army officers, criminal gangs, thugs and other powerful groups go to extremes to protect their position.

It is a tribute to the integrity of our craft that, despite the risk, journalists continue to investigate and fight corruption, struggling to expose corrupt politicians, businessmen and criminals.

Of course, combative, investigative journalism is not enough. The culture of rejection of corruption needs to be embedded in the institutions of society. However, as we scrutinise the actions of others, we have to turn that same gaze on ourselves. We have to ask whether we and the media organizations we work for meet the standards we demand of others. We have an ethical obligation to our readers, viewers and listeners. They expect honesty from us as we demand it from others.

Our responsibilities in societies in conflict are critical. Too often, we have allowed ourselves to corrupt our profession by taking sides in ethnic or religious conflicts. Tragically, Sri Lanka has given us too many examples of the destructive outcome of this approach.

Self-censorship of journalists, whether through fear, some misplaced sense of ethnic or religious solidarity or for hope of some gain discredits the media and corrupts our key role.

In many developing countries, so-called envelope journalism (accepting financial benefits for certain action or inaction), is the corruption which destroys the image of our profession, deepening cynicism about the media and making us part of the problem, not the solution.

Defeating corrupt journalism requires an attack on four fronts.

First, journalists have to learn to say No. We need more campaigns like those run by journalists' organizations in Indonesia, South Korea and elsewhere to force a recognition that you cannot be a professional journalist and take bribes at the same time.

Second, the widespread practice of envelope or bribery journalism has been linked to low wages and substandard conditions for journalists. Eliminating internal corruption requires decent pay and working standards for journalists. This demands a collective response from journalists to form independent trade unions to win fair wages. It demands that employers respect the right of their staff to form unions. A free press -- a press uncorrupted -- cannot operate where journalists operate in conditions of poverty.

Third, governments -- often the largest dispensers of envelopes -- need to stop their budgetary allocation and to treat the envelopes as the bribes they are.

Fourth, we need to report on the media like we would any other institution, exposing corruption when it occurs.

Of course, we cannot treat this simply as a developing-world challenge. In the developed world, too often corporations use trips or gifts or privileged access to replace the envelopes of the developing world.

And we've seen just recently in the United States that not all the developed world's journalists are immune from corrupt behaviour. When a New York Post journalist sought to extort money from a Californian businessman in exchange for respecting his privacy, more damage was done to a free media than any envelopes could have done.

Despite the legitimate criticisms that can be made of individual journalists, it is more often media organizations themselves that are compromising our independence. When media companies lobby governments, with implied promises of bias, this corrupts both the political process and the media themselves.

That sort of corruption has seen journalists sacrificed to corporate greed. Shih Tao is in a Chinese jail because Yahoo placed its corporate interests over its obligations to a free media by handing over to the Chinese authorities email records that led to his conviction.

Yahoo claim to have simply been obeying the law in China. But their action forces us to ask: if Anne Frank had been blogging in Amsterdam in 1944, would Yahoo have obeyed the law and handed her over to the Nazi authorities?

Yahoo has not been alone. News Corporation, Microsoft and Google are all guilty of corrupting a free media by censoring journalists and writers in pursuit of their corporate interests in China.

When governments are themselves the owners, the

challenges are clear. The failure of successive governments in south Asia to democratise state-owned media has done more to corrupt the media in this region than any single other factor. Here in Sri Lanka, since 1994 government after government has talked big, promising to reform the state-owned media, but has failed to deliver. It remains the most urgent democratic reform still waiting in Sri Lanka.

It has been left to south Asia's newest democracy, Afghanistan, to take the first step towards independent public broadcasting. As democracy is restored in Nepal, journalists demand that an independent public broadcaster replace the state broadcaster as an essential component of the democratic framework.

The failure to act by governments has sacrificed the media's independence to short term political gain. And democracy has been the loser.

Media corruption is exacerbated through commercialization of media organizations.

As more and more media companies become dominated by the imperatives of the market, our role in democracy is corrupted. News tailored to suit advertising, widespread syndication and republishing, cost-cutting by firing journalists all degrade our profession.

Across much of the developed world, newsroom staffs are being slashed. That's thousands of journalists' jobs gone. That's tens of thousands of stories that will never be written, of news that just won't be known.

Yes, media have always had to operate in the market. But there is no doubt that today over-commercialization and cost cutting corrupts the media, rendering them shallow and event-driven, contributing to apathy and disillusionment. Ultimately, democracy is the loser.

In this climate more than ever, governments have a responsibility for ensuring properly resourced independent public media are able to fill the role being abandoned by too many of the commercial media.

As ever, both as individuals and as a collective, journalists are fighting back.

Clearly, as individuals, we have to get our own actions right: fighting corruption demands professional behaviour by journalists.

This in turn demands an investment in training and development.

We need to commit to self-regulation to eliminate unethical practices that compromise our independence.

We can't do it as individuals. That's why in most countries, journalists have organized themselves into independent

unions that campaign to purge the media of corruption, and create decent and transparent working conditions.

When journalists stand together we can make a difference. We cannot be ignored. We can succeed in creating a culture of openness, and a free society with transparent, accountable and effective governments.



## **A free press promotes development, prevents hunger – but who’s listening?**

by Larry Kilman,

Director of Communications,  
World Association of Newspapers

Amartya Sen’s well-known dictum about the relationship between press freedom and prevention of famine bears repeating because few governments have taken it to heart.

‘There has never been a famine in any country that has been a democracy with a relatively free press. I know of no exception,’ the Economics Nobel laureate has said.

The relationship is a direct one: famine can only occur if nobody is allowed to criticize policy decisions, government action or inaction or corrupt practices that lead to crop failures and food shortages. Yet even today, governments continue to hide the conditions that give rise to catastrophe. For example, the government of Niger -- where the constitution provides for freedom of the press but the government limits this right in practice – banned foreign journalists from covering the country’s food crisis.

It is no coincidence that it is largely in the poorest, least developed nations where repression of information and opinion is at its most severe. It is these countries where thousands of journalists are persecuted, murdered, beaten, arrested and imprisoned, often for doing no more than asking questions when their governments take information hostage and deprive their fellow citizens of the right to open debate and the plurality of opinion.

There is now a convincing body of evidence that demonstrates that a free press is a central condition for the development and maintenance of transparent and honest government and durable economic growth. The establishment of a strong, free and independent press sector is a necessary precondition to all real and durable progress in economic, social and political development and stability.

Yet numerous autocratic and repressive governments continue to argue, despite the evidence to the contrary, that economic and social development is somehow obstructed by the existence of a free press. They argue that it is a higher priority that justifies the postponement of free information and free expression until a satisfactory level of economic development has been achieved.

History, and current economic realities, show this is a self-defeating position that provides a breeding ground for corruption, illiteracy, radicalism -- with the terrorism it fosters -- and the general conditions that prevent sustainable economic development.

While repressive governments have been reticent to accept the evidence, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have seized upon the concept that the free flow of information leads to transparency, good governance and to the education of informed and responsible citizens. This UNESCO World Press Freedom Day conference is the most recent of several major events to focus on the role of the press in economic development.

The World Association of Newspapers and the World Bank were already making the argument in 1999. ‘Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are surely essential elements of the development process,’ said James Wolfensohn, then president of the World Bank, speaking at a joint conference entitled, *A New Approach to Development: The Role of the Press*.

That conference made the case that freedom itself is not enough -- the press cannot contribute to sustainable economic development unless it stands on a sound financial footing, supported by a critical mass of readers and advertisers.

The World Bank’s 2002 publication, *The Right to Tell - The Role of the Mass Media in Economic Development* was a seminal report that expanded on this work, providing evidence on media performance around the world and highlighting what type of public policies and economic conditions might hinder or enhance the media in supporting economic development.

The publication explored the role of the media as watchdogs of government and the corporate sector, the media's power to influence markets, their usefulness as a transmitter of new ideas and information, and their ability to give a voice to the poor.

More recently, media experts from 100 countries gathered in Jordan in October 2005 for the Global Forum for Media Development to explore the relationship between independent media and economic and political development. The main objective of the forum was to demonstrate the linkages between media development and economic, political and overall development.

The World Bank Institute presented empirical evidence at the conference to show that independent, financially stable media were essential to good governance and that efforts to strengthen the business environment in which independent media could thrive had an impact on their success.

The World Bank's advocacy is likely to be strengthened under its current president, Paul Wolfowitz, who has made fighting corruption central to his tenure. Shutting down independent media outlets that expose corruption only assists instability, he has argued, because 'you really can't talk about economic development without talking about freedom of the press'.

Translating the World Bank's advocacy into action -- by directly linking international aid to press freedom -- is not a simple matter. Mr Wolfowitz is pushing the boundaries -- he recently held up \$250 million in loans to Kenya, where the government has cracked down on independent media, because of corruption allegations. But the World Bank's charter does not allow it to get involved in politics. Nevertheless, the Bank's lending policies and its access to world leaders makes it a powerful advocate for promoting the link between a free, independent press and economic development.

This is not, in fact, a concept that has only developed in the past decade. After World War II, the newspaper industries of the belligerent and the occupied nations lay in ruins, in many cases deprived of the means to re-establish their independence and economic viability. Newspaper professionals in a dozen countries -- Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Egypt, France, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States -- came together to seek international commitments and guarantees to safeguard freedom of expression, to ensure the renewed availability of the means of newspaper production, and to create a new dialogue and exchange of information and ideas between representatives of the newspaper community world-wide.

Their goal was to create the conditions that would allow independent media to thrive so that the conditions that aided the rise of fascism and repression in Europe would not occur again.

To aid in these efforts, this small group of publishers created

what is now the World Association of Newspapers. It has grown to include 73 national newspaper associations, but the core mission remains the same -- to defend and promote press freedom and the economic independence of newspapers as an essential condition for that freedom.

Although the concept has been viable for some time, and is getting increasing attention today, the amount of assistance currently available for media development remains modest. If security and economic development are the goals, then clearly more aid needs to be directed into the media sector. Newspapers and other media throughout the developing world desperately need outside support if they are to survive, prosper, and contribute to the development of their societies.

Programmes to tackle the economic and social problems of developing and transitional countries cannot be fully effective, and are indeed often condemned to failure, without open, fair and well-managed government;

Honest, transparent and effective government -- and of course democracy -- cannot exist without a strong, free and independent press.

The establishment of such a press in developing and transitional countries can only be ensured in the short-term by a major external effort to aid the creation of economically viable press enterprises.

But no such effort exists. Only a major international effort undertaken with imagination and determination can confront this challenge on the scale necessary to ensure durable change and impact.

The World Association of Newspapers advocates nothing short of a Marshall Plan for the press.

Well-meaning governments, working through UNESCO and other agencies, have been contributing to press development projects, but these kinds of initiatives only scratch the surface of the problems.

The question is not where to help, or how to help -- the skills and knowledge are readily available. Only the means are lacking.

We have seen that the independent press can have a positive impact on governance and economic development. But positive political change also has an impact on the press, as happened in Korea, Brazil and Taiwan.

South Korea saw drastic political liberalization in 1987. From 30 dailies published that year (and for many years prior to that), the number more than doubled, to 65, in 1988; the number of weeklies more than doubled, from 226 to 496, and that of monthly magazines went from 1,298 to 1,733 -- all within the space of one year. And that was only the beginning; in every successive year since then, more and

more publications of all kinds have appeared, making South Korea a tremendously vibrant press market, where 5,000 more titles now appear than in the years before the lifting of censorship and other controls.

In Brazil, the transition from military government to democracy spurred a tremendous boom in publishing, accompanied by new standards in quality, better service to readers and a more stable relationship between media companies and the state. The abolition of censorship – a decision made by the military itself, which hung onto power a further eight years - occurred at the very end of 1978, when there were 1,512 newspaper titles in the country. Two years later, the number had increased to 1,717. The effect on magazines was even more striking, with an increase from 1,991 in 1979 to no less than 3,335 two years later. In these first years of publishing freedom, newspaper and magazines sales also soared, going from 2.4 millions in 1979 to 2.9 millions in 1982. Today, all these figures have again more than doubled again, as newspapers and magazines have aggressively improved their services to readers and advertisers and achieved higher economic returns.

In Taiwan, where political restrictions and censorship were abolished at the end of the 1980s, the effect was identical: within one year, the number of newspapers had increased from 31 to 87; the number of magazines rose from 4,052 to 5,493; the sales of newspapers increased from 3.7 million to 4.5 million; and advertising sales increased from 500 million US dollars to 630 million – all of this in twelve months and all due to the introduction of publishing and journalistic freedoms.

Thus, the first and most important challenge, and the biggest opportunity, for newspapers and magazines in developing markets is to become free from control and censorship (including, of course, self-censorship) and to serve their readers independently and honestly.

But if media are to contribute to sustainable economic development, then by definition the media themselves have to be sustained. Aiding them through the transition process should be a key focus of aid.

If you want to ensure that media become self-sustainable, insist that they pay back the aid money. That is the concept behind the Media Development Loan Fund and a new partnership between it and the World Association of Newspapers called the Independent Newspaper Development Initiative.

The fund, founded in 1995, pioneered a new model of media support, focused on developing self-sustainable independent media outlets. Acting as a mission-driven venture fund, it enters into a close, involved and long-term relationship with each client. It supports each loan and investment with intensive financial monitoring, on-going advice, specialized consulting, management training and technology assistance.

The Independent Newspaper Development Initiative

provides low-interest loans to help carefully selected independent media companies in developing democracies to become financially viable businesses. The fund provides capital, through repayable loans; tools to help implement business plans and ensure repayment of loans through provision of expert advice; knowledge on how to leverage technologies to accelerate self-sustainability; and lobbying and campaigning support to help client newspapers resist threats to their press freedom.

The World Association of Newspapers and the Media Development Loan Fund are asking funders – development aid agencies, corporations, foundations, vendors and newspapers – to lend, not give, money, at a low rate (optimally zero percent). This is a novel approach to media assistance which ties in well with the desire of many funding sources to support projects that carry a long-term, self-sustainability goal. Funders will also be able to add grants to their loans, if they wish, to give an additional boost to worthy press projects.

The approach is not for everyone. The media market conditions and the recipients must be strong enough for the loan structure to succeed. And there is certainly a lively debate within the development assistance community on the value of loans versus donations.

But the results of this approach can be dramatic, as the following cases show.

In Russia, Altapress, based in Barnaul in the strongly conservative Western Siberian region of Altaiskii Krai, began life in 1990 with three journalists who left Barnaul's communist paper and launched a general-interest newspaper, Svobodnyi Kurs, with an initial circulation of 32,000. Altapress received nearly half a million dollars from the Media Development Loan Fund to build a new printing facility.

Today the company has 460 full-time employees and seven newspapers with a total circulation of more than 240,000. Its two printing presses are the only high-quality, non-state newspaper printing facilities in the area. A modern new building hosts most of the company's employees, as well as its training centre, where more than 200 local students are trained in journalism, business, advertising, management and public relations. Altapress scrupulously respected repayment of the loan and recently received a new 180,000-euro loan from the Independent Newspaper Development Initiative to upgrade its printing facilities.

In Montenegro, the founders of the daily Vijesti could not find a printing house willing to print its newspapers when it launched during the Milosevic era in 1996. Using two loans from the Media Development Loan Fund, they built their own press, not only to print their own newspaper, but to compete in the job-shop print market in the region to help it finance the newspaper. Among others, its clients were the banned Serbian newspapers Nasa Borba, Danas and Dnevni Telegraf, which ensured that these resistance voices were

heard in neighbouring Serbia.

Zekjko Ivanovic, the first director, conceded that getting the loan was difficult.

*Without the MDLF loans, our plans for starting the first independent, privately owned daily in Montenegro would not have succeeded. In fact, it's not likely that it would ever have been launched or, if it had been, survived in an atmosphere of government pressure and monopoly prices. Never before had we written a serious business plan. For the first time, we started considering making a newspaper not only from the journalistic but also from a business point of view. Close communication with the management helped us put together all aspects of the project and create an excellent organization – this was the only way to produce results in such a small and poor market.*

In Indonesia, President Suharto's fall in 1998 freed media from restrictions, but years of strict controls had damaged their capacity to take advantage of this new freedom. MDLF loans to Radio 68H provided funding, technology and training to create a network of independent radio stations around the nation, linked with each other, and with a production hub in Jakarta, via the internet. The network has since graduated from internet to satellite distribution and includes more than 230 stations. It produces eight hours of programming every day, delivered to millions of listeners.

The president-director of Radio 68H, Santoso, said the loan assistance

*helped us change the broadcasting paradigm in Indonesia. MDLF continues with its support, assisting Radio 68H in our effort to achieve financial sustainability through an advertisement-based model. The long-dormant potential of radio finally has come to bear fruit.*

Whether the assistance comes in the forms on loans or donations, the ability of media in developing and transitional countries to fulfil their role in contributing to sustainable development depends on their ability to survive as economically independent businesses. When the funding dries up, as it eventually will, conditions must exist to allow them to stand on their own. A free and independent press can serve as the ideal guide and watchdog for governments and givers of aid. But a malnourished watchdog is of little use. To be truly free and independent, the press must be economically sound as well.

There are numerous, non-political, non-sensitive, concrete and practical steps that can be taken immediately, to help to establish and develop strong, independent and free media, which can play a vital role in spreading knowledge, helping to tackle the ills that plague so many nations and societies, and contributing to economic development,.

This includes skills and information transfer, both journalistic and managerial. The clearest opportunities relate to training – for example, seminars in business and economic reporting,

with journalists writing more knowledgeably about the day's developments as well as the wider context of economic issues. Specialized programmes can give business journalists a deeper understanding of how international development works as well as laying out the specifics of the development process. Training programmes can also provide techniques for monitoring governance and working with other sectors of society.

Management training can put newspapers and other private media companies on a firmer financial footing and help newspaper men and women exploit local markets for circulation and advertising increases and cost reductions.

Development agencies should build on the professional training programmes already in place -- to educate budding writers and editors on the fundamentals of international economics, to further explain the intricacies of the development process to experienced journalists, to sharpen the management skills of newspaper executives and to provide pointers for attracting domestic and well as international investment.

As a federation of national newspaper associations, the World Association of Newspapers has made it a priority to establish professional organizations to defend and promote the common interests of the industry. The association has used the expertise both in-house and among its members to create and sustain associations in developing and transitional countries. These organizations are unique in that they bring together fiercely competitive businesses to fight for the common good.

Their issues are not only to defend and promote press freedom, but the daily issues that effect media everywhere -- tax rates, newsprint supplies and prices, advertising regulations and more. By themselves, these might not seem important or essential -- but they all have a profound impact on the economic vitality of media outlets.

New tools can be employed to aid in the economic development of the media industry itself. This may involved developing new channels for obtaining newsprint and other supplies, or building new regional press facilities, or facilitating new telecommunication and other electronic channels.

Care must be taken both to ensure equal access to technology and to ensure that the technologies provided are appropriate to the social and economic setting. For example, setting up computerized editorial systems and web sites would be of little benefit in rural communities where electrical power is intermittent, or where computers would be anachronisms. But in a rapidly growing urban environment, computerization could be an important part of the development equation.

To perform its role effectively both as communicator and as a watchdog for corruption, the press must have access to documents. Not only documents, but the people behind them -- personnel in government and in the private sector,

multilateral and bilateral organizations as well as the key players in civil society. If development assistance cannot be tied to press freedom, it can surely be tied to the absolute necessity of transparency in how the assistance is used.

The evidence of the media's role in promoting sustainable economic development is clear. Yet governments clearly are not convinced -- or they have their own reasons for not wanting independent media to flourish. It is up to international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, working with local partners, to make this an investment priority and convince governments and authorities that it is in the interests of their economies and of their societies to let independent media flourish.

## Press independence needs a healthy bottom line

by Jorgen Ejboel,

Chairman,  
JP-Politikens Hus

A media company is not truly independent unless it is financially healthy. Without financial freedom, there can be no freedom. Without sufficient financial resources, a news organization lacks the muscle to defend freedom of the press or free expression.

Governments need to understand this. Every year, they donate hundreds of millions of dollars to various media initiatives, but unfortunately the percentage of waste is tremendously high.

I am convinced that UNESCO should try to guide governments in how to spend this huge amount of money.

The problem is that many governments have no expertise in the media field. They are afraid of dealing with media companies and therefore leave it to grass-roots organizations and journalists' unions.

During the last two years, I have seen failed projects that should have been scaled down or dropped altogether. It is sad to see taxpayers' money go down the drain in this way.

Why so many failures? There are many reasons for this, but one of the most important is that too many amateurs are being handed huge sums of money.

They do not have the experience to build companies – whether small or big – and they do not have the skills to lead these often quite well-funded initiatives. Furthermore, they do not have the patience to stay with a project that may take years to succeed. There is always a new, fashionable place to go to. There is plenty of enthusiasm. Media are exciting to work with.

Training courses for journalists are, of course, important, but it takes much more than that to build a sustainable company with a future. You have to start working with a company from the top. Some – unfortunately not all – know that they have to be financially self-sustainable.

In some cases donor money is important in the beginning, but there has to be a solid business plan from the start. The first test should always be that the media company comes to you with a plan and not the other way around.

I saw examples of *donor sickness* in Central Asia last year, where the World Association of Newspapers was holding a conference. Many newspapers there have been given money for many years and now find it very difficult to work on their own without financial help. Financial aid has become a drug for both them and the donors, who make a great living handing out money.

The number of government agencies, non-government organizations and foundations dealing with media, many of them in competition with one another, is almost unbelievable.

Sending money, of course, is not the only form of aid. News partnerships can be highly satisfactory on both sides. Recently, I travelled with the management of the Danish news agency, *Ritzaus Bureau*, when the agency made a co-operation agreement with its Jordanian counterpart, *Petra*.

This interesting peer-to-peer agreement incorporates exchange of editorial staff, proven editorial concepts and technologies and the exchange of editorial content. The conclusion of this agreement took place in the midst of the affair of the cartoons,<sup>1</sup> and it quickly and clearly demonstrated the benefits of media sharing knowledge across cultures.

At *JP/Politiken* Newspapers, we are at the moment running three partnerships. It is a great experience for everybody. It also gives you a taste of globalization. And it gives you

<sup>1</sup> The controversial cartoons published in *Jyllands-Posten* on September, 30, 2005, alleged to have been offensive to Islam.

a feeling of doing something important and useful. In short: it is a great service to the public.

Finally, I would like to give you an example of how free media and education can work hand in hand – with respect for differences in their public roles.

Can a free press enhance dialogue between cultures? Of course it can. The *JP Explorer* and its missions around the world is a good example. *JP Explorer* is an institution at the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. Since 1998, 20 expeditions have taken place. Almost 70 countries have been visited.

Last year the paper sent an expedition down through nine countries in Africa to discuss armed conflicts and ways to prevent and stop them.

Thanks to the internet, Danish school children were able to travel with us. Every day the students in 1.400 Danish schools clicked in on the internet to see what the journalists were doing. They read background articles about the countries and they forwarded questions to a Danish teacher who was taking part in the expedition. Through her, the children communicated with their peers in the countries we visited.

In this way, they came in contact with child prostitutes in Ethiopia, refugees from Sudan and children in Uganda who have to walk for hours every night in order not to be abducted by militia groups,

They talked to victims and killers in the Rwanda genocide, travelled with Pakistani peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, visited intellectuals in Mozambique and found out that in South Africa white and black can actually live peacefully together.

The schoolchildren got a totally different and much richer view on Africa than they would reading only the normal, stereotype articles that unfortunately have a tendency to focus only on themes like aids, poverty and famine.

On another expedition, named *The Third World*, 15 ordinary Danes were sent to 15 different countries. They stayed with private families for three weeks, sending reports to the paper.

DANIDA, the Danish aid agency, helped fund the expeditions.

Imagine if one hundred newspapers in Europe copied the *Explorer* concept and went into this kind of close dialogue with people in other countries – not only with political and the business leaders, but also with ordinary people.

With today's modern technologies, only our fantasy limits the ways communication can take place and what we can gain from it.

Imagine if journalists from Africa and Asia came to Europe to explore our countries -- to report on achievements, but also on all the problems a modern society faces.

On one *JP Explorer* mission to Africa, the journalists visited a bush radio station in Niger. There was no electricity, so the radio station ran on solar energy. It was made with little money and was an amazing success. Locals could trade in their handguns for a wind-up radio on which to listen to the broadcasts, which dealt mostly with day-to-day problems like how to educate children, how to get the best out of land, how to combat diseases and how to stand up for women's rights.

The radio also broadcast local, national and international news. Suddenly this remote place in Niger became part of a bigger world. People found out that a radio was worth much more than a weapon. Rather than a tool to fight, the project gave them a tool to obtain a better life and to communicate.

## **All the news that's not fit to print in Arab states**

by Daoud Kuttab,

Director,  
AmmanNet

Following an Arab summit held in Baghdad, public discussion took place in Egypt regarding cars donated to journalists by the Iraqi president. The debate 17 years ago was not whether receiving cars was morally or professionally wrong, but whether the cars were the property of the journalists or the newspapers for which they worked. In the end the agreement was that the journalists could use the cars so long as they were working for the publication but had to give them up if they left.

That's just one example of the way things work in the Arab world regarding corruption and the media. And here are a few more anecdotes to show that the above was not an isolated exception of the topsy-turvy media situation here.

In 1996 the television station that I ran at Al Quds University was broadcasting live sessions of the Palestinian Legislative Council, with the approval of the speaker. But after broadcasting a rather rowdy session dealing with corruption in the Palestinian Authority, I was jailed for seven days by the Authority.

In 1998 the deputy head of the Jordanian journalists' union, Nedal Mansour, was expelled for daring to set up a centre for the defence of journalists with foreign funding. In Jordan as in all other Arab countries, membership of the one and only journalists' union is mandatory. It is illegal to claim to be a journalist if you are not a member of this closed shop, which is largely run by pro-government journalists. The banishment was therefore tantamount to ending Mansour's career.

In 2003 after the Gulf war documents discovered in Baghdad showed that many of the individuals who benefited from oil coupons scheme were journalists and columnists. Clearly being bribed for their opinion has done little to discredit these journalists, who are still working for their publications.

In 2000 I established an internet radio station in Amman. We sent a reporter to cover the city council and he noticed that mainstream reporters who cover the council did not even bother to take notes. They were simply handed a story (often along with an envelope) at the end of the session.

In the fall of 2005 when our internet radio was licenced as an FM station, we sought to broadcast the full sessions of the city council, but were denied permission by the mayor. When I told the story to a columnist friend, he tried to write about it, but his column was not published because he was told by the owner of his paper that the council was a major advertiser with over one million dollars in advertisements a year.

In late March 2006 I received the annual report of the Arab Bank. I am normally not very good with numbers, but when I looked at the report I discovered an interesting chapter called Corporate Governance. In this section, the salaries, expenses and stock holdings of top bank officials and their spouses, was listed as were the names of the major stockholders in the bank.

Feeling that this was unique, I posted it on our web site and read it on our radio. For days after, I was surprised that the local newspapers did not see fit to print this news. Ironically while this corporate transparency seems to be the rule for all companies trading on the Amman stock exchange, parliament was dragging its feet on legislation that would oblige senior government officials and members of parliament to reveal their own financial holdings.

What these anecdotal stories show is that the problems of dealing with corruption is not restricted to the need for journalists to carry out more investigative reporting. What is needed is root and branch media reform, which I suggest requires major changes in the following areas:

- Media ownership: we need to end the existence of government media monopolies whether direct or indirect, turn state-run radio and television into public



services and end all forms of subsidies.

- Legal reform: media laws must explicitly ban the arrest of journalists for doing their jobs.
- Closed shops: membership in a union should not be mandatory. Journalists and owners should have the right to establish whatever associations they need to organize their profession.
- Professional reform: it must become unacceptable for journalists, editors and publishers to receive or tolerate the acceptance of financial rewards, gifts or any other incentives.

Codes of ethics are not enough if they are not backed up by a serious effort to hold media practitioners accountable to their own professional codes.

The media should not be excluded from scrutiny or criticism. They must be watchdogs over the government, but should not shy away from being watchdogs on other media.

The media can make a contribution to fighting corruption simply by holding themselves to the standards of professionalism and transparency that even private companies are adopting.

There is often lip service to investigative journalism, but rarely is it included in a comprehensive plan that goes beyond simple training. It needs professional coaching, legal advice and follow-ups until the investigative reports are printed or broadcast.

With international support, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) has been set up to address these problems. Its web site<sup>1</sup> has published investigations, diaries of journalists, coaching notes and background documents.

Fighting corruption requires a holistic approach by society, government and the media. While media reform is required, we also need to break up the closed-shop syndicates in order to allow for professional unions to play their role in the defence of journalists and contribute to freedom of expression. A serious effort to get the media to fight corruption must include cleaning up journalism itself from corruption and lack of professionalism.

<sup>1</sup> In Arabic, <http://www.arij.net>

## **Arab populations have had enough of regimes' lack of transparency**

*by Walid Al-Saqaf,*

*Senior Editor/Reporter,  
Yemen Times*

For many decades, Arab regimes have deliberately ignored the issues of transparency, accountability and financial integrity. Successive government believed and made their citizens believe that knowing about the government's internal operations, deals, statistics, and any other information was a privilege and not a right. They hid what they wanted and revealed what they pleased, and citizens were told they had to accept this in order to protect the so-called national interest.

But I'm glad to say, this may be changing. While doing a press report in one of the remote areas in Yemen, I had a discussion with a simple farmer named Ali, living a poor life on less than a dollar a day.

Feeling neglected and ignored, Ali came out and asked,

*Where does the country's oil go? Why are we getting poorer and poorer every day? Please help us by showing our suffering to our officials.*

As I met other villagers, I realized that Ali was not alone. He seems to be representing a growing trend in Yemen and other Arab countries. People are nowadays aware that there is something wrong.

Poor public policy, corruption, inefficiency and worsening economic conditions have taken their toll. Even villagers far away from the capital are feeling the strains caused by the inefficiency of their governments.

They also realize that other nations are developing and improving their standard of living, as they can clearly see on satellite TV channels. They can access information on a global scale and know more about their government's performance from the international and local free press, which is struggling to meet the information needs of society.

This bleak reality in the Arab world is met with arrogance and stubbornness by regimes that refuse to accept the new reality. Even though they are aware that globalization has resulted in a more rapid flow of information, they are sluggish in responding to developments. And even when they do respond, it is usually in reaction to the stick-and-carrot approach by superpowers, though they never admit it.

The free media have participated in pushing people to ask for more from their governments. They are encouraging them to speak their minds, ask the tough questions, demand information and deliver critical viewpoints that regimes usually don't like to hear.

I am proud to say that my country, Yemen, has one of the most vibrant and critical local media scenes in the Arab world. The performance of Yemen's president and many of his top officials has been harshly criticized in the press. Journalists are increasingly raising the bar and challenging the old tradition of waiting for information to come whenever the government pleases. Today, the press is demanding and, if necessary, seizing information.

Yet this has come at a heavy price. Yemeni journalists who called for more transparency, good governance and anti-corruption measures were subject to beatings, imprisonment and prosecution, and, on a few occasions, were even kidnapped and tortured.

Yet the more brutally Yemeni journalists were harassed, the more insistent journalists were to protect the sacred right of delivering information to the public. This was not only because of the growing international pressure on the Yemeni regime to allow more freedom. It was mainly due to the support that journalists received from Yemeni citizens, who have realized the press is acting in their interest.

Despite all of the difficulties that the Yemeni free press has been through in demanding

more transparency and accountability, there is now certainly a glimmer of hope. For the first time ever, an Arab president announced his decision to step down and voluntarily leave his post for a *younger* generation of leaders. This is certainly unprecedented and if Yemen witnesses a peaceful transfer in power, it could be a phenomenon that may serve as a role model in many other Arab countries.

Moving from the specific case of Yemen to the general pan-Arab world picture, one can see that today, Arab countries remain among the most backward in the world in terms of economic growth, human resources development, shared responsibility and decision-making, administrative and financial efficiency and quality of life.

Those that suffer the most are the people. Thanks to the free press, Arabs are beginning to ask questions and gather their courage to demand answers. Whether they get answers is another issue. But I believe we are on the right path, and that the values of democracy and political reform are slowly evolving and becoming a daily reality.

In an ideal situation, which is far from what we have now, rulers would be obliged to expose their bank accounts, reveal statistics about their spending and declare their assets. They should also be held accountable for decisions that had negative impact on the economy. This ideal is out of reach today. But with stronger voices emerging from within the Arab countries as well as support from international organizations and foreign governments, it may be achieved.

Whether transparency, accountability and non-corrupt governments can emerge in the Arab world remains a great challenge. But the free press is certainly key to making this a reality. Every day a journalist is beaten, harassed, imprisoned or killed to promote this cause, it is not a loss, but a sacrifice for a noble cause: bringing the truth into the light.

## Annexes

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*Following the conference marking World Press Freedom Day, delegates from donors and financial institutions, non government organizations and media groups attended a follow-up meeting to discuss possible ways forward in assisting the media, particularly in conflicts and post-conflict situations, in promoting good governance and in contributing toward the eradication of poverty.*

*There was also reflection about the media situation in Sri Lanka.*

*The discussions are described here, along with extracts from a position paper prepared for the meeting by Christopher Warren, president of the International Federation of Journalists, in which he called for support to be channeled through independent journalists' unions.*

*Summing up the conclusions of the World Press Freedom conference and suggesting the course for further actions, delegates adopted the Colombo Declaration on Media, Development and Poverty Eradication, which concludes this book.*

*Notes from a meeting of representatives from donor, non-government and media organizations following the World Press Freedom Conference.*

The central issue of the meeting was to assess the role that assistance to media ought to play in development policy.

Two main areas of discussion emerged. The first raised the question of how assisting media advances human development. The second focused on how donors can work together to support media.

Delegates agreed that more data and research are needed to justify making the support of media a central priority. And agencies need to share information, since many of them are doing the same job next to one other without realizing it.

The suggestion was made that information should be centralized, ideally through UNESCO as the sole intergovernmental organization with a media mandate.

Donor agencies approach aid questions from different perspectives, and therefore a model consensus is unlikely to be achieved on how they can or should support freedom of information and media.

However, discussions on shared values such as accountability of governments, gender equality and basic human rights could serve as a common platform for developing policies.

Media support could become a part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, which involve countries' own accountability systems, including the media, as well as external development partners such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Assistance to media would thus become part of a larger institutional approach, rather than being a marginal sideline to overall development policies, as at present.

Media legislation is needed because it is the foundation for other programs and projects, such as community media and public service broadcasting. Policies and media laws are closely linked to the capacity of media professionals to regulate themselves.

Including assistance to media in institutional programs for aid and development addresses the problem of sustainability. Today, aid agencies frequently move from one crisis to another, leaving development projects that are locally unsustainable in their wake.

For a free and independent press to prosper and provide continuing development benefits, economic sustainability is crucial. Media must be understood not only as development tools but as businesses. Encouraging economically sustainable outfits with working business models is even more complicated than encouraging fair and objective reporting.

Yet enabling media to be independent of government or powerful commercial interests precisely needs economic stability. And this requires assessment of conditions in which the media operate, often without the advertising and audience purchasing power of the developed countries.

Indeed, when the development of the media is driven by economics and the purchasing power of the target population, the poor are often excluded.

The key to media's role in sustainable human development is the creation of a professional media corps. A non-free press can publish news, but only a free press can provide information that keeps governments accountable to their populations, and empowers populations to feel the benefits of democracy and their entitlement to human and other rights.

The situation in the host country, Sri Lanka, exemplifies the dangers of a lack of media professionalism. Its journalists have no autonomy either in state-owned or private media. There are no unions and journalists very often work under appalling conditions with very low wages.

Without professional organizations or autonomy, the media are divided along ethnic lines and do not cover both sides of the conflict. Journalists refer only to selected sources of information that are difficult to verify.

Sri Lanka's state-dominated advertisement market makes it difficult for any media outlet to escape the control either of government or of political commercial interests.

## **The case for supporting journalists' unions**

*by Christopher Warner, International Federation of Journalists*

Strong and independent unions are central to press freedom (and therefore poverty eradication) in five ways:

- Only through them that journalists have a collective voice that can speak for them, independent of both governments and employers.
- An independent collective of journalists is needed to promote ethics, self-regulation and freedom of information. It is involved in issues such as safety, criminal defamation, confidentiality of sources, and promoting public service broadcasting and public service values. And it is responsible for promoting professionalism and ensuring that journalists' economic and social rights are respected.
- Independent unions are necessary for press freedom because it is only through fair wages and working conditions – achievable only through the collective -- that journalists can practice ethical journalism and reject corruption.
- An independent union is the only effective, fair and democratic means of reaching journalists in the field.
- Independent unions are necessary because labour rights for journalists are press freedom issues.

Journalists' unions are leading the charge against criminal defamation laws, which are an anathema to press freedom.<sup>1</sup>

While international organizations such as Article 19 and the World Press Freedom Committee have done much work on

<sup>1</sup> Walters, E. and A. Johnson, 2005. *Decriminalising Defamation: an IFJ campaign resource for defeating criminal defamation*. Brussels: International Federation of Journalists

campaigning against criminal defamation, it is the national collective organizations of journalists that must take up the fight to strike these draconian laws from the penal code in their own countries.

Press freedom cannot exist where journalists live in poverty. Bad pay and conditions are also encourage corruption among the media. Indeed, there is no doubt that many employers have relied on the envelopes their staff may receive from outsiders to balance low salaries.

This link between the social environment in which journalists work and press freedom has been recognized by UNESCO, which at its last General Conference included the right to decent working conditions as part of the enabling environment for press freedom.

Another related area is the changing nature of work in the media—the trend toward contingent and atypical employment practices. Putting journalists on contract, increasing use of freelancers, and part-time correspondents— is having a deleterious effect on press freedom.

These employment practices divide individual journalists from their collectives, leaving them alone and vulnerable to increased editorial interference from employers and government. The unions are the only organizations that can address these alarming trends by campaigning for economic and professional rights.

An independent union is the most effective, fair and democratic means of reaching journalists in the field. A collective organization ensures that all have the opportunity to access development training and information. A democratic collective organization ensures that media development work is not limited to individuals, and that such work becomes part of the media culture by creating organizational – not individual – memory and resources.

Journalism is highly unionized. But at any meeting of journalists the concerns are always about freedom of expression and the impact of working conditions on journalistic integrity and autonomy. It follows that anything that undermines the autonomy of media also reduces freedom of expression.

Donors need to recognise that effective media development work should be conducted through collective organizations of journalists. This means supporting the establishment of such organizations where they do not already exist, and strengthening existing and fledgling independent, democratic, active, representative organizations of journalists.

*Media, Development and Poverty Eradication*  
Colombo, 3 May 2006

We, the participants of the UNESCO-sponsored World Press Freedom Day conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, May 1-2, 2006:

Recall Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, and regardless of frontiers";

Recognize that the eradication of all forms of poverty must encompass a multi-dimensional human development approach in a number of areas necessary for the attainment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights;

Highlight that freedom of expression is a fundamental right for the promotion and attainment of other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights and that press freedom is part of the agenda for a human rights-based approach to development as elaborated in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals;

Recall the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, which urges the international community to facilitate the empowerment of women;

Recall the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, which commits Member States to promote child participation and inclusion in national media;

Recall the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965;

Reaffirm Resolution 5.17 of UNESCO's 33rd General Conference (the Belgrade and Dakar Declarations) finding that independent and pluralistic media are fundamental elements of good governance, human rights-based development and the prevention of violent conflict, all of which are key contributors to poverty eradication;

Recall both the Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) phases of the World Summit on the Information Society, which affirmed freedom of expression as the first of the four central pillars for creating knowledge societies;

**Unanimously declare that:**

Freedom of expression should be made available to all. It requires effective local participation to empower individuals and groups to address poverty, hunger, disease, discrimination, vulnerability, social exclusion, environmental degradation and education;

In order to contribute to poverty eradication, freedom of expression must be recognized as a fundamental

right protected through free, independent and pluralistic media;

UNESCO, as lead agency for freedom of expression issues within the United Nations system, should maintain and further policy development and programme activities, acting as a platform for dialogue amongst stakeholders on freedom of expression issues;

**Call on Member States to:**

Include press freedom and the development of free, pluralistic and independent media as core components of their strategies for development, poverty eradication and meeting the Millennium Development Goals;

Ensure that those responsible for attacks on media professionals and institutions are investigated and brought to justice;

Develop national policies that address access to, and participation in, information and communication for people living in poverty, including access to licences and fair spectrum allocation;

Expand the reach of information and communication technologies (ICTs) especially to poor and marginalized populations;

Develop national policies and supportive legal frameworks that enable and encourage community media;

Transform state and government media into independent public service media and guarantee their editorial and financial independence;

Encourage public service broadcasting to address issues related to poverty eradication;

**Call on media outlets, professional associations and media organizations to:**

Ensure that the voices of the poor and marginalized are heard;

Be vigilant and steadfast in ensuring the transparency and accountability of public authorities, private enterprises and civil society organizations in the pursuit of poverty eradication;

Work to ensure transparency in the media and combat corruption within the media;

Report incisively on issues of poverty eradication and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and rights-based human development;

Support independent, pluralistic and voluntary professional bodies and associations as vehicles for media

development and the defence of press freedom;

Work together to make the case to development institutions that strengthening of media independence is a key element of poverty alleviation;

**Call on the United Nations, the International financial institutions and donor governments to:**

Undertake and fund further research into the link between poverty eradication, development of free, independent and pluralistic media and press freedom, as well as disseminate already existing data;

Affirm the crucial role of the media in exposing and combating corruption and take concrete measures to support press freedom in consort with media professionals and other non-governmental actors;

Take a strong public stand when the media's right to freedom of expression is compromised by national governments or others;

Increase and coordinate their efforts in favour of free, independent and pluralistic media systems through long-term financial support mechanisms, including research, training, capacity building and infrastructural development;

**and**

Invite the Director General of UNESCO to present this Declaration to the General Conference of UNESCO for endorsement and develop a strategy for a concrete plan of action for the United Nations system, governmental and non-governmental donors and civil society partners, following the principles of this Declaration.





United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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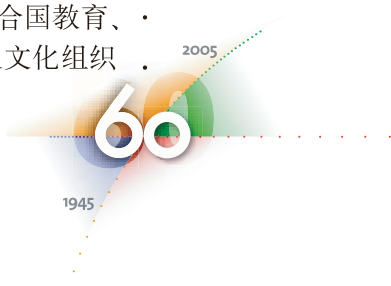
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severe Only 12 billion

80% of the world's population

around the world Pre

Nearly 160 million children

the better is life-expectancy

17 million people die each

poverty line 2.4 billion

