



**FREE, INDEPENDENT AND PLURALISTIC MEDIA
IN THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA
A DISCUSSION BRIEF**

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1. Introduction

As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) come under review in 2015, the world has a new opportunity for articulating clear goals and targets for post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. In turn this prompts an updated assessment of the contribution of free, pluralistic and independent media to development, thereby establishing a contemporary case for its inclusion in the new agenda.

This brief puts forward policy arguments as to why the international community can, with confidence, acknowledge the connection between free, pluralistic and independent media, and sustainable development. These arguments are grouped in three categories:

- (i) The evolving *empirical* correlation between free, pluralistic and independent media, and national development monitoring and priority-setting.
- (ii) The past and emerging recognition of unfettered media as an integral part of *governance* that is a prerequisite for sustainable development.
- (iii) The broad global consensus on the *normative* functions of a free, independent and pluralistic media system in relation to the normative discourse of sustainable development.

The brief summarises these *empirical*, *governance* and *normative* arguments, with the recognition of sustainable development as being based on public participation and the interaction of state and non-state actors, and this as optimal to ensuring development outcomes for the present and future generations.

2. A correlation between free media and sustainable development is empirically demonstrated.

Ascertaining the evidence base for placing free and independent media at the core of sustainable development is both a conceptual and empirical matter. Conceptually, there is need to have a clear framework within which to discuss the normative correlation between free, pluralistic and independent media and sustainable development. Empirically, the task involves adducing evidence to establish the extent of the “fit” between the conceptual framework and the particular circumstance of sustainable development.

Although this is an old debate, its contemporary potency is evident in new research initiatives that generate fresh insights into the role of the media in different societies. What is clear from these is that *free, independent and pluralistic* media has played an essential role in realising both democratic and developmental rights, and their interconnection. This can be analysed in terms of the contribution of each dimension:

- The category of *media freedom* means the safety of a society and its institutions to speak freely in the formulation of public policy and to be able to highlight without fear a range of anti-social blocks to development such as corruption and human rights abuses. This category affords the watchdog (or surveillance) function of the media. The work of Pippa Norris on the statistical correlation between a free press and democratisation, good governance and human development, has been an important evidence-based contribution that links free media to the realisation of democracy and development.¹ This is reinforced by others such as Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize laureate, who recognised that lack of information has adverse political as well as economic effects. In a book published by the World Bank Institute which addresses the role of mass media in economic development, Stiglitz and other authors demonstrate that better and timelier information results in better, more-efficient resource allocation with free and critical media playing a crucial role.² Similarly, a report published by UNESCO shows that freedom of the press and governance indicators are closely correlated. If the media are free, it is likely that a country will be politically stable, have more effective and less corrupt officials, more robust and sustainable economic development, and more solid rule of law.³
- The category of *independence* means a situation of self-regulation whereby media professionals themselves are responsible to uphold the high ethics of public interest which they voluntarily profess to follow. This category affords the accuracy and fairness of media in contributing to democracy and development. It also checks against abuses of expression that violate rights or encourage hatred, and instead promotes a contribution to peace and non-violence which are important ingredients of sustainable development. In societies with effective independence mechanisms, journalists have been shown to uphold professional standards against a range of pressures that would otherwise distort the normative ideals of public interest information.⁴
- The category of *media pluralism* is especially important for development and democracy and their interrelationship. For UNESCO, this means a variegated media landscape of institutional and ownership forms and roles: in particular, public, private and community media sectors and their respective primary (albeit not exclusive) functions. The public service media provides important citizenship service to all people, irrespective of wealth, age, language or rural location. The private media grows the sector economically, providing employment and

¹ Norris, P. 2006. The role of the free press in promoting democratization, good governance, and human development. Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 20-22nd April, 2006, Chicago, Palmer House.

² For an expanded discussion, refer to Clapp-Itnyre, Alisa, Roumeen Islam & Caralee McLiesh (eds). 2002. *The right to tell: the role of mass media in economic development*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

³ UNESCO-CPHS Research Project. 2006. *Press freedom and poverty—an analysis of the correlations between the freedom of the press and various aspects of human security, poverty and governance*. [0]. Available: http://gem.sciences-po.fr/content/publications/pdf/novel_pressfreedom_poverty_150606.pdf. Accessed on 11 February 2013.

⁴ See, for example, Coyne, Christopher. J & Peter T. Leeson. 2004. Read all about it! Understanding the role of media in economic development. *KYKLOS*, Vol. 57: 21-44. [0]. Available: <http://www.peterleeson.com/Kyklos--Media.pdf>. Accessed 24/02/2014.

bridging sellers and buyers through carrying advertising. Community media especially exist to offer a platform for *participatory* mediated communication in which citizen empowerment is a key variable. Where a pluralistic media landscape exists along these lines, a diversity of content has given representation to public voices and enabled informed development choices to be made.⁵

More broadly, the empirical work on the media and development interface has also uncovered additional connections, particularly relevant to the issues of conflict-resolution, poverty and corruption, as elaborated below.

On conflict resolution, Coyne and Leeson have analysed empirically how the media contributed to the development of several countries by playing the role of a coordination-enhancing mechanism which transformed situations of conflict into situations of coordination between politicians and the populace, with concomitant significance for development issues.⁶

Taking social conflict and societal fragility as a specific indicator of development, there is research that further uncovers the relevance of a free, pluralistic and independent media. In several conflict-escalating countries, whose institutions of governance are fragile or virtually non-existent, media has played the role of improving “dialogue across very different communities so suspicion and distrust can be decreased”, thereby creating “an environment where conflict becomes less likely”.⁷ Such an environment encourages greater civic courage and participation in plural politics that may prove sufficiently calm or settled for development processes to continue. This is further confirmed by an econometric study which concluded that countries that have more political risk are likely to gain more in terms of increasing stability by making their media sector more effective. The lesson has been that that strengthening the media sector holds promise for at least some politically unstable countries.⁸ On the other hand, it is well known that in countries where the media landscape has not been free, pluralistic and independent, the consequences have included phenomena where warlords and others have controlled outlets to promote hatred and violence in an atmosphere fuelled by rumour and distrust.

With regard to poverty issues and media, a recent correlational study by Van Staveren and Webbink confirmed the hypothesis that “a stronger civil society will positively contribute to poverty reduction and to democratization”.⁹ The study focused on the transformative agency of civil society, including the social norms, organizations, and practices, which facilitate citizen involvement in public policies and decisions, correlating this notably with data on access to the media, as well as participation in demonstrations and petitions, the density of international organizations, etc. A recommendation based on their positive findings was that:

⁵ See, for example, Besley, Timothy & Burgess, Robin. 2001. Political agency, government responsiveness and the role of the media. *European Economic Review* 45(4-6).

⁶ Coyne, Christopher. J & Peter T. Leeson. Op cit: 43.

⁷ Deane, James. 2013. How do we get to a better evidence base on media and conflict? [0] Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcmmediaaction/posts/How-do-we-get-to-a-better-evidence-base-on-media-and-conflict->. Accessed 11/02/2014.

⁸ Roy, Sanjukta. *Media development and political stability: an analysis of sub-Saharan Africa*. [0]. Available: <http://www.mediamapresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Media-Development-and-Political-Stability-FINAL.pdf>. Accessed 03/03/2014.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. 2012. *Civil society, aid, and development: a cross-country analysis*. Study carried out by Prof. dr Irene van Staveren and Ellen Webbink, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, for the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

... ODA [Overseas Development Assistance] *might become even more poverty reducing when it would actively stimulate Civic Activism, which means in particular by supporting free press, in order to enable people's objective information gathering about politics and what is going on in the world through newspapers, radio, tv and internet ... Access to and use of (independent) news media and participation in demonstrations and petitions will support the accountability of government policy and finances, and allows the building up of public pressure for a more equal distribution of expenditures and more progressive taxation. This helps to reduce relative and absolute levels of poverty.*¹⁰

This conclusion assumes a sharper focus when contextualised in terms of the negative impact of corruption on the levels of poverty in all societies. In an IMF Working Paper, Gupta, Davoodi and Rosa Alonso-Terme demonstrate that high and rising corruption increases income inequality and poverty by means of reducing economic growth, the progressivity of the tax system, the level and effectiveness of social spending, and the formation of human capital by perpetuating an unequal distribution of asset ownership and unequal access to education. The IMF study argues that these findings hold for countries with different growth experiences and at different stages of development.¹¹

In this picture, a free press (as with civil society activism) can be a clear counter-balance to corruption. The reason why free, pluralistic and independent media contribute towards reducing the level of corruption in any society is because of (i) their provision of verifiable information in the public interest, (ii) placing voices and issues on the public agenda, and (iii) raising the level of public scrutiny of national development policies. Again, this has been empirically established in the research.¹²

Further empirical evidence of the role of media in sustainable development can be disaggregated from various studies to show how such media relates to the attainment of other indicators of development: child welfare, gender equality; education; health services; infrastructural development, etc.¹³ This is especially significant as regards collecting, analysing and refining measurable data on development indicators. The quantity and quality of data in circulation and available to a society is in part a function of the effectiveness of a vibrant media landscape. In terms of shaping the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, the question of reliable data is prominently raised by the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which calls for “a data revolution for sustainable development”.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid: 40.

¹¹ Gupta, Sanjeev, Hamid R. Davoodi and Rosa Alonso-Terme . 2002. 'Does corruption affect income inequality and poverty?' *Economics of Governance* 3(1): 23–45.

¹² See, for example, Daniel Kaufmann's presentation entitled *On Media Development: An unorthodox empirical view* [0]. Available: <http://cima.ned.org/sites/default/files/Kaufmann%20presentation%20for%20CIMA%20site.pdf>. Accessed 03/03/2014. See also Mary Myers' summary of what academics say about the relationship between media and governance. [0]. Available: <http://panos.org.uk/2012/07/26/media-and-governance-what-the-academics-say/>. Accessed 03/03/2014; See also: Fighting Corruption To Improve Schooling: Evidence From a Newspaper Campaign In Uganda, Reinikka, R and Svensson, J. <http://econ.lse.ac.uk/staff/rburgess/eea/svenssonjeea.pdf/> Accessed 13/03/2014

¹³ The Media Map Project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by Internews has produced studies aimed at establishing the empirical basis for media development. See, for example, Sanjukta Roy's synthesis of such empirical research and the methodological approaches emerging for analysing the relationships between media and development. 2011. *Overview Report: Measuring Media Development*. [0]. Available: <http://www.mediamapresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/MeasuringMediaDev.MediaMap.pdf>. Accessed 03/03/2014.

¹⁴ Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. [0]. Available: <http://www.un.org/sg/management/beyond2015.shtml>. Accessed 05/02/2014: 21.

In summary, the evidence demonstrates the significance, in a particular context, of free, independent and pluralistic media for development due to a multiplicity of roles performed by such media.

3. Support for free, pluralistic and independent media is increasingly recognised as central to the changing contemporary character of inclusive politics and governance.

The recognition of free, pluralistic and independent media as an integral part of the development process and especially in terms of governance is not new. There has been a broad consensus on their role in development, although the variegated nature of that role has sometimes been – and will almost certainly continue to be – a source of controversy.¹⁵ What is now notably different in the current period is that the wider context of media work has changed radically, particularly in the wake of the Internet and mobile telephony which have catalysed increases in media access and media exposure and, alongside these developments, greater civic activism.¹⁶

Such changes have implicated media, online and offline, in larger societal processes which include the nature of development and the role of citizens in it. As a result of these changes, the character of politics, policy-making and political organisation is in change, which offers an opportunity for an inclusionary and democratic governance agenda that responds to the changes to better serve people everywhere. This is in line with the view of the “shared society” espoused by Cassam Uteem, former President of Mauritius who, during his submission to the 8th UN Open Working Group for Sustainable Development (OWG), observed that achieving the SDGs needs to reflect “sensitive, inclusive governance that looks after and values all members of society”. He called for a SDG target on participation and consultation, adding that “good governance needs good information”, and recommended disaggregating data to show differential outcomes of policies, in order to know whether the SDGs are reaching the whole community.

Such a vision of an empowered community is not far-fetched. The near ubiquity of tools of communication, and the importance of their use in regard to media functions, have become integrated into the fabric of the community, and of the development process itself. In this vein, there is a greater role for free, pluralistic and independent media, on all media platforms and with a range of new actors also now contributing to the media function and thereby supplementing the continuing journalistic role performed by traditional media institutions. This development reinforces further the political and governance significance that media has for development.

This significance has already long included political attention to the declarative embrace of the principles underpinning a free, pluralistic and independent media. To varying degrees, many national constitutions acknowledge freedom of expression, as a key tenet of democratic governance, within a vision of national development. The same is true of the various regional conventions collectively acceded to by governments. The right to freedom of expression, apart from being recognised as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also finds political expression in the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the African

¹⁵ See, for example, such works as: Rogers, EM. 1962. *Diffusions of innovations*. New York: Free Press; Shramm, W. 1964. *Mass media and national development: the role of information in the developing countries*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; and Mowlana, H & Wilson, H. 1987. *Communication and development: a global assessment*. Paris: UNESCO. More recent works in this area could include Susman-Peña, Tara. 2012. *Making media development more effective*. Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA); Tettey, Wisdom J. 2006. The politics of media accountability in Africa: an examination of mechanisms and institutions. *International Communication Gazette* 68(3): 229-248 and Gupta, Sanjeev, Hamid R. Davoodi and Rosa Alonso-Terme . 2002. 'Does corruption affect income inequality and poverty?' *Economics of Governance* 3(1): 23–45.

¹⁶ Hoffman, David. 2013. *Citizens rising: independent journalism and the spread of democracy*. New York: Cuny Journalism Press.

Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. As such, it lends itself to universal political recognition and application.

These declarative principles have, in as far as the discourse of sustainable development is concerned, found a clear political articulation in the 2013 report of the UN Secretary-General's 27-member High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The report emphatically calls attention to "good governance and effective institutions". It links good governance to such democratic fundamentals as people enjoying freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information; increasing public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels; guaranteeing the public's right to information and access to government data; and reducing bribery and corruption and ensuring officials can be held accountable.¹⁷

According to media development expert, James Deane, the report "presents a fresh, ambitious agenda that provides a comprehensive framework for meeting a set of immense development challenges. It does so by putting issues of governance and rights – including freedom of the media – at its heart, not its periphery. That has not happened before".¹⁸ The report contributes to official framing of media issues within the discourse of sustainable development, particularly given that it recommends that "access to independent media and information" be a target in its own right. Deane discerns that the focus on the existence of a free and independent media is precisely because of the relevance of such for public access to expression and information.¹⁹

Linked to good governance, there are various 'framing' options emerging as to how sustainable development can be linked to issues that would ordinarily include free, independent and pluralistic media. The overall idea of openness – which is integral to good governance – is echoed by the UN Secretary-General when he, in accepting the report of this high-level panel, praised its inclusive approach and extensive consultations.²⁰ Openness, participation and transparency, when framed as conditions of governance, are also inextricably premised upon free, pluralistic and independent media. Csaba Kőrösi, Co-Chair UN Open Working Group, has observed in summing up the conclusions of the Group's stocktaking exercise, that crafting the SDGs is an act of governance, and implementing it will depend on governance. He further noted that transparency was identified as a key component of governance, and rule of law should focus on fair outcomes and not just fair processes.²¹

Further framing is by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons in their unpacking of 'governance' as a possible sustainable development goal.²² Associated with this goal are several targets that, in many

¹⁷ United Nations. 2013. *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development: The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. New York: UN Publications. [0]. Available: http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf. Accessed 05/02/2014.

¹⁸ Deane, James. 2013. *What would a post-2015 development goal on free media mean?* [0]. Available:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcmediaaction/posts/What-would-a-post-2015-development-goal-on-free-media-mean->. Accessed 05/02/2014.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. [0]. Available: <http://www.un.org/sg/management/beyond2015.shtml>. Accessed 05/02/2014.

²¹ Eighth Session of the Open Working Group (OWG) of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 3-7 February 2014 | UN Headquarters, New York, United States of America. [0]. Available: <http://www.iisd.ca/sdgs/owg8/>. Accessed 11/02/2014.

²² See, for example, Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. 2013. *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the UN Secretary-General*. [0]. Available: <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/An-Action-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>. Accessed 25/02/2014, in addition to the *Progress report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*. [0]. Available: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3238summaryallowg.pdf>. Accessed 24/02/2014.

cases, include the rule of law. This is an indicator that is especially visible in the case of the safety of journalists and the combatting of impunity for crimes against them, as recognised in a UN resolution in November 2013.²³ For its part, the UN's OWG also links governance to human rights, the right to development, conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding and the promotion of durable peace.²⁴ The OWG also reflects gender sensitivity alongside governance, by highlighting the promotion of equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment. A discussion paper by the Deutsche Welle Akademie extends the list of possible indicators of governance to include strengthening "the independence and mutual accountability of societal institutions", referring to political parties, parliament, the judiciary, civil society and, significantly, the media.²⁵

While distinct, the concerns of governance in its various dimensions on the one hand, and the issue of media on the other, are inter-related. In effect, ongoing discussions point to the logic of framing governance in relation, at least in part, to media-related considerations. Free, independent and pluralistic media are not a goal, but a means towards the development concerns of governance. One can identify media's role in contributing towards promoting human rights, enhancing the right to development, and strengthening governance such as through their vital role during elections. Promoting journalists' safety can contribute towards conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding, etc. Political participation and gender issues are integrally bound up with media, as are the issues of independent social institutions.

Therefore, it is conceivable to use the notion of 'governance'²⁶ as a frame for a sustainable development goal that is directly linked to the promotion of free, independent and pluralistic media, particularly in an age when the definition of what counts as media has radically broadened. As such, this brief includes an annex (see page 11) which uses the focus areas developed by the UN OWG and other actors to map out a possible 'governance' sustainable development goal that would address the regulatory context, operational nexus and media-citizen relation cycle required for free, independent and pluralistic media in the context of sustainable development.

In welcoming the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, ARTICLE 19 has developed three arguments concerning the centrality of freedom of information in fostering national development. It highlights the following:

- A clear focus on the right to information would be transformational, promoting participatory development, empowering all people to exercise their rights and address their own development challenges, and providing a means to promote progress on accountability, transparency, good governance, participation and empowerment;
- Better quality and greater availability of information would lead to improved allocation of resources and more informed decision-making by governments, civil society and the private sector; and

²³ Resolution on Safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, adopted at the UN General Assembly, 68th Session on 18 December 2013

²⁴ Progress report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals. [0]. Available: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3238summaryallowg.pdf>. Accessed 24/02/2014.

²⁵ Lublinski, Jan, Deselaers, Peter & Berner, Petra. 2013. *Post-2015 MDGs: Freedom of Expression and the Media: Discussion Paper*. [0]. Available: <http://www.dw.de/popups/pdf/29438701/post-2015-mdgs-freedom-of-expression-and-the-media-pdf.pdf>. Accessed 05/03/2014.

²⁶ See also the African Union's 21-page *Common African Position (CAP) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

- Information intermediaries such as CSOs, the media, parliamentarians, and libraries can help governments and people communicate, organize, structure and understand data that is critical to development.²⁷

At the same time, civil society groups perceive that despite the recognition of open governance as a backdrop against which SDGs can be implemented, the issue is diluted in the OWG's "Focus Areas Document". While welcoming the OWG's recognition that capable institutions are essential for supporting sustainable human development, these groups have urged the OWG to be "more explicit about the need for a standalone goal to support accountable, open and inclusive governance, both at local and national as well as international levels"²⁸ – a position that is in accord with the recommendations of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

4. Free, pluralistic and independent media are a global norm relevant to development norms.

At different times, the international community has acknowledged, either implicitly or explicitly, norms as regards development, and norms as regards freedom of expression and press freedom. The relevance of the two realms to each other is an informed and civically-engaged public addressing development challenges.

Within the UN System, from the founding of the United Nations in 1945, and later of UNESCO as a specialized agency in 1946, the role of the media in bringing about peace and a just world was already a globally acknowledged reality. Article 1(3) of the UN Charter upholds the promotion of and respect for "human rights and fundamental freedoms for all" in the context of "solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character". Such fundamental freedoms extend to freedom of expression and its corollaries of access to information and freedom of the press – all of which are key to enabling people to actively participate in "solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character"²⁹. This linking of human rights and fundamental freedoms to citizen participation is reflected in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), where Article 19 reads:

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.³⁰

The UDHR's position is prefigured by UNESCO's Constitution of 1946, which enjoins upon the Organisation's Member States to "collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and

²⁷ Article 19. 2013. Access to information central to the post-2015 development agenda. [0]. Available: <http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37393/en/access-to-information-central-to-the-post-2015-development-agenda>. Accessed 05/02/2014.

²⁸ Beyond2015. 2014. *Beyond 2015 reaction to the Open Working Group's 'Focus Areas Document'*. [0]. Available: <http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/Beyond%202015%20reaction%20to%20the%20Open%20Working%20Group%20final%203%20March%202014.pdf>. Accessed 06/03/2014.

²⁹ Charter of the United Nations. [0]. Available: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml>. Accessed 05/02/2014.

³⁰ Annex 1: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). [0]. Available: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/ABCannexesen.pdf>. Accessed 05/02/2014.

understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image”.³¹

Worth noting further is the elaboration of these positions over the years. In particular, in 1991, UNESCO member states adopted the Windhoek Declaration which recognised the norm of a free, pluralistic and independent (African) press as a manifestation of the right to freedom of expression and an essential means for the free flow of ideas by word and image. Recognition of “through any medium” was acknowledged at UNESCO’s 37th General Conference in 2013 to include online as well as offline media.³²

All this is directly relevant to the emergence of the norm of sustainable development itself, which has been seen as “an approach to development that looks to balance different, and often competing, needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society”.³³ Such a balanced, interlinked view of development means that the totality of development options becomes a key policy consideration, enabling governments to, for example, take a long-term view that meets “the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity”.³⁴ An unsustainable view of development is delinked from futuristic considerations and could also potentially result in greater inequality, which is detrimental to economic growth, and in particular to the kind of growth which reduces poverty and enables social mobility. Such inequalities, as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) observes, could undermine social cohesion, and subsequently increase political and social tensions, and, in some circumstances, drive instability and conflict.³⁵

There are immediate harmonies between the international norms of media and the counterpart norms around development when the latter is conceived as a long-term, sustainable and human-centred process. For example, such a process of human development requires, inter alia, a great deal of accurate, diverse, analytical and predictive (or early-warning) information that a free, independent and pluralistic media system can help to provide to policymakers, among other informational constituents, enabling thereby an informed and civically-engaged society well attuned to development issues.

This strong linkage between these realms of international norms has been further bolstered by civil society. Almost 200 civil society groups joined hands in February 2014 to urge the UN OWG to put government accountability and independent media at the centre of a new framework for global development. In a joint statement, coordinated by ARTICLE 19 and the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), the advocacy organisations argued that access to information and media freedom are vital elements for a future development plan, as they help to allow people to hold governments accountable in their efforts to achieve economic growth, social equality and

³¹ UNESCO. 2004. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Basic Texts*. Paris: UNESCO: 7-21.

³² This was in Resolution 52 “Internet related issues: including access to information and knowledge, freedom of expression, privacy and ethical dimensions of the information society”, and it in turn reinforced Resolution L13 on “The Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet”, adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2012.

³³ The Sustainable Development Commission. 2011. *What is sustainable development?* [0]. Available: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html>. Accessed 11/02/2014.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ UNDP. 2013. *Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries*. New York: United Nations Development Programme Bureau for Development Policy.

environmental sustainability.³⁶ This ground swell of global civic activism concerning international norms represents strategic momentum concerning the recognition of free, independent and pluralistic media as a significant factor of the development equation.

Policy implications

This brief has argued that the discourse of sustainable development, as an interlinked process of human development, is increasingly recognising the value of free, independent and pluralistic media. There is a growing *empirical, governance* and *normative* basis for their inclusion in any global package for sustainable development. Free, pluralistic and independent media can be empirically tested for their efficacy in attaining and sustaining development gains, and their prerequisite status in regard to good governance. Such media further constitute a UN normative mandate for promoting world peace. Against this backdrop, then, three policy recommendations can be made:

1. Member States can regard sustainable development as an interlinked system of development options that is underpinned by overall governance efforts;
2. Taking into account the above consideration, Member States can develop national media policy goals which enshrine a free, independent and pluralistic media system as an integral part of governance for sustainable development, in the manner that the report of the Eminent Persons has advised the UN Secretary-General.
3. Furthermore, Member States can institutionalize in practice within their own national jurisdictions, the principles of a free, independent and pluralistic media through appropriate policy and legislative actions.

³⁶ 200 campaigners demand a UN development plan that makes governments more accountable. *GFMD Newsletter*. 4 February 2014.

Annex: Towards a Sustainable Development Goal to cover free, pluralistic and independent pluralistic media

Focus area(s) ³⁷	Possible SDG	Possible targets	Issue measured	Applicable (UNESCO) indicators ³⁸
OWG focus area 19: Peaceful and non-violent societies, capable institutions	Secure accountable, open and inclusive governance	a) Protecting freedom of expression, media freedom and independence and journalistic safety	The safety of journalists, as a feature of freedom of expression, underpins other democratic freedoms such as the right to form political parties, the right to share political ideas, the right to scrutinise the actions of public officials, and so on. In this sense, it also supports good governance and democratic accountability ³⁹ , and could arguably be seen as contributory to creating conditions conducive to sustainable development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Freedom of expression, the right to information & editorial independence are guaranteed in law and respected in practice 2. Journalists' right to protect their sources is guaranteed in law and respected in practice 3. The public and civil society organisations (CSOs) participate in shaping public policy towards the media 4. Perception that journalists and media organisations have integrity and are not corrupt 5. Perception that news reporting is fair and impartial 6. A high level of citizen participation in media content production 7. Journalists and associated media personnel are not subject to threats, harassment or surveillance

³⁷ This focus area reflects the work of the Open Working Group. It alludes to the reports of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. In all, these processes can be taken to represent technical, political and corporate approaches towards developing a set of post-2015 sustainable development goals. In their own way, albeit with varying emphasis, they each address an aspect that could resonate with a goal to cover free, independent and pluralistic media. The documents can respectively be accessed as follows:

- *OWG Focus Areas Document*: http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/Focus%20areas%20document_OWG%20SDGs_21%20February%202014-1.pdf.
- *High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons Report*: http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf.
- *SDNS Report*: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html>.

³⁸ These indicators could have their data sources in UNESCO's *Media Development Indicators, Journalists' Safety Indicators*, among other publications.

³⁹ UNESCO. 2013. *Journalists' Safety Indicators: National Level: Based on the UNESCO's Media Development Indicators*. Paris: UNESCO. See also UNESCO. 2013. *Journalists' Safety Indicators: International Level: Based on the UNESCO's Media Development Indicators*. Paris: UNESCO. The MDIs themselves can be accessed at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001631/163102e.pdf>.

				<p>8. Journalists, and associated media personnel are not physically attacked, unlawfully detained or killed as a result of pursuing their legitimate activities</p> <p>9. Media organisations are not forced to close down as a result of pursuing their legitimate activities, or threatened with closure</p> <p>10. Crimes against journalists are prosecuted and there is no climate of impunity</p> <p>11. Media organisations have policies for protecting the health and safety of their staff, along with measures of social protection that are available to all staff, including temporary and freelance employees</p>
		b) Strengthening media pluralism to reinforce their economic sustainability & overall contribution to economic growth ⁴⁰	Free, independent and pluralistic media are an industry and their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the economic viability of a nation can be traced. ⁴¹ The media sector can be a significant, growing and	1. Effective regulations to prevent undue ownership concentration and promote plurality, including specific legislation on cross-ownership within broadcasting and

⁴⁰ Economic growth is a category of economic development. While economic development focuses on policy interventions aimed at economic and social well-being of people, economic growth is a phenomenon of market productivity and rise in GDP. In a word, “economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development.” For this analysis, see Sen, A. 1983. *Development: Which Way Now? Economic Journal* Vol. 93 (372): 745–762. Here, it is also important to highlight the fact that free, independent and pluralistic media can be analysed as business units, contributory to overall national economic development, particularly in terms of the advertising expenditure that they represent in relation to overall economic activity. However, it must be acknowledged that the media are much more than just economic institutions; they are foundational to open democracy. As such, their use to indicate economic development (growth) must be underpinned by a nuanced understanding of their overall democratic-communicative role in any society, which can be captured by other indicators (e.g. journalists’ safety, etc.). Using multiple indicators thus ameliorates what would otherwise be a very simplistic economically-reductionistic approach to analysing media dynamics in a given polity.

⁴¹ These indicators are extrapolated from Webster, Frank. 1995. *Theories of the Information Society*. London: Routledge. See also his chapter entitled ‘Information society revisited’. [0]. Available: http://www.uk.sagepub.com/mcquail6/PDF/022_ch01.pdf. Accessed 25/02/2014. They are also reflected, to varying degrees, within the UNESCO/UNESCO Institute for Statistics quantitative surveys of national media landscapes which are based on the Media Development Indicators (MDIs). 2012. *The media landscape in 28 countries:*

			<p>value-added sector in its own right, with a sizable turnover and employing a significant proportion of the population under optimal conditions of media autonomy, legal structure, quality of media content and consumer demand.⁴²</p>	<p>between broadcasting and other media sectors to prevent market dominance</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Regulations recognise the distinction between small and large players in the media market 3. Transparency and disclosure provisions for media companies with regard to ownership, investment and revenue sources (e.g. percentage of revenue accruing to media companies by way of public grants or public subsidies, licence fee, advertising, subscription, donation or private subsidies, and other sources) 4. Licensing process for the allocation of specific frequencies to individual broadcasters promotes diversity of media ownership and programming content 5. Government actively monitors and evaluates the consequences of media concentration, and enforces anti-monopoly laws to refuse license requests or force divestment of existing media operations in order to
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results from a UIS pilot survey. [0]. Available: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Communication/Documents/Media-statistics-pilot-survey-report.pdf>. Accessed 04/03/2014.

⁴² Compare how the Arts in the UK were quantified as a contributory part of the economy. This citation is relevant to the extent that the media can be treated as a cultural industry, contributing to artistic promotion. For this analysis, see Reeves, Michelle. 2002. *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review*. London: The Arts Council of England. [0]. Available: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications/340.pdf>. Accessed 24/02/2014. See also Coyne, Christopher. J & Peter T. Leeson. 2004. Read all about it! Understanding the role of media in economic development. *KYKLOS*, Vol. 57: 21-44. [0]. Available: <http://www.peterleeson.com/Kyklos--Media.pdf>. Accessed 24/02/2014.

				<p>avoid excessive concentrations of media ownership</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Regulators allocate digital licenses to a diverse range of commercial and non-commercial operators 7. Number of media business starts-up and closures registered 8. Existence of media support companies (e.g. audience research companies; suppliers of newsprint, transmitters, satellite/cable technology, etc.) are available in the wider economy⁴³ 9. Assessment of donor media assistance and its possible (distorting) effect on media market⁴⁴ 10. Assessment of multiplier effect of media companies on other sectors of the economy 11. Total number of employees in media companies in relation to GDP 12. Growth rate of wages in media companies in relation to other sectors of the economy 13. Volume of transactions in online media (including social media) as a percentage of GDP
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⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA). 2007. *Toward Economic Sustainability of the Media in Developing Countries: Working Group Report*. Washington, DC.: CIMA. [0]. Available: http://www.ned.org/cima/CIMA-Economic_Sustainability-Working_Group_Report.pdf. Accessed 25/02/2014.