



Tripartite Strategy: Media Assistance in Conflict, Good Governance, and Poverty Eradication
A Strategic Policy Discussion between Donors, NGOs and UNESCO
4 May 2006

Background

The correlation between media freedom and the eradication of poverty is the main theme of the “World Press Freedom Day” 2006. In the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, aid agencies, NGOs and state actors are increasingly recognizing the multi-level impact and the central dynamic of media assistance in fostering sustainable human development and alleviating extreme poverty.

Media freedom and access to information play a key role in facilitating local participation and empowerment of the poor. Freedom of expression is furthermore the core human right in a rights based approach to poverty reduction, since it serves as a trigger and catalyst for the realization of all other basic human rights. It is precisely through the exercise and practice of freedom of expression that the disadvantaged are enabled to recognize and claim the protection of their human rights. And while the declarations of Belgrade in 2004 and Dakar in 2005 have already reflected the decisive role of independent media in conflict resolution, reconstruction and enhancing good, accountable and transparent governance, the upcoming “World Press Freedom Day” in Colombo once again reaffirms media freedom as an indispensable cornerstone of a comprehensive and effective international development strategy.

How to Best Invest in Media and Development: Discussing the Policy Strategy

The past years, there has been a growing recognition of the nexus between freedom of expression and poverty alleviation. At the same time, however, the policies regarding the concrete application of media assistance in development differ greatly and the conceptual boundaries of media assistance are often non-uniform, unpredictable and thus more difficult to coordinate. Whereas one actor might set freedom of expression in the context of enhancing cultural diversity, others might conceive media assistance as an educational initiative or a good governance project. The efficacy of media assistance in realizing the concrete practice of poverty reduction on the ground, however, depends decisively on how stakeholders within the development community conceive of and conceptualize media assistance within their overall development strategies. The growing diversity of approaches thus requires a substantive discussion at the strategic level of media and development policy.

In line with previous similar strategy meetings, such as in Vaxholm, Sweden, in 2003, this seminar is jointly initiated and organized by Sida and UNESCO. Directly following up on the conference at “World Press Freedom Day”, this meeting invites development donors, key policy experts and representatives of the media profession to participate in a mutual exchange of views and an open and creative discussion on the concrete strategic role of media assistance in the international framework for poverty eradication. The rationale of the meeting is thereby based on three central objectives we seek:

1. to share and discuss the individual aid agencies’ approaches to media and development,
2. to gather the relevant stakeholders and facilitate exchange from different policy perspectives, and
3. to disclose and discuss the potential for a joint and comprehensive strategic framework for action on media freedom, development and poverty eradication.

As a roadmap for further action, this meeting draws attention to the “meta-perspective” or the strategic rationale for media assistance and development. It should serve as a catalyst for fruitful policy discussion and seeks to enhance coordination, cooperation and synergy within the development community. We therefore address in particular those stakeholders who – from different points of view – contribute to the process of formulating a coherent media development policy: governmental development agencies, key policy experts in the field of media assistance and representatives of the media profession from different geographical regions. Deliberately diverging from the usual focus of donor conferences on fundraising and implementation in the field, this meeting seeks to present a platform for development agencies themselves. The donors’ strategic approaches to media and development, their evaluation of previous achievements and their expectations concerning the development input by UNESCO and key media experts is the meeting’s central focus. Discussion sessions are therefore designed to outline a potential roadmap for further action and devote attention to media assistance and the international Tsunami disaster response in Sri Lanka as a concrete empirical example of recent concern.