

A Special Report to the Center for International Media Assistance:

# *Making Media Development More Effective*



*By Tara Susman-Peña*

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**National Endowment  
for Democracy**

*Supporting freedom around the world*

**The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA)**, at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world. The Center provides information, builds networks, conducts research, and highlights the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development. The Center was one of the of the main nongovernmental organizers of World Press Freedom Day 2011 in Washington, DC.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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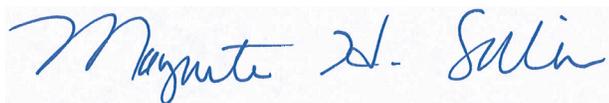
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# Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study, *Making Media Development More Effective*.

The report reviews patterns in media development assistance over the last two decades and considers the effectiveness of these interventions, using principles from the aid effectiveness process as guidelines. It offers suggestions for how media development can improve its effectiveness in strengthening the media sector and better integrate into mainstream development efforts. The analysis draws upon a body of original research conducted for the Media Map Project, a collaborative effort between Internews and the World Bank Institute, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

CIMA is grateful to Tara Susman-Peña, a development and communications consultant, for her research and insights on this topic. Her paper lends itself to discussion. The analysis and conclusions presented are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CIMA or its parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy. We invite you to read the report, think about the ideas it presents, share your thoughts, and see what others have to say at <http://cima.ned.org/publications/making-media-development-more-effective>. We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance practitioners.



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# Executive Summary

A wealth of research demonstrates that a healthy media sector is consistently paired with better development outcomes and in many ways can contribute to better development. However, media development—donor support for strengthening the quality, independence, and sustainability of the news media—has comprised only about 0.5 percent of overall aid to developing countries. Most stakeholders in international development have never even heard of media development. Should media development’s track record earn it a more central place in international development? A strong evidence base of original research conducted for the Media Map Project, a collaborative effort between Internews and the World Bank Institute, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides the opportunity to analyze the extent to which donor support to media historically has helped the media sector fulfill its promise to strengthen development. We find that despite years of stock taking, donors to media development still have a number of blind spots that prevent their interventions from being more effective. In particular, media development stakeholders could improve their efforts by applying aid effectiveness principles to their practice.

When examining media development assistance over the last two decades, certain patterns become clear. The consensus among media development practitioners is that media development supports all other development, both economic development and good governance, directly and indirectly. At the same time, donors often use media to promote stability, democracy, and development. Donors to media development rarely articulate a precise theory of change at the outset of their interventions. Generally, however, modernization theory—the idea that Western-style, top-down mass media would transform developing societies into “modern” nations along the same path as their Western counterparts—seems to be still unconsciously driving much of contemporary practice even though the theory itself has been long discredited.

Looking at the last two decades of donor assistance to the media, a pattern emerges:

1. A country experiences a political shift or humanitarian crisis that acts as a trigger for donor intervention to support the media.
2. Initial investments in supporting the media sector are meant to help stabilize the country and support its transition toward democracy or out of war.
3. After donors perceive a certain level of success, they draw down their support and usually alter the type of support they provide; some withdraw completely.
4. In the last five years or so—and particularly since the Arab Spring—support to digital media has been strongly emphasized.

Have these practices been effective? Two important principles from the aid effectiveness process can serve as a framework for testing media development work: ownership of development priorities by the country receiving the aid and a focus on results. Examining the evidence, it

seems that much of media development assistance has not been driven by country ownership. Rather, it has been supply-driven, focusing on training as opposed to creating institutional structures that build the capacity of the media over time. The supply-driven approach is also evidenced by outsiders' failure to recognize that they are trying to change what is a fundamentally different cultural perspective about what a media system is and what its role within a country should be. In many countries that receive media development assistance, the news media functions generally as a means to a political end, not a business that produces information and tries to leverage the market value for this information from its audience.

Looking at the question of results produces a mixed bag, with successes in some countries over a limited time period. Strong support for freedom of the press as the foundation for media to develop was a common trait across the more successful countries. Another important determinant of success was an understanding on the part of donors of the local context and supporting aspects of the media sector that were considered high priority and driven by local actors. Failures are harder to examine, as they are less openly discussed and not well documented. There are many signs, however, that long-term impact has been less than strong relative to investments. Donors' current emphasis on evaluation and openness presents an opportunity. Donors can consider how to make failure productive by becoming more open about it, learning from it, and showcasing successes that were built on the backs of failures.

Recommendations for donors, policymakers, and implementers for strengthening media development interventions:

- Donors should adopt aid effectiveness principles to guide media development strategy.
- Media development should be better integrated into mainstream development efforts, in particular anti-corruption, education, and human rights.
- Media development should become a knowledge-based practice by better integrating research into policy and practice, developing and testing theories of change, creating institutional knowledge from evaluations and other sources, and sharing knowledge across other development practice areas.
- Rather than isolating the media sector, donors should focus on information more broadly, with media, access to information, and freedom of expression all interlinked sub-components.

# How Can Media Development Be More Effective?

Does media matter for development? If we look at the evidence, it is hard to conclude anything other than a resounding “yes.” A wealth of research over the years demonstrates that a healthy media sector is consistently found alongside better development outcomes, and in many ways can contribute to better development. While there are some exceptions, when taken together, this body of research comprises what economist Daniel Kaufmann calls a preponderance of evidence that “provides the overall empirical sense that media matters.”<sup>1</sup>

A healthy media sector in any country is free, independent, produces high quality information, reaches all or most of the population, offers diverse perspectives, and provides the information people need to be able to make decisions and to be able to hold their government to account. Increasingly, a healthy media sector also means that people can freely create, distribute, and exchange content. As media cut across all sectors in society, their potential for impact is enormous.

Media can be considered to be:<sup>2</sup>

- **Market institutions.** Media creates an information flow that is the lifeblood of a working and efficient economic system.
- **Governance institutions.** By providing information and detail about government decision-making, budgeting, and actions, the media strengthen oversight, and thus government accountability, and exposes vice or incompetence.
- **Social and cultural institutions.** By increasing people’s knowledge about their own and other societies, the media may strengthen bonds and common understandings among people.
- **Market sectors.** As mainly a private sector activity, the media represent an area of investment and growth.
- **Support to development.** The media can track how donor funds are used and inform people about development interventions.

One would think that the development community would immediately pounce upon anything that has potential for such broad-reaching impact and whose importance in development is demonstrated by a strong body of evidence. However, quite the opposite is the case. Media development—donor support to strengthening the quality, independence, and sustainability of the news media—has up to this point comprised a negligible portion of overall aid. Various estimates of donor spending in media development suggest that support to the media over the last decade tops out at about 0.5 percent of all aid.<sup>3</sup> Most stakeholders in international

development have never even heard of media development. Supporting a healthy media sector as a critical component of helping to grow economies, alleviate poverty, and improve lives has been a real blind spot in international development.

To help make the case for media development's importance for broader development goals, we should take a hard look at whether the support donors have given to media historically has helped the media sector fulfill its promise to strengthen development. Thus, this report first reviews patterns in media development assistance over the last two decades, then considers the effectiveness of these interventions (using principles from the aid effectiveness process as guidelines), and last, offers suggestions for how media development can both improve its effectiveness in strengthening the media sector and better integrate into mainstream development efforts. The analysis draws upon a body of original research conducted for the Media Map Project, a collaborative effort between Internews and the World Bank Institute, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Media Map pilot study focused on these key questions:

- Does media matter for development? How, why, and in what ways?
- What kinds of donor support to the media are most effective?
- What is the evidence for the answers to the above questions?
- Where are the gaps in the evidence?
- How should those knowledge gaps be filled?

Here, a look from a different perspective at the body of Media Map research can help tease out the blind spots in media development interventions: characteristics of and challenges to successful media development from the last two decades that donors themselves have largely failed to consider. Addressing these blind spots should help make media development more effective and strengthen the argument for incorporating media development in a more integral way into development efforts.

## Evaluating Donor Support to the Media: What's the Evidence?

To build an analytical portrait of past practice, this study draws evidence from seven Media Map country case studies: Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Indonesia, Mali, Peru, and Ukraine. We traced donor interventions to focus on how the interventions evolved over time, what was successful, and what was not successful. We tried to select countries that represented a range of geographic, political, cultural, development, and media contexts. Although we emphasized Sub-Saharan Africa, the three countries studied there are quite different from one another. The chart below presents a snapshot of the most recent key indicators for each of the case study countries. Scores are color-coded green for countries that fall in the top third, yellow for the middle third, and red for the bottom third.

## Snapshot of Media and Development in the Media Map Case Studies

	Cambodia	DRC	Kenya	Indonesia	Mali	Peru	Ukraine
Freedom House, Freedom of the Press, 2012	<b>63 Not Free</b>	<b>83 Not Free</b>	<b>52- Partly Free</b>	<b>49 Partly Free</b>	<b>24-Free</b>	<b>44 Partly Free</b>	<b>59-Partly Free</b>
Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, 2011-12	<b>55</b>	<b>67.67</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>51.25</b>	<b>54</b>
Media Sustainability Index, 2010	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1.8 Unsustainable Mixed System</b>	<b>2.31 - Near Sustainability</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1.99 Unsustainable Mixed System</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>2.0 Unsustainable Mixed System</b>
ICT Development Index, 2010	<b>1.99</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>4.34</b>
World Development Indicators-Internet Users per 100, 2010	<b>1.9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>44.6</b>
Worldwide Governance Indicators, Voice & Accountability Subindicator, 2010	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>-1.4</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-0.1</b>
Human Development Index, Rank Out of 187 Countries, 2011	<b>139</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>76</b>

The methodology for the case studies combined desk research, quantitative analysis, and fieldwork to ask a common set of key questions across a highly diverse global landscape, focusing on the last two decades of donor support to independent media.<sup>4</sup> We asked: who are the major actors? What are the major activities? Which activities have a positive impact? Which activities fail? Why? Each in-depth study offers rich information for donors, policymakers,

international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local governments, media, and NGOs interested in improving the effectiveness and relevance of media support in that particular country. Here, we extract the themes and patterns that cut across the seven countries to strengthen the base of evidence for how donors can be more effective in their support to the media sector around the world. In addition to the case studies, the report synthesizes other findings from across the Media Map research, in particular: two extensive literature reviews, a study of donor approaches to monitoring and evaluation, and a report on how media can support development in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Trying to identify blind spots in media development means that certain critically important but already well-considered “lessons learned” will be emphasized less, for example: donors’ weak coordination on media interventions, the sustainability of media outlets as businesses, the overabundance of ineffective “parachute” journalism training, and the importance of strengthening the enabling environment for media. Even though many of these lessons are clearly not yet completely learned, a broad, high quality discussion of these topics already exists.<sup>6</sup>

# Examining 20 Years of Donor Support to the Media

## What motivates assistance?

If it is possible to outline general patterns of assistance, one critical piece of the pattern should be what drives the whole thing—why do donors provide this assistance in the first place? Veterans of the media development sector believe, of course, that the work that they do in supporting local media has an important impact on development. They believe that support to local media will facilitate independence from the government and other outside influences, freedom to disseminate information to the public and to represent the public’s needs to decision-makers, ability to operate as an independent business, and better quality of the news produced. In turn, such an improved news media, by maintaining a free flow of information, should keep the government transparent and hold it accountable to its citizens, give life to the market economy, and provide citizens with the information they need to make all kinds of critical decisions that affect them as individuals as well as their families, communities, and countries. Increasingly, media development interventions also attempt to improve people’s ability to engage with the media and produce and distribute content, which can potentially bolster government and business accountability and increase access to information by strengthening the flow of information.

Here are some typical—and quite consistent—expressions of this thinking from media development stakeholders.

*Often guided by the belief that independent media are crucial in building a functioning democratic system, international media development programs aim to facilitate the free flow of information, transparency, government accountability, and economic growth.<sup>7</sup>*

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*Media assistance aims to strengthen regional, national and local media systems and institutions in ways that serve the public interest. Examples of media assistance include support to regulatory reform, journalism training and media business management. It also covers support to community media, citizen journalism and media for sustainable development—on health and environmental issues, for instance—in ways that ensure that people are able to access information and to express their own opinions and priorities in the public arena.<sup>8</sup>*

At the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Press Freedom Day in 2011, Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation gave a more pragmatic perspective as to why development stakeholders should care about supporting free and independent media in developing nations: “Media development aid creates the independent journalism that tells you whether all the other aid is being stolen. Just as freedom of expression supports all other freedom, media aid supports all other aid.”<sup>9</sup>

In essence, collectively these arguments say: Media development supports all other development, both economic development and good governance, both directly and indirectly. Support to Ukraine’s media to help grow its new democracy in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union is a classic example of this view. All of the case study countries considered here in some way illustrate donor thinking that building the media as an institution means that it in turn will support other institutions.

The other broad theory at play might be summarized as “using the media as a tool for messaging will promote stability, democracy, and development.” According to this theory, trustworthy, informative messages about elections, health issues, women’s rights, or other development topics will encourage people to change their behavior in a way that supports a country’s development. Many media development participants strongly disagree with this perspective,

***Media development interventions attempt to improve people’s ability to engage with the media and produce and distribute content, which can bolster government and business accountability and increase access to information by strengthening the flow of information.***

arguing that international organizations should empower a society to keep its public informed in an ongoing way, not invest in isolated messaging. There has been some controversy around the question of media development versus development communications, but the latter is so prevalent across the media development landscape that in many cases it can be hard to fully separate the two.

In the DRC, “After the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi people in Rwanda and the infamous role played by the Rwandan ... Radio Television Libre Milles Collines (RTL), many donors and specialized organizations had become concerned with the role of the media in both the conflicts and in peace-building efforts, with the aim of counteracting or neutralizing ethnically motivated hate media in favor of nation-building. The

establishment of Radio Okapi, in the wake of the United Nations (UN) peace-keeping mission, also reflected this concern.”<sup>10</sup> The activities of the Radio Okapi project put it firmly in media development category, but it was established as a tool of the peacekeeping process. Some projects clearly articulate from the outset the change they expect to induce, but many others do not have a clearly stated goal and expectation of why the chosen activities should lead to that goal, making evaluation challenging.

## **Searching for Theories of Change in Media Development**

Being generally in agreement about why media development work is done is not the same as articulating a precise theory of change at the outset of each project. The expectation that any intervention will have a series of impacts suggests that there is an underlying theory of change driving these activities, even if it is not articulated as such. In media development, it is unlikely that either donors or implementers spend much time thinking about or articulating a theory of change. In a study of evaluations of media interventions in conflict countries, Iginio Gagliardone

observes, “Academics and M&E [Monitoring & Evaluation] experts lamented the lack of clarity among donors about what specific changes they hope to achieve,” citing a need for “clearer theories of change.”<sup>11</sup>

Taking a step back, what does “theory of change” mean? The United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) seems to be one of the one of very few media development donors that requires implementers to spell out their theory of change as part of intervention process. The United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) program is another, and CMM’s quite broad definition is as good a place to start. CMM’s guide to theories of change and indicator development explains, “In general, a theory of change states what expected (changed) result will follow from a particular set of actions. A simple example would be, ‘if I add more fuel to the fire, then it will burn hotter.’”<sup>12</sup> This level of theory has been articulated very broadly, but few donors have tried to identify precisely the forces of cause and effect they believe to be at work in the dynamic of media assistance.

If most major players involved in media development interventions have not focused on the question of a theory of change, why should we care about it? Even though deciphering a theory of change may seem academic and perhaps trivial, from another perspective, it is foundational to effective development. There is no point in doing development work unless actions are expected to yield change. Fully articulating this theory should be the responsibility of any development actor. The same CMM manual argues, “By making our theory explicit, we can then consciously shape our program planning and implementation to correspond to it. And, knowing our theory of change allows us to critically examine it, refine it, and, if necessary, dismiss it when evidence suggests it is misguided.”<sup>13</sup>

Looking at this question another way, we can consider that a failure to articulate a theory of change and build programs out of that theory leaves interventions open to a number of potential critical flaws. Without being conscious of what theory is driving our actions, it will be more difficult to find the ultimate source of any flaws. It would seem a wise idea to think through carefully and spell out what the goal is and why that goal is the expected outcome of a series of actions before intervening in the development of another country. Without taking this step, the actual interventions may in fact be supporting some other outcome, detrimental to the program’s goals. For example, researcher Marie-Soleil Frère observes that in the DRC, donors “have not yet addressed—and in many cases may even have contributed to—one of the primary challenges to the establishment of a quality media sector: that is, an uncontrolled, chaotic proliferation of media

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outlets.” Without articulating a theory of change, the implementer’s ability to detect, learn from, and revise flawed planning may be seriously handicapped. And without clearly stated goals and theories of change to explain the chosen path toward those goals, it may be impossible to fully define and measure impact.

Trying to measure impact in the absence of a theory of change is something akin to trying to win a race without having identified either the starting point or the finish line. Devra Moehler of the Annenberg School for Communications at the University of Pennsylvania explains:

Too often projects are up and running before a theory of change is formulated. Usually the activities are decided first, and only at a later stage the organization develops a theory explaining how the activities are going to lead to a desirable outcome. I realize there are many logistical reasons why this happens, but it is really hard to evaluate when there isn’t a specific theory of change. You can’t just measure everything. You need to have that theory in order to know which measure you can use and to explain why something was a success or had negative effects. You should try to be as specific as possible.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, declaring a theory of change at the outset of a project is necessary to accurately measure results and determine whether or not it has had the intended impact.

Historically, defining the theory of change as a first step in any intervention appears to have been a more typical approach in media development. In the 1960s and 1970s, when there were closer ties between communications scholars and development practice, theories of change for media development were more commonly articulated. Daniel Lerner’s book, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, “argued that the media were key socializing institutions that encouraged indigenous populations to embrace modernity.”<sup>15</sup> Broadly speaking, the theory of change was that the presence of Western-style mass media would transform developing societies into “modern” nations, along the same path as their Western counterparts. From a development perspective, broadcast media (with its top-down, uni-directional flows of information) was critical to achieving this evolution. This theory subsequently influenced the UN to promote the development of mass media systems as a vital aspect of economic development.

The critique of development communications argues that using media as a tool for messaging reinforces this power imbalance and does not build the capacity of societies to drive their own development. Media and communications scholars Amelia Arsenault and Shawn Powers argue that modernization theory, which informed the strategies and practices of media development interventions beginning in the 1960s but has since been strongly critiqued, may still underpin not just development communications, but also contemporary media development (albeit unconsciously). It would be worth an analysis of contemporary donor plans, goals, and discourse in support of the media to determine the extent to which this outmoded way of thinking, which has generally been discredited in development circles, still drives actual practice. Signs indicate that these theories have been driving practice many years after the theory was disavowed, at least to some extent. The establishment of Radio UNTAC during what donors

meant to have been the beginning of the democratization process in Cambodia illustrates modernization theory and the limits of the interventions that flow from it.

Media development appeared on the scene in Cambodia when the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) came in to help shepherd the country out of military rule and conflict after the Paris Peace Accords in 1991. The UN established Radio UNTAC to inform the population in a balanced way about the upcoming and unprecedented democratic elections. The media activities included establishing a radio station, installing a transmitter, providing one-week journalism trainings to government journalists, broadcasting messages about the election around the country, and distributing 143,000 radio sets. By giving equal time to all political parties, and convincing the population that their votes were secret, UNTAC helped contribute to a 90 percent voter turnout.

After the success in supporting the 1993 elections, Radio UNTAC closed, the equipment was turned over to the state, and journalism returned to the status quo ante. During the earlier conflict, most non-government journalists had been killed. The government trainees had difficult adapting in the long-term to the Western style of reporting, as they had been working as a government mouthpiece before UNTAC, and had little to no support to maintain what they had learned after UNTAC withdrew. While UNTAC achieved its short-term goal, it also missed a brief window of opportunity. In hindsight, the post-peace accords period might have been an opportunity for broader reform and improvement, including better access to information, freedom of expression, and stronger media. Lasting positive impact of this modernization-theory driven intervention was largely at the individual level; certain people acquired skills that in some cases they were able to put to use. For example, Chea Sundaneth was on staff at Radio UNTAC and later became the head of Women’s Media Center, one of two Cambodian media NGOs that survive to this day.

***“A lot of media development funding has been based on the concept of a free press in a democracy that has been rooted in Western newspaper culture in the 19th and 20th century. This model has been disrupted by the double tsunami of new media technology and economic shifts.”***

— Anne Nelson,  
Media Development Consultant

Some experts believe that modernization theory was broadly influential. Media development consultant Anne Nelson argued, “A lot of media development funding has been based on the concept of a free press in a democracy that has been rooted in Western newspaper culture in the 19th and 20th century. This model has been disrupted by the double tsunami of new media technology and economic shifts.”<sup>16</sup> This question of underlying theories of change deserves further analysis. A detailed study by Jo Ellen Fair in 1989 found that from 1960-1989, the modernization paradigm continued to dominate contemporary discourses on media’s contribution to development.<sup>17</sup> This research should be updated, not just as scholarly exercise

but to inform policymakers. If a new study found that modernization theory is still embedded in mainstream media development assistance practice, it would raise questions about what is done, how it is done, and whether there are any true alternatives. If we haven't identified any yet or been able to articulate what the theory of change is, does that mean there is truly no alternative, or is it a collective failure of imagination? A stronger connection to academic research might help provide some resources for creating alternative theories of change.

Employing a theory of change at the beginning of every project would mean that donors would have to articulate not just the big picture (a democracy must have a strong independent news media sector to keep it accountable and functioning well) but a more precise theory of why specific interventions should be chosen and employed in specific ways to address the specific problems and context. Would donors' patterns of interventions begin to shift if theories of change were widely employed and systematically evaluated? Would they have more success? At the least, donors would be better able to step back and consider if the mode of implementation best suits the theory (for example, is investing a large portion of the budget in training journalists the right way to put the theory into practice?). They would also be able to better measure the impact of what they have done and more accurately determine not only what is successful and what has failed, but how and why. They would have plenty of material to help create and feed a more robust culture of learning and institutional knowledge within and across organizations.

## **What Practices Did the Theories Drive? Patterns in Donor Support to The Media**

Trying to construct a taxonomy of donor interventions to support the media sector produces a necessarily impressionistic map. Donors have supported media largely as part of their governance and civil society programs, though media activities have also been funded as part of thematic programs on areas like health and the environment. Emphasis over the last 20 years has shifted regionally from the post-Soviet states and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s to post-conflict regions and developing countries in the Middle East, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa in the 2000s. Latin America had media development activities funded by the United States in particular in the 1980s but has received considerably less attention since. The definition of media development tends to be sprawling and includes a generous gray area, making the task of tracking donor activity quite challenging. Donors themselves do not clearly define media development assistance, and few donors (notably the Open Society Foundations) define media as its own sector, breaking it out clearly from other areas. When media is not broken out, funding for media development is buried in project budgets scattered across many sectors. Most donors' own records do not provide clear evidence of where spending in media development has gone, and when asked, they have been for the most part either unwilling or unable to track down and add up all of the bits and pieces.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, Media Map case study research helps to outline certain broad gestures across the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st. The pattern seems to hold true when looking at the field of media development from a bird's eye view, taking into account multiple donors with different policies, and across countries that share both surprising

similarities and striking dissimilarities. The general trajectory of donor assistance seems to follow a pattern:

1. A country experiences a political shift or humanitarian crisis that acts as a *trigger* for (increased) donor intervention to support the media.
2. Initial investments in supporting the media sector are meant to help *stabilize* the country and support its *transition* toward democracy or out of war.
3. After donors perceive a certain level of success, they *draw down* their support and usually alter the type of support they provide; some withdraw completely.
4. In the last five years or so and particularly since the Arab Spring, support to *digital media* is leading the *recent trends* in assistance.
5. A pattern of *blind spots* is also visible, and it is worth pointing out those areas that need support but which have largely been neglected.

From a closer perspective, the pattern reveals nuances and examples to the contrary, but the overall structure holds.

### 1. *The trigger*

The paradigmatic trigger for media development interventions is the fall of the Soviet Union. Western donors rushed in enthusiastically to help Central and Eastern European countries transition to democracy, and media development—in this case, helping to transform the government mouthpiece into an independent, thriving business sector able to act as a government watchdog—was an important part of their interventions in countries such as Ukraine. In non-Soviet countries, media assistance also tended to follow incipient democratization. In Mali, donor support to the media accompanied the democratization process in the early 1990s. Mali had a much lower level of development than Ukraine, so rather than reforming the existing media system, donors focused more on establishment and growth of the media system, including basic infrastructure for broadcasting systems.

To a lesser degree, donors also support the media to increase the pressure on a repressive government. In Peru, the Catholic Church had been quietly supporting community radio in the provinces since the 1960s, but bilateral donors began to support independent media during the presidency of Alberto Fujimori in the early 1990s. Fujimori's preferred authoritarian tactics included creating politicized media content, bribery, censorship and soft censorship, and outright repression of the media. The fall of Fujimori triggered a notable increase in donor support for the democratic transition.

## 2. Initial investments meant to stabilize and support transition

Development support to local news media to try to build an accountability mechanism can take on a number of forms. The most traditional and by far the most widespread is journalism training. Training comes in a variety of formats, for example: brief seminars given by a “parachute” trainer brought in, often without knowledge of local conditions and challenges; longer in-house trainings (both basic and advanced, in any media format); taking journalists out of their country for training in the United States or at other media outlets; and intermittent training over time with ongoing feedback from mentors. There is a range of training topics, from basic reporting skills, to investigative journalism, to ethics, to management and business. In whatever form, training dominates media development interventions. USAID has noted that its focus on journalism training has decreased from 80-90 percent of media development funding in the 1990s down to 50 percent today;<sup>19</sup> this is still a significant investment overall.

***While training has been the dominant mode of media aid over the last two decades, other interventions seem to break down according to the rough level of development of the recipient country.***

A recent survey of German media assistance found a similar overwhelming emphasis on training.<sup>20</sup> Case study evidence points to parallels in the work of other donors, whether bilateral, multilateral, or private; a broad scan across the seven case study countries reveals a proliferation of training activities still in progress.

While training has been the dominant mode of media aid over the last two decades, other interventions seem to break down according to the rough level of development of the recipient country. In less developed countries, such as Mali, the DRC, and Cambodia, interventions emphasize radio—building infrastructure, creating new media outlets, and creating content. Community radio is

often a focus; in some cases, like Mali and Peru, it was flourishing prior to the media support linked to democratization initiatives. The UN created Radio Okapi and all of its programming from the ground up, and it has become the equivalent of the DRC’s public service radio, reaching close to 85 percent of the country. By contrast, more developed countries such as Ukraine seem to have benefited from a more balanced investment in a diverse array of these other types of interventions and a greater emphasis on the enabling environment, particularly the support for media watchdog and civil society organizations. Activities that support the enabling environment can be found in all types of countries and appear to be responsive to the partner country’s political situation, such as advocating for regulatory reform, supporting liberalization, and helping to create and advocate for media and freedom of expression laws. Attempts to help organize and network the sector, for example through support of trade associations or radio networks, have also been characteristic of assistance to countries in various stages of development.

Peru is an interesting example, as support there seems to have changed in tandem with the country’s economic improvement. Support to community radio in particular has a long history and still continues, but increasing donor interventions in response to Fujimori’s crackdown on

human rights and democratic institutions (including press freedom) also coincided with Peru's rise to middle income status. Aid increased significantly in the early 2000s. While media aid is never a very big piece of the pie, in Peru it seems to be relatively even less than in many other countries going through similar democratic transitions. However, there was significant investment in the growth of democracy, including support to local NGOs that focused on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, transparency, and accountability; all factors that are necessary not just for democracy but for the media to flourish.

### **3. Draw down after perceived success**

Almost universally, donors tend to collectively identify a milestone of success, which may coincide with shifting political priorities. After this they typically reduce their investment in

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media development. This may reflect a change in the country's overall development strategy. The World Bank and other donors now recognize Peru as an upper middle-income country, and development assistance across the board has begun to decline over the last few years, provoking anxiety for aid recipients.

In Ukraine, journalists played an important role in the Orange Revolution, exposing and protesting election corruption and fraud that eventually led to a fair revote in 2004. Most donors—such as the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation, the British embassy, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to name just a few—scaled down, withdrew, or shifted their strategies to fund isolated projects over broader initiatives. USAID was a notable exception, staying in place without significantly reducing funding. While some smaller initiatives such as Charter 4

and public radio fell apart, many of the stronger donor funded initiatives remain to this day, for example: STB TV, *Ukrainianska Pravda*, and Telekritika. However, with the 2010 election of Viktor Yanukovich, gains made in democracy and media development have begun to backslide. Ukraine's government has become increasingly centralized, weakening its accountability and increasing threats to freedom of expression. For example, experts on the Ukrainian media warn that the government is likely to use the transition to digital broadcasting in 2015 to reshape the media sector toward monopoly in a non-transparent way.

In Mali, as the democratization process took hold, around 1998 donors began to shift their strategies. After the initial success in supporting radio and a free press, donors began to increasingly support media as a tool to bolster interventions in other sectors. As of 2011, examples of short-term theme based trainings abounded (for instance focusing on health and elections) and the sustainability strategy of most local NGO media organizations appeared to be: Chase whatever the donors will fund. Mali's media was among the most free in Africa, but it was also chaotic and lacking in quality. In March 2012, the democracy was overthrown and the first day of the coup brought an attack on the state television. The media has been sharply repressed throughout the conflict and chaos that has followed.

The tendency of donors to move in after a trigger and draw down after a perception of initial success suggests a disruption to the theory that supporting media thereby shores up other institutions. It may be more accurate to say that donors perceive media to be a catalyst for creating democratic institutions. Once democratic institutions begin to appear, and the media has had some successes in holding them to account, the system should begin to take care of itself. Unfortunately, these examples of backsliding after donors have drawn down and shifted strategy do not support this implicit theory.

#### **4. Embrace of ICTs and other recent developments**

Over the last five years, donors have increasingly supported social media and digital technology, which will certainly receive increasing emphasis in the wake of the Arab Spring. There also is new emphasis on Internet security training, Internet freedom, and data journalism. New players have also entered the development field, technologists who may not have a background in development. They may at times work on a for-profit model, further complicating the landscape. Innovation is the buzzword of the moment, and an over-enthusiasm for new technological

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developments can shade into techno-determinism, or the expectation that technology alone, bereft of human context, will drive development. This means donors and technologists may simply throw technology at a problem, or even create and deploy technology that doesn't address any particular problem.

A pilot project in Kenya brought FrontlineSMS, a crowdsourced text-messaging platform, to some local and community radio stations. FrontlineSMS introduced the platform to the stations and stepped back, confident that the software's ease of use would facilitate increased

interactions with listeners. After a few months, researchers on the project found that the platform either was not being used or was not being used fruitfully. One station reported that it had already been doing something similar with a different technology. Another station sent reports on its progress, but closer investigation revealed that the station was not actually using the technology; its functionality and benefits were not immediately obvious. Following renewed technical support from FrontlineSMS and better ongoing monitoring of the project, appropriate stations were targeted better and began to explore how they might incorporate the platform into their programming to collect listener opinion and feedback.

Donors are also paying increased attention to the problem of sustainability in media development projects. Media is a business that can be very lucrative, but the crisis in media business models in the West, combined with repeated examples of media development projects falling apart without donor funding, have brought this problem into sharp relief. Across the case studies, there were barely a handful of examples of media and related NGOs that were able to survive without donor funding. Calls have been increasing for training related to business management, audience and market research, and advertising. A flurry of policy papers on the problem of business models in media development has appeared within the last year.<sup>21</sup>

Media literacy, building an interested news audience with the ability to critically assess the value of a news source, is also emphasized in the policy literature as increasingly important. However, Media Map fieldwork found scant evidence of actual media literacy interventions. USAID in Ukraine is again an exception. The current project includes a component meant to teach the public to identify *jeansa*, reporting that has been sponsored by business in a non-transparent way. Most developing countries still have serious problems with literacy in general, so any attempts to improve media literacy that are disconnected from broader education problems are likely to have some serious flaws.

### **5. Blind spots in donor activities**

Identifying donor patterns would not be complete without pointing out the negative spaces in the patterns as well. These are blind spots in what donors have done to support the media over the past two decades. The neglect of the business end of media has increasingly been recognized. It was not a blind spot in early donor interventions in the post-Soviet states; business training was an important part of donors' attempts to help countries transition from state-run, funded, and dictated media to media as an independent institution. Perhaps surprisingly then, attention to the business side of the media has been largely absent in interventions in other parts of the world. In Ukraine, donors and donor-supported media themselves overwhelmingly cited the current need for business and organizational capacity-building. This apparently is an area that fell into donors' blind spots over time.

Another blind spot helps explain the inconsistent attention to developing the business side of the media: a lack of institutional memory capturing what donors have done and anything they may have learned from it and a severe deficit of knowledge sharing within and across organizations. At a

donor meeting in 2011 in the DRC, Mary Myers and Marie-Soleil Frère, media researchers with decades of experience in the country between them, had to correct the donors' misperceptions about the history of their own interventions there. The success of our attempts to track each donor's history of media interventions within the countries we studied depended on the length of service of the individual employees interviewed. Even basic record keeping was absent, with a few exceptions. The most thorough we encountered was the National Endowment for Democracy, which has a searchable database of its interventions since 2004 that can produce a list of what organizations were funded in a country with a short description of activities and time period.

Corruption in the media is a pressing area in need of attention. This was present across all of the case study countries, though in different forms. In the DRC, *coupagne* journalism (literally,

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“taking a cut”) is so institutionalized that there are standard rates. For example, \$20-30 will buy a story from a radio journalist. In Peru, insufficient small town salaries means corruption is worse outside of Lima: “For example, radio stations in provincial towns rent out airtime instead of hiring permanent journalists, thus obliging journalists to find sponsors to pay for airtime and to provide them an income. The number of such sponsors is limited in the provinces; therefore, journalists are forced to receive funding from local politicians, private interests, and others, ultimately compromising the ethics of their journalistic practice.”<sup>22</sup> Not only do donors not pay sufficient attention to these problems; their own practices can reinforce or even exacerbate them. Rokia Ba, the UNESCO representative working in media and media development in Mali for over 30 years observed unhappily, “to get the journalists to come to a press conference, you have to pay them [about \$50]. You can’t avoid it.” While UNESCO’s policies of course do not allow bribery, UNESCO employees need to ensure the presence of the press at events. In a similar vein, over the years, donors have commonly paid per diems to journalists to ensure that they will show up for trainings.

Ironically, with the overwhelming attention given to training over the years, there has been relatively little attention paid to creating journalism schools or other institutions for media education. While donor support has helped to set up journalism departments at local universities in some cases, working within the educational system to create long-term structures has been the exception. In Mali, for example, media training has been considerable, yet most working journalists are still untrained. The country has no journalism schools and has low levels of education and literacy, which might have something to do with the problem. The DRC has one journalism school that received support from Canada, France, and UNESCO from its inception in 1974 through the 1980s. The end of support in 1990 marked the beginning of its decline. Thus donor support to journalism education has perpetuated a system of dependence on outsiders, rather than helping to institutionalize a system of journalism education that can strive to become self-sustaining.

The blind spots in the areas of learning, corruption, and journalism education are intimately connected to the questions of whether or not donor interventions are supply-driven or demand-driven, as well as media development’s isolation from other development work.

# Has Media Development Been Effective?

## Framing Effectiveness: Principles From International Development

The World Bank defines aid effectiveness as “the impact that aid has in reducing poverty and inequality, increasing growth, building capacity, and accelerating achievement of the Millennium Development Goals set by the international community.”<sup>23</sup> Over the last decade, the aid community has been wrestling with serious questions about the extent to which more than half a century of international aid to developing nations has worked and how best to measure progress. Donor organizations themselves have acknowledged this mixed bag of improvements and ongoing challenges. The process of international meetings on aid reform that began with the Paris Declaration (2005) has been a series of top-down sessions—High Level Forums—led by donor countries as part of an effort to improve development assistance. Development aid is collectively a shifting field, taking stock of its progress and attempting to become better at alleviating poverty. Concurrently, many individual donor organizations are reorganizing and realigning priorities for both economic and political reasons. If media development is to be taken more seriously in this context, practitioners will have to demonstrate its effectiveness.

If the international aid community is largely blind to the potential of media to support development, then media development stakeholders are largely blind to trends in aid effectiveness that could improve the impact of media work and help improve the stature of this work in the aid field. Two critically important “shared principles to achieve common goals” defined in the most recent High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011 provide a useful framework by which to examine media development interventions:

- a) *Ownership of development priorities by developing countries.* Partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs.
- b) *Focus on results.* Our investments and efforts must have a lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, on sustainable development, and on enhancing developing countries’ capacities, aligned with the priorities and policies set by developing countries themselves.<sup>24</sup>

How well have media interventions fulfilled these principles?

### Development ownership

#### *Who is driving media interventions?*

While uncommon in media development language, many development actors have been using the terms “supply-driven” and “demand-driven” for at least 20 years to describe two opposing

styles of development aid. Supply-driven interventions originate from any outsider and are imposed on aid recipients. Demand-driven interventions, however, start with a recipient country's expression of its needs and are designed to meet those needs, ideally in collaboration with local actors. Donors' budgets and strategies naturally reflect their priorities, which may be politically driven and will hardly ever precisely match the goals of the partner countries. Nonetheless, one of the primary principles of aid effectiveness, according to the Busan outcome document, is a focus on demand-driven aid. Understanding the local context is absolutely critical to success, but even beyond understanding, letting a country drive its own development means that it will be a partner rather than just a passive recipient. This can be particularly tricky with media development, as governments are notoriously reluctant to support the growth and strengthening of an industry that increasingly will pressure them the stronger it becomes. But country leadership for development does not necessarily have to start with the government. Mark Nelson of the World Bank Institute notes that "evidence from development practice overall suggests that most reforms happen only when you have strong domestic pressure for change; the media sector is no different."<sup>25</sup>

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The recommendation to start locally is not new. Media development expert Ellen Hume's first "commandment of media development" from 2004 is "Build from the bottom up, not the top down. Western models don't necessarily work. The best media development is local."<sup>26</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that there is a striking difference between the larger development community's embrace of this principle in theory and how sporadically it has been applied in practice. Despite some successes, there are signs that media development has been significantly supply-driven.

The clearest sign of historically supply-driven approaches is the overwhelming emphasis on training, often at the expense of cultivating political will to support a healthy media sector or supporting the enabling legal environment. A focus on training does not necessarily lead to failure. In Peru and Ukraine, support to the legal enabling environment and the NGO sector helped to create a balance that made the training more effective. Support for press freedom together with the creation of basic infrastructure and training provided a boost in Mali's early days of democracy.

Focusing on training over other forms of support, however, does limit the extent to which even the countries that have experienced success can continue to develop and take ownership of the education of their journalists, the competency of media business managers, and other deficiencies. In Mali, after years of investment in trainings, which were mainly short-term, thematic interventions, most journalists are untrained and few structures exist to educate them. According to Ibrahim Keita of the Journalists Association for the Promotion of Professionalism (Association des Journalistes pour la Promotion du Professionnalisme), "Many people at this time

came into journalism without formal training. And even now there is no school [of journalism] ... The younger generation really needs training. Mali does not have institutions, and training centers.”<sup>27</sup> Dependency on outsiders for media training has not improved.

Particularly in the African countries and Cambodia, donors use media as a tool to support their development agendas rather than partner with recipient countries in the development process. Cambodia’s closed environment means in-country demand, at least from the government, will not strongly support free media initiatives. Some implementers, such as ABC Australia, have taken the strategy of using development communications as an avenue into media development, responding to demand at a very local level. Most development communications in Cambodia,

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however, is meant to support the Millennium Development Goals and reflects the influence of modernization theory. In a similar vein, donor support to media through the purchase of airtime in Mali, the DRC, Indonesia, and elsewhere provides content created by outsiders, reinforcing pay-for-play structures that are antithetical to the free media system they are trying to achieve.

Another, more subtle sign of a supply-driven approach is the proliferation of NGOs as a result of increased donor activity. While NGOs often arise from a grassroots push to address local needs, other complex factors are at play. Because donors prefer to fund organizations rather than individuals to increase accountability for funds, most countries experienced a growth in organizations simply to

be able to access funding. In Mali, the system “spawned a proliferation of associations across the country which have come about not for the economic and social benefits of working collectively ... but simply so that people can gain access to assistance.”<sup>28</sup> These structures are needed in order to administer accountable aid. However, if donors do not understand the local context and somehow ensure that these organizations develop relevant to local needs and realities, there can be negative social impacts as well.

In Peru, aid from European foundations “intensified during the 1980s and many more NGOs were established as the country started its democratic transition but also began suffering from internal conflict,” communications scholar Gabriela Martinez observed. “Indeed, the number of NGOs multiplied so much across the country, and especially in Lima, that a new Peruvian NGO class appeared: a class of highly educated intellectuals and professionals who for the most part shared similar politics, schooling, social and cultural capital and became linked with international development.”<sup>29</sup> These professionals earned better salaries than other professionals and had access to other elite opportunities, such as travel. The privilege of this new class in contrast to the rest of the population was openly criticized by well-regarded historians who argued that these professionals who pledged their socialist ideals to working for the poor were actually establishing themselves as well-compensated brokers of poverty assistance. Yet, it was this NGO class that helped bolster the relative success of media interventions in Peru.

All of the case studies found evidence that local partners perceived that the aid process was not country-driven enough. The critique took on different dimensions: interventions were not participatory; development agendas were donor-driven; and local organizations reshaped their missions to fit donor requirements. The common theme was the resentment of a perceived power dynamic that puts the donors in the active, decision-making, and agenda-setting role and country partners in a passive recipient role.

In most cases, lack of both good records and institutional memory meant that these charges were difficult to verify on the donor side. While they may have been exaggerated in some cases, the frequency with which these complaints arose suggests that they were based in fact. Observers

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critiqued this dynamic at both an individual and institutional scale. Donny B.U. from ICT Watch, Indonesia, returned from a Gates-sponsored Knight Foundation training in the United States last year complaining that he had learned “nothing new; the Americans thought we didn’t know how to use social media.” He commented that the information was presented from a developed country perspective.<sup>30</sup> André Ipakala Mobiko, leader of the National Association of Congolese Publishers, claimed more broadly, “The activities performed are in fact the activities desired by a donor and not those submitted or desired by the partners themselves. If our projects do not fit into the donor’s priorities, they have no chance of being supported, although they may be important to us.”<sup>31</sup> The very structure of giver-recipient relationships implies an unequal power

differential that is difficult to mitigate, even when donors sincerely attempt to treat aid recipients as “partners” and ensure that interventions are needs-driven.

The other side of the complaint about being treated like a passive recipient is the observable influence of political considerations on how and even whether donors support the media sector. A glance at the shifting USAID focus from Latin America in the 1980s to the ex-Soviet states in the 1990s and then to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other MENA countries in the 2000s illustrates this dynamic all too clearly. After significant media activity in the 1990s, World Bank policy for media development has taken a much less strategic and far-reaching approach in recent years. Fear of being perceived as intervening politically in partner countries, where media tends to be politicized and polarized, has prevented the World Bank from making a stronger commitment to developing the media sector.

In the end, it is likely not feasible to expect donors to completely divorce their practices from their priorities and views of the world. Consequently, the most balanced interventions (media or otherwise) will probably be a dance between supply-driven and needs-driven. Looking at the situation in Peru, Martinez noted:

The role played by foreign donors is a complex one. On the one hand, the goals expressed in their mission statements and by some representatives state that they provide assistance without trying to influence the mission or goals of the organizations they fund. On the other hand, most donor institutions set specific trends in funding, for example, a focus on maternal health, human rights, democracy, and transparency, among other areas. Thus, this is perceived on the ground as a subtle way of setting particular agendas for development. Both European and U.S. donor organizations have specific areas of development they tend to fund. Usually these areas align with current institutional interests, and in some cases, with their government's foreign policy towards the recipient country.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Cultural concepts of the media sector***

Perhaps the clearest evidence that the supply-driven approach is leading the dance is the failure of donors to consider that there may be a fundamentally different cultural perspective about what a media system is and what its role within a country should be. The Western ideal is a media sector that is independent, unbiased, and informative on topics that people both need and want to know about.

By contrast, according to the cultural concept of the media sector in the case study countries, the news media functions generally as a means to a political end, not as a business that produces information and tries to leverage the market value for this information from its audience.<sup>33</sup> The other important function of the media sector is entertainment, which can range from music to sensationalistic news reporting. Thus, an approach to interventions that treat a politicized and sensationalistic media sector, such as Kenya's, as simply an aberration from the Western norm that needs to be set right and made stronger ignores the possibility that Kenya's media system is an indigenous result of Kenya's particular history. The objectionable aspects of Kenya's media system—political polarization, bias, concentration of ownership—are not simply flaws preventing the realization of a better system but are actual characteristics integral to the current system and Kenyans' concept of media.

The history of Kenya's media is intricately tied to the country's history of colonialism and subsequent social and political evolution. The original role of the press during the colonial period was to relay government information to white settler communities. African publications later arose that the government perceived as oppositional, and it enacted a penal code restricting creation and consumption of anti-colonial publications. As colonialism was breathing its last, the colonialists formed the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation to take over from the former government mouthpiece; the KBC came to monopolize the radio sector. As the new post-colonial state consolidated power and turned repressive, it used the media to legitimize its rule. The next political regime limited freedom of expression and was repressive toward both local and foreign press. Beginning in 1990, economic liberalization led to a proliferation of media, but the media continued the tradition of political polarization.

A new constitution in 2010 gave Kenyans the right to access public sector information, and the media gained a higher degree of freedom from state interference. However, there has not yet been a parallel cultural shift in the role the media play, despite their occasional effectiveness as watchdogs. Kenya's media sector is characterized by concentration of ownership and strong ties between media and government elites. "[A]lmost every channel can be identified with a political party or personality," as Gagliardone and Katharine Reed Allen wrote.<sup>34</sup> Digital and social media are adding new voices and are part of the change Kenya has been experiencing since the introduction of multi-party politics in 1992. New media has been the mode rather than the cause of this shift, which is part of a larger political transformation, including increased citizen participation and input. However, this evolution has not fundamentally changed Kenyan media's connections to political and business interests.

In Cambodia, the culture of scant access to information is a great challenge to donors' ideal media model. Information historically has been used as a tool of power rather than as a facilitating force of development and democracy. Questioning authority is not ingrained in the

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culture. Cambodians have limited access to independent information and tend to believe information in the media. Cambodia, with a population above 13 million people, has only two reference libraries.<sup>35</sup> Because the country is politically stable and growing economically, however, the international community has largely not challenged Cambodians' lack of access to information. After the end of internal conflict, the media system developed as a reflection of its the country's culture. "Cambodia is characterized by patrimonial traditions and patron-client relationships," researcher Margarette Roberts observes. "Power tends to be personalized rather than institutionalized and society is fiercely hierarchical, maintaining deference to authority and power with a strong tradition of 'upwards' deference. The rise of private business over the past two decades has consolidated opportunities for the media business

and political elite by reinforcing existing and new patronages. The majority of media outlets are political assets rather than conventional business assets, facilitating broader political or business interests, depending on the owner."<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, donors too often model the same behavior of using the media as a tool for their own purposes. For example, in Cambodia, the Global Fund supported a project from 2006-2009 that produced television and radio public service announcements, television drama, television documentaries, radio call-in programs, and magazines on HIV and AIDS. The media was used instrumentally to promote behavior change to prevent HIV, following the mission of the donor. That the aims of the project were worthy does not diminish the troubling similarity of the approach to a politician's instrumentalization of the media.

While there is only room for illustration of two countries here, there is a wealth of detailed information from each country studied, suggesting that this topic deserves much deeper consideration. The observation that developing and transitioning countries often have radically different cultural views of the media's role than that held in the West should be something worth considering when outsiders are formulating a theory of change. Rather than starting from modernization theory, donors might consider what it would take to transform the culture around the media system. This includes, of course, country-driven processes, which might mean a willingness to let developing countries drive toward a media model that does not necessarily look like that of the West.

## Focus on Results

### *Characterizing successful media development interventions*

Even if measures of success are not yet fully refined, it would still be useful to look at what donors, international NGOs, and local NGOs perceive as successful and identify some common characteristics. Then the question is whether these successes reflect lasting results that partner countries want, as defined by aid effectiveness principles. Defining the parameters of success is tricky business. There appears to be significant variation across different actors' goals and definitions of success. There are at least four perspectives from which we could try to observe or measure success:

- **Project** – Did the intervention achieve its goal?
- **Social** – Do people have more of the information they want and need?
- **Sector** – Did the intervention strengthen the media system as a whole?
- **Development** – Was democracy strengthened or development improved in any way?

Aid effectiveness principles would emphasize the last three, for broader impact, which would be built on the success of individual projects. The first logical place to look then might be at the project level with M&E data; however, it is as patchy and inaccessible as institutional knowledge. Donors, over the last two decades and even sometimes today, have not required rigorous and consistent methods of testing the impact of their investments. Good quality M&E exists but often is not comparable across projects, countries, or time, and few full reports are available to the public. Donors and implementers have been reticent to share their impact results. They made only a handful of reports on the projects in the case study countries available for purposes of this report and did not grant permission to make any of the findings public.

In this age of open data and open government movements, this may be changing. USAID has pledged that in its projects, “findings from evaluations will be shared as widely as possible, with a commitment to full and active disclosure. Furthermore, a summary including a

description of methods, key findings and recommendations will be available to the public on-line in a fully searchable form within three months of an evaluation's conclusion."<sup>37</sup>

Looking at the case studies, between 1990-2010, the media sectors of Mali, Ukraine, and Peru improved due to donor interventions, and some aspects of the media sector or individual projects clearly flourished across the other countries. One important similarity across all three countries was strong support to freedom of the press as the foundation for media to develop. Another characteristic that was critical to the successes in each of these countries was that donors worked to understand the local context and supported aspects of the media sector that were driven by local actors.

There was “an exciting and vibrant beginning to independent radio in Mali, one that sprung its roots even before the wave of democracy began with small, homemade ‘pirate’ stations,” researcher Heather Gilberts writes. “Media pluralism in Mali began with a passion for self-

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expression and a spirit of political resistance that preceded donor interventions, constitutional freedoms, and liberalization of the airwaves. [Researcher Mary] Myers argues that this spirit was one of the factors that attracted donors in the first place, and they saw the burgeoning independent media (primarily radio) sector as a fundamental tool in the push toward democratization.”<sup>38</sup>

Donor focus on growing and supporting community radio in Mali thus was a response to one of the forces that helped establish the democracy in the first place, and that was eminently relevant. The country's opening to democracy was also an opening for a strong independent press; “We can't build a democracy in a cemetery of radios and newspapers,” Alpha Oumar Konare, Mali's first democratically elected president

was said to have declared.<sup>39</sup> The combination of political openness and a vibrant grassroots media created a supportive atmosphere for media development. By 2011, “Mali's media sector [was] considered an exemplar on the African continent. Freedom of the press indices and barometers consistently laud the sector for its plurality, diversity, and freedom. However, great challenges still remain, including poor working conditions, lack of business management practices, indiscriminate licensing, self-censorship among journalists, lack of professionalism and inadequate training opportunities.”<sup>40</sup> Donors, as we saw, had shifted their investments to give higher priority to using media as a tool over further developing the sector.

Overall, the donors managed to help move the needle on the state of the media in Mali in the right direction. Yet their shift in strategy over time away from country-driven priorities may have undermined their results in the long term. In the last few years, USAID equipped 10 radio stations and trained the staff to create programs focusing on conflict prevention and resolution,

following the pattern of shifting to a thematic focus in media support. Donor support to the media was much weaker in the north than in other parts of the country, despite the greater need, as Gilberds wrote; “stations are clustered near urban centers, leaving the most rural and hostile areas of the north largely out of reach.”<sup>41</sup> While it is impossible to establish a causal link, the al-Qaeda-aligned forces that hijacked the 2012 coup and gained control of the north came out of that media-deprived region.

In Ukraine, donor strategy was quite different, focusing on transforming the existing Soviet-style media system into one that reflected the values and business models of the West. Ukraine

***Individual examples of success are much easier to identify than an overall improvement in information flow, a stronger media sector, or better development outcomes.***

was well-developed even at the outset of media support, with high levels of education, good infrastructure, and basic social services in place. Donor focus was on creating independent NGOs, supporting freedom of expression, and encouraging accountable governance that recognizes a civil society sector. Contrasting this with the focus on community radio and theme-based projects in Mali also suggests that donor interventions were quite relevant to the Ukrainian context. The pro-democratic government, particularly after the Orange Revolution, encouraged this transition with donor support. Indirect political pressure from the European Union (EU) on Ukraine has also helped to create an environment that

encourages the growth of free media and NGOs into institutions of accountability. Ukraine has a much stronger civil society than other post-Soviet states that developed together with the media and contributed to the overall success of media interventions.

One often-elusive type of success happens when organizations become truly independent and no longer need donor support. This is rare, but in Ukraine, “among the respected independent media outlets that were established with help of Western donor money are Telekritika, Channel 5, STB (CTB), and *Ukrainianska Pravda*. Most of these media have become privatized, not without a scandal and harsh feelings on the part of the donors,” according to researcher Katerina Tsetsura.<sup>42</sup> While the road to sustainability may have had some bumps, these are all organizations that have been contributing to a healthy national media sector. Regressions since the 2010 elections and ongoing challenges to media freedom in the new political environment, however, are currently a threat to the considerable progress achieved with donor support in the post-Soviet era.

In Peru, some successful results have been achieved with relatively low levels of investment, especially when compared to donor spending in countries like Ukraine or the DRC.<sup>43</sup> As in Ukraine, donors have supported NGOs that focus on transparency, press freedom, accountability, and access to information, among others. A flourishing civil society helped to create a constructive enabling environment for the development of the media. Peruvian NGOs have strong linkages with the media sector, and some non-media NGOs engage in media activities. Radio Cutivalú in Piura was founded and run by the NGO Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado [Center for Research and Promotion of the Peasantry], with

funding from the Catholic Church. Success in Peru has hinged on donor partnership with local, well-established NGOs, helping to align donors' investments with local realities. Peru's high concentration of competent NGOs and think tanks may in fact contribute to success of small grants, as the funding can be precisely targeted.

Individual examples of success are much easier to identify than an overall improvement in information flow, a stronger media sector, or better development outcomes. Sometimes, by narrowing the perspective to a local level, results are more visible. In Battambang, Cambodia, the Australian Agency for International Development funded the "Youth Voices" program at Provincial Information Services (PIS), which brings together representatives from provincial government and NGOs to discuss issues important to the community. The show is in "talk back" format, and the project implementer, ABC Australia, had to overcome considerable skepticism that Cambodians would break from cultural practices of reticence and reluctance to question authority and call into the show. By building support from the minister of information down to the local NGOs, the program has become successful, garnering audience participation by gaining trust over time. (Callers are permitted to be anonymous.) The program has become well established and respected and is an important avenue for citizens to enforce local government accountability.

***Even when we are able to point out some successes, there is the question of time—can something be called a success if the impact lasts for a year? Five years? Ten?***

What success looks like can have many definitions and variations, some conflicting. From one perspective, the independent radio network/news agency KBR68H in Indonesia is a strong example of a successful donor supported project. Founded during the early years of Indonesia's transition to democracy, the agency is well respected for its journalism in a country rife with sensationalistic infotainment. Myers writes in a recent CIMA report:

KBR68H is a successful development-oriented news agency in Jakarta, which began a small loan program for its radio station network members, now numbering more than 600. Through this program, stations in the region have access to low interest loans for those that wish to upgrade their equipment or working capital. Nearly four years on, 90 loans have been provided across Indonesia and the region, totaling around \$200,000. Of these, only 2 percent are non-performing loans.<sup>44</sup>

By June 2011 there were about 800 stations in the network, which was continuing to expand rapidly. With an innovative loan program, KBR helped to financially stabilize its network of stations and stimulate impressive growth, but its own financial stability remains donor dependent. Production director Heru Hendratmoko noted that about 12 different donors supported the organization. Each funded projects as opposed to providing core funding.

Even when we are able to point out some successes, there is the question of time—can something be called a success if the impact lasts for a year? Five years? Ten? If we graph progress over time,

does the trajectory have to move continually upward, or can it reach a plateau and stay there? How do we integrate the political changes such as the 2010 elections in Ukraine or the 2012 coup in Mali that had a negative effect on what had been cited as a success? While this question may ultimately be impossible to answer, one important factor in the longevity of success has certainly been the degree to which an intervention is driven by local actors or from the outside.

### **Defining failure**

Like success, the question of failure could be addressed at several different levels: project, social, sector, and development impacts. Similarly, depending on the time frame, a country could show overall success (Ukraine 1991-2010) or failure (Ukraine 2010-2012). Project failure is simpler to analyze, as it would obviously mean failing to have a positive impact on any of the other levels. In any discussion of failure, it is important to recall the challenges that international development assistance in general has had in significantly moving the needle in development overall; it would not be fair to hold media development to a higher standard.

If one were to rely on the perspectives of the dozens of donors, international implementers, NGOs, and other stakeholders interviewed for the case studies in this report, media development would look like a very successful enterprise. In Peru, Cambodia, and Mali, for example, no actor involved in a media development project would admit to any failure. Some in Indonesia helpfully pointed out others' failures. Few in any country were willing to admit to their own errors and dissect them with much detail.

***In any discussion of failure, it is important to recall the challenges that international development assistance in general has had in significantly moving the needle in development overall.***

Nonetheless, certain patterns emerge. Examining some of the key elements of success, numerous projects failed to take into account local contexts, involve multiple local stakeholders, or respond to local demands. Several interviewees from different organizations in Indonesia, for example, pointed to the School of Broadcasting Media, which was established with EU and United Nations Development Programme support. Donors wanted to set up a center of excellence, but the project was slow, contested, and badly managed from the start. At donor closeout, ownership of the project and strategy for its future were not clearly defined. Donors said that they wanted it to be locally run; a commercial radio station now controls it. While the project did not collapse after the donor left, it bears little resemblance to what it was intended to be. In 2011 the school was beginning to charge tuition, which will likely transform the student body into a wealthy cohort rather than a purely meritorious one.

There are many signs that long-term impact has been weak as compared to investments, because while intervention emphasis may shift, such as from professional skills training to thematic training, the basic approaches have not evolved. In many countries, despite decades of investment in training, the result has been a mostly untrained corps of journalists. There are many causes:

turnover in the workforce (in some cases newly trained journalists put their skills to work in better paid and more stable professions); the environment did not support journalists, editors, or managers in exercising their new abilities; or the trainings themselves were not effective.

Interventions intended to support the elections in the DRC illustrate this problem:

[In 2006] to prepare the DRC journalists who would be covering the polls, the media sector received significant support and attention from the international community. Now, five years later, as new elections are being organized, it seems that exactly the same programs have to be supported again: the regulatory body has to be completely re-established, journalists have to be trained once more in electoral coverage because so many have left for other jobs, “synergies” to group local radio stations together have to be organized and funded again, and a joint monitoring commission for ethics has to be created and sent to the provinces in order to monitor the electoral campaign. “It was all the same in 2006. Is it going to be the same thing in 2021, then in 2026?” wonders Pascal Berqué from the implementer Panos.<sup>45</sup>

Another failure has been often cited in media development policy papers: the dependence of NGOs and media outlets on donor support. There has been a large-scale inability to improve the sustainability of media development projects. The research for this study uncovered only a few media development projects that survived post-donor support. Given the recent attention to the subject and good thinking on media business models coming out of several policy papers mentioned earlier, it can only be hoped that the approach to sustainability is in process and moving toward better outcomes. Based on the observable lack of evolution over time of donors’ approaches and the striking gap between research and practice, real attention to sustainability will take a major transformation in how donors function.

### ***How donors deal with failure***

The very nature of donor funding—which rewards success and punishes failure—makes it hard to provide a nuanced exploration of how donors manage failure. A donor-funded project that has been assessed as a failure will not be re-funded, giving implementers and aid recipients little opportunity to right wrongs, build learning into their cultures, or innovate based on failure.<sup>46</sup> If a project is closed because of perceived failure, it is generally difficult to find any documentation as to what happened, why, and what any subsequent follow up might have been. Especially when the implementing NGOs or aid recipients conduct their own M&E, there is an inherent “success story” bias in what has been reported in impact evaluations. While a “kill the failing project” approach appears logical (why would a donor reward failure?), it is very different from practices in the commercial sector, where successful and particularly innovative companies study and learn from their failures.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the research found, if donor funding goes away, a project collapses, so unless the donors demand and fund evaluations, there is little incentive to admit

failure, let alone dissect and learn from it. Nonetheless, the topic of failure is becoming slightly less taboo in the aid world as it increasingly embraces new technologies and innovation and the risks that accompany them.

It is not yet possible to analyze as a whole the body of M&E work, and it was not possible to acquire enough evaluations to meaningfully contribute to the case study research. Nonetheless, primary research into how donors are currently approaching impact assessment through 23 interviews, 15 of which were with people from donor organizations, six from media development NGOs, and two with academic experts/practitioners, yielded some useful data. Eighty percent of interviewees reported an increased emphasis on M&E over the past 20 years. Among donors, this increased commitment to M&E was driven by different motives, but their desire to learn from their failures was one of the principal reasons.<sup>47</sup>

This all sounds promising, but there is a very serious challenge to making this new emphasis on evaluation meaningful: Overall, donors are not closing the loop; they are not building on what they have learned to create future strategy and budgets. According to researchers Alcorn et. al., “ultimately, we found little evidence that M&E was changing the landscape of funding decisions, other than the now ubiquitous requirement to provide some sort of M&E component to project proposals.”<sup>48</sup> Few donors, the research found, can make a clear link between evaluation results and funding decisions, and for those who can, impact results are just one of many complex factors that influence donor decision making. Others include changes in policy and politics. It doesn’t sound like understanding either success or failure is yet making much difference in how donors approach media development. The lack of institutional memory that characterized most donor organizations in the case studies, together with evidence of the same mistakes repeated across countries and over time, bears this assertion out. There is an opportunity now with the new emphasis on evaluation and openness. Donors can consider how to make failure productive by becoming more open about it, learning from it, and showcasing successes that were built on the backs of failures.

***Few donors can make a clear link between evaluation results and funding decisions, and for those who can, impact results are just one of many complex factors that influence donor decision making.***

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Media development remains somewhat of an outlier in the world of international development despite strong evidence that a healthy media sector contributes to development. At the same time, the environment for international support to the media is fast changing on the ground. New actors have rushed into the development space: technologists with digital tools from SMS crowdsourcing to data-gathering devices. The Arab Spring highlighted the catalytic potential of social media, getting the attention of governments both inside and outside the revolutions. President Obama, in his May 2011 speech on the Middle East, declared what appears to be a remarkable commitment to supporting independent media, together with access to information, and freedom of expression:

Real reform does not come at the ballot box alone. Through our efforts we must support those basic rights to speak your mind and access information. We will support open access to the Internet, and the right of journalists to be heard—whether it’s a big news organization or a lone blogger. In the 21st century, information is power, the truth cannot be hidden, and the legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens.<sup>49</sup>

This new recognition of the power of information has not moved media development any closer to the center stage of international aid. Rather, the United States and other donors have intensified their focus on chasing flashy “innovation,” usually meaning projects that use ICT. This emphasis is a welcome recognition of the role of information in development, but it verges on treating the technology itself as a panacea, often bypassing both local context and traditional mass media. Cultivating press freedom and building healthy media sectors are still relatively marginal lines of business in the aid world. However, the development community’s increased attention to both aid effectiveness and the importance of information holds potential for media development to become more fully integrated into development principles and practices at the strategic level. Likewise, embracing the principles of development effectiveness process could significantly improve the effectiveness of media development interventions.

While media development gatherings in recent years have tended to be marked by collective hand-wringing about the greater aid community’s ignorance of media development, only minimal progress has been made to rectify the situation. Trying to integrate more effectively into the aid system is one possible approach. Often a subset of a governance or health intervention, media development is not recognized as a sector in its own right by most donor organizations. This means that media development is poorly defined, usually does not have its own budget line, and donor coordination can be difficult. Media development has remained ever in the blind spot of international development, but there may be overlooked opportunities for donors to link media development to the mainstream of international development more strongly.

The media may be an outlier in part because of characteristics that differentiate it from other development areas:

- The media is largely a commercial sector; a healthy media system generates its own income.
- Donors can support the media as a sector or use it as an instrument, or both.
- In many aid recipient countries, the normal function of the media system is as a political tool and/or entertainment.
- Engagement with media is ultimately incumbent upon citizen choice, and citizens may choose to tune into entertainment or sensationalistic journalism rather than news and information.

Despite these distinctions, many problems in the media sector across developing and transitioning countries are clearly linked to other development problems. The solutions, too, should be better linked, especially at the strategic level. More could be done to integrate support to media into the development sectors supporting governance and civil society, humanitarian assistance, and health programs. Other areas are clearly lacking in the use of media. Research suggests that anti-corruption, education, and human rights are areas where more emphasis on media development would improve both support to the media and support to the other development initiatives.

Corruption is one of the factors most debilitating to a healthy media environment. The problem is endemic throughout all of the countries studied in this report and takes on many forms. In Mali, Jacques Dez, the head of Radio Kledou, the only radio station that functions in a manner close to a Western model, claimed, “Most of the funding from donors is embezzled.”<sup>50</sup> The problem of *coupage* in the DRC is integral to how the media system functions. In three separate interviews in Peru, interviewees asked that the audio recorder be turned off so that they could speak freely about corruption in the media system. Not nearly enough has been done in donor interventions to address these practices, but there is no reason to take on media corruption separately from broader initiatives to mitigate government and other types of corruption. The media sector, one of the primary forces driving accountable governance, should be incorporated as an integral part of anti-corruption interventions.

Donor interventions have emphasized training, but much less so creating institutional structures for educating journalists, media business managers, and audience researchers over the long term. It would be worth considering what types of linkages with education might help strengthen long-term impact. While media literacy has arisen as a recent media development trend, the fundamental necessity of *basic* literacy is still looming large in many countries and

***Research suggests that anti-corruption, education, and human rights are areas where more emphasis on media development would improve both support to the media and support to the other development initiatives.***

would appear to be a more important first step. By and large, however, the research did not find strong links between support to the media sector and support to basic literacy and education.

Lastly, another link to consider strengthening is to human rights. According to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “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.”<sup>51</sup> Media development interventions at times emphasize freedom of the media and of expression through support of better legislation and regulations. Generally, however, media development stakeholders emphasize media’s key role as a democratic institution. It would be worthwhile to emphasize more strongly the media as a public good in and of itself, and by extension support access to information and freedom of expressions as basic human rights. The rise of donor interest in ICTs and social media will continue to highlight the importance of information in development and humanitarian response. Media development initiatives continuing to link up with ICTs should be guided by the aid effectiveness principle that development should be context-specific and country-driven, rather than by techno-determinism.

Media development stakeholders should continue to develop and implement strategy for better integration into mainstream aid, both to improve the practice of media development and help strengthen development outcomes overall. Learning from the aid community about country-driven practices might transform donors’ and implementers’ ideas about how the media should function and how best to support it. Better integration of research into policy and practice, sharing knowledge across other development practice areas, developing and testing theories of change, and creating institutional knowledge from evaluations and other sources are among the many steps that could be taken to transform media development into a knowledge-based practice. As the definition of media evolves, the media development community might be better served focusing on information more broadly, with media, access to information, and freedom of expression all interlinked sub-components. A focus on results aligned with country priorities will help media development stakeholders improve their understanding of what is effective in the long term.

# Endnotes

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