

# Continental Shift:

## New Trends in Private U.S. Funding for Media Development

*A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance*

*By Anne Nelson*

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**The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA)**, a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. 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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## Acknowledgements and Methodology

This report is based on the author's interviews, conducted in person, by telephone, and by e-mail in April, June, and July 2011 and August and September 2009 with the following individuals: Awo Ablo, Joyce Barnathan, Clark Bell, Stewart Chisholm, Carlos Fernandez, Sam Gregory, Liza Gross, Steve Hubbell, Gordana Jankovic, Stephen King, Susan King, Vanessa Mazal, Eric Newton, Monroe Price, and Elspeth Revere. The author extends her thanks for their assistance.

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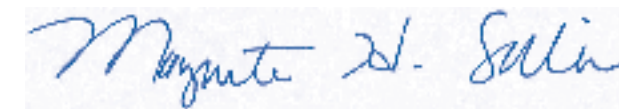
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# Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy is pleased to publish *Continental Shift: New Trends in Private U.S. Funding for Media Development*. The purpose of this report is to update CIMA's 2009 report, *Experimentation and Evolution in Private U.S. Funding of Media Development*, which examined the level and sources of U.S. private funding for international media development and the priorities of private donors.

CIMA is grateful to Anne Nelson, a former journalist and a media consultant who teaches at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, for her research and insights on this topic.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.



*Marguerite H. Sullivan*  
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## Executive Summary

This work is a December 2011 update of the October 2009 CIMA report, *Experimentation and Evolution in Private U.S. Funding of Media Development*, by the same author.

The field of private sector funding of independent media abroad has continued to undergo a massive upheaval over the past two years. Two major factors have driven the change. The first is economic: The 2008 recession sharply reduced the portfolios of most traditional foundations and media philanthropies, many of them by 20-30 percent. They were still recovering when the aftershock of 2011 struck. These institutions, many of them based on the East Coast, had formerly led the way in funding international media development activities, with an emphasis on journalism training and support for freedom of expression. Now they are in a period of retrenchment, struggling to maintain existing commitments and with few resources to pursue new initiatives.

***Recent political and economics trends have blurred the lines and shifted the balance between “media development” and “media for development.”***

The second disruptive force, driving the field in a new direction, has been that of digital technologies. Vast new fortunes have been made in the field over the past decade, and some of these are now creating new models of philanthropy that display a keen interest in the role of digital media in the world.

Digital media have also altered the geography of philanthropy. In the past, international media development grants were often earmarked for specific countries or regions. Now, thanks to the ubiquity of the Internet, many new grants are borderless, with

major “international” grants paid out to U.S.-based institutions, and many other grants going to individuals and platforms that operate internationally, with virtually no fixed address.

The working definitions of media development are also shifting. U.S. foundations have long funded programs in both “media development” and “media for development,” but recent political and economic trends have blurred the lines and shifted the balance between the two fields. Crowd-sourcing and citizen journalism have forever altered the definition of the “news media.”

Two additional factors have appeared on the horizon that will further disrupt the field. One is the impact of the ongoing economic crisis on government funding. During 2009 and 2010, many European donor agencies began to react to the crisis by cutting back staffs and aid budgets (though media assistance was not always among the programs affected). Substantial cutbacks in U.S. foreign aid are now predicted.<sup>1</sup> If these cutbacks do reach into the media sphere, they will place added pressure on the already stressed private foundation community to maintain assistance levels. But the second emerging factor may mitigate the cutbacks in media, and that is the increased attention to the role of social media in political unrest. Donors (on all sides) are

wrestling with the duality of the thrill of the Arab Spring and anxiety over the loss of control represented by Wikileaks and the social tensions spreading across the globe. It may be that, even in a period of general cutbacks, the field of media will remain too critical to ignore—even though the outcomes of media development programs can be unpredictable.

### Major findings:

There is a growing list of foundations, many of them based on the West Coast, sprung from the powerhouses of new media technology, that are making their mark in the fields of media and development. These include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Omidyar Network, the Skoll Foundation, and the Google philanthropies.

Two other institutions deserve special note. The first is George Soros’s Open Society Foundations (formerly known as the Open Society Institute), which support a broad array of innovative media projects on a vast scale. Soros also funded the creation of the influential Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF) to provide direct investment and managerial advice to media companies.

The second noteworthy organization is the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which originated as a newspaper family foundation and has become both an innovator and a convener for media funding strategies in the digital age.

The philanthropic fields of media and development can be expected to continue their rapid evolution. Some of the growing trends include experiments in a venture capital model, including social impact investment and the acquisition of equity in media projects; support for non-professional citizen journalism projects; and a heavy emphasis on media that promote public health, environmental protection, and education. Digital media are also affecting the grant-making process itself, by creating more transparent online platforms for applications and engaging online audiences in the funding process. Technology companies are showing increasing interest in offering direct services on a pro bono basis, such as Google’s “Person Finder” (an online platform to locate individuals displaced by catastrophes such as the 2011 earthquake in Japan) and Skype’s “Social Good” partnerships with international relief agencies and NGOs. Traditional boundaries are blurring between private donors and government agencies, media companies, and implementers. This trend can be expected to accelerate.

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# New Trends in Private U.S. Funding for Media and Development

## Introduction

In July 2011, the Wikimedia Foundation hosted its first Wikipedia Higher Education Summit in Boston. More than a hundred professors, students, and Wikipedians were present. There were also representatives from England, Germany, India, Brazil, and Egypt—as well as at least one major foundation.

Wikipedia was founded in 2004, and at the time no one would have mentioned it in the same breath with international media development. However, the summit left no doubt that Wikipedia is international, and a growing list of donors have supported its development as media. These

***Many of the new players are the philanthropic arms of the new media corporate giants, and they have added their own unique perspective on the role of media in society.***

include the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations (OSF) as well as newcomers such as the Omidyar Network and Google.org.

But does a Wikipedia article qualify as “news?” The platform’s updates on breaking stories are often posted, corrected, and amplified as quickly as any wire service. “In the past we used to say it depends on who did it; if it’s a journalist, it’s journalism” said Eric Newton, senior adviser to the president of the Knight Foundation. “Now, just because a citizen did something doesn’t mean it’s not journalism. If it’s used as journalism, it’s journalism.”

This is the brave new world of funding international media and development. Only a few years ago, there was a lively debate between the virtues of “media development” versus “media for development.” Now this line, like many others in the field, is fading. Vast new grants are flowing to international media projects from private U.S. funders, and in many cases the institutions, the recipients, and the projects are all new.

Many of the new players are the philanthropic arms of the new media corporate giants, and they have added their own unique perspective on the role of media in society.

Their entry has also contributed to a shift in regional emphasis. During the 1990s, the attention of the world was fixed on developed countries undertaking a transition to democracy. The focus of that period, with its many triumphs and some disappointments, is now shifting to less developed areas of the world, notably Africa and India, and the population that Oxford professor Paul Collier has called the “bottom billion.” Foundations concentrating on this approach recognize that while it is still important to support print and broadcast media and democratic ideals, it would be negligent to do so without addressing day-to-day crises in public health, environmental

issues, and basic education. The foundations that follow this logic begin with specific social goals, such as public health or the environment, and then direct their support to whatever media can best transmit the message.

Nonetheless, the world’s ongoing political unrest highlights the ongoing need for the creation of quality news content, grounded in factual reporting, stringent fact checking, and careful editing. So far, non-professional online media has not duplicated the news values of quality journalism, and most professional journalism outlets have not identified an online business model to support the production of quality content. No matter how rapidly the social and economic benefits of media development advance, the critical information needs of civil society will not disappear.

## Background

International media assistance has deep roots in the battered landscape of post-World War II Europe and the realization that reinventing the news media was a critical component of reconstruction. The Ford Foundation was an early and significant partner in these efforts, joining forces with U.S. government agencies and other institutions. The machinery of fascist propaganda was dismantled, and new broadcast media were instructed in independent news production. Newspapers were created with mixed editorial boards, free of party control. These efforts were especially effective in Germany, where a vibrant and politically diverse media culture flowered within a decade of the Nazis’ defeat.

In the early 1990s, the end of Soviet communist rule led to a dramatic expansion in media assistance. U.S. foundations and their grantees streamed into the formerly communist countries, offering workshops and support in everything from investigative reporting to advertising management. In 1993, George Soros founded the Open Society Institute (now the OSF) to manage his foundations, which were then largely focused on Eastern Europe, as a way to contribute to a transition from communism to free-market democracies. The OSF soon extended its programs in media development to a growing roster of developing countries, some just emerging from their own conflicts, and many with populations living in extreme poverty. Founded by a philanthropist-entrepreneur, the Soros foundation was unusually open to new models. One of its many innovative programs is the Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF), founded in 1995 by Serbian newsman Sasa Vucinic and former *Washington Post* reporter Stuart Auerbach. In a departure from traditional grant making, the MDLF provides affordable capital and management expertise to independent media in societies in transition.<sup>2</sup>

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## The Traditional Field of Donors

Over the years, innumerable U.S. foundations have funded some areas relating to media, and a vast number have been involved in international projects. However, if one looks to the realm where media and international development work overlap, the list of foundations with a sustained presence is relatively short. Ford and OSF have been two of the largest general foundations to work in the media field. The Carnegie Corporation of New York was known for relatively small but insightful and influential programs on journalism, journalism education, and media in the Arab world, but the foundation has cut back on media-related grants in recent years. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation has redirected much of its funding to digital projects.

The philanthropic arms of media organizations, such as the *New York Times* and various television networks, have also played important roles in the past. One of the most influential categories represents the overlap between large foundations and media-based donors, notably the Knight Foundation in Miami, which was joined by the McCormick Tribune Foundation in Chicago, the Scripps Howard Foundation in Cincinnati, and the Freedom Forum (which grew out of the Gannett newspapers) in Washington. For many years, the foundations and philanthropic programs that originated in news organizations were responsible for a strong impetus in international media development, offering many forms of support for news organizations abroad.

Many of the projects have emphasized human capital: training journalists in reporting techniques, ethics, and new technologies, and later, working with management to improve business practices and develop advertising models. The funding continues to support training in the field and formal journalism education for foreign students (both in the United States and in indigenous institutions).

The leading implementers in the training field include Internews Network, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), all with offices in Washington, DC, as well as the London-based BBC World Service Trust and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, among others. Journalists' protection has also been an important element of media assistance. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and related organizations have received major foundation funding to represent foreign journalists and news organizations that come under physical and legal attack.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the monetary value of foundation contributions to media (often measured in the thousands) has been minor compared to the expenditures of large government aid agencies (usually measured in the millions). Modern media development has been greatly shaped by USAID, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID), and a number of European agencies. At the same time, the private foundations have unique qualities that often transcend the dollar value of their expenditures. Private entities can be more nimble and politically independent

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than their government counterparts. Many of them have benefited from the participation of journalists and media executives, who bring valuable relationships and experience to the work. A notable example is the Knight International Journalism Fellowship program, which has sent waves of U.S. journalists overseas to conduct training in print, broadcast, and new media journalism and has created generations of returnees with an acute commitment to the mission of media development.

## Gates Arrives

One enormous factor in the growth of “media for development” has been the emergence of a new generation of foundations grounded in new media. A year after the creation of George Soros's Open Society Institute in 1993, the next “big bang” in the foundation universe occurred with the creation of the Gates Foundation.<sup>4</sup> Over its first decade, the foundation's assets were multiplied many times over through the contributions of Bill Gates, and in 2006 investor Warren Buffett virtually doubled its reach with a contribution valued at the equivalent of \$31 billion, to be paid out gradually over a number of years.

The Gates Foundation is now described as the “largest foundation in the world.” Its 2009 assets approached \$34 billion—more than the assets of Ford, MacArthur, Hewlett, Rockefeller, Knight, and Carnegie combined.<sup>5</sup> “Gates dwarfs everything,” said Monroe Price, director of the Center for Global Communications Studies at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication.

Gates is not just a very large new foundation; it is also a new kind of foundation. Its culture is rooted in the tech community of the West Coast. New York may be the traditional media capital of America (home to leading print and broadcast institutions of “gatekeeper” media), but Seattle and the San Francisco Bay Area are the bases for the new media revolution that is reshaping global culture. New media tools have changed the nature of knowledge creation and dissemination in ways we are still assimilating. Speed of transmission has reached previously unimaginable rates. Content creation has been democratized and decentralized. “There's general agreement in the news and information community that the digital age has dawned, and the new era is upon us,” the Knight Foundation's Newton said. “Western countries with broadband have access to close to the totality of human knowledge, but that's not the case in the developing world—there's still an enormous gap.”

These new realities have challenged the traditions of philanthropy. The spirit of innovation and venture capital has infused media funding in new ways, along with new thinking about goals and methods. This process accelerated with the emergence of counterparts to Gates. Two early foundations arose from the West Coast tech sector in the form of the David and Lucile Packard

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Foundation (founded in 1964) and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (founded in 1967). Although both foundations have included media projects in their portfolios, their approach often mirrored those of their traditional counterparts, with emphases on internationally-oriented broadcasting projects and education. As these and other foundations have begun to increase their focus on digital media, they have been joined by philanthropies launched by founders of eBay (the Omidyar Network and the Skoll Foundations), as well as Google’s philanthropies, all of which have begun to fund international media projects.

### Retrenchment and Experimentation Among Private Donors

It is difficult to get a clear picture of support in the international media field using traditional means of assessment. For one thing, new donors such as Omidyar and Google have entered the field very recently and often disburse large amounts. (Grants in excess of \$1 million are not uncommon.) Furthermore, grants are often offered on a multi-year basis, while traditional measures present single-year totals. New forms of assistance, including social investing for equity, create further complications.

With these caveats in mind, the following table indicates some of the shifts in U.S. private funding patterns in international media and development over the past five years:

Organization	2006	2008	2010
OSF	\$40 million	\$50 million	\$50 million
Knight	\$7 million	\$10 million	\$10 million
Ford <sup>1</sup>	\$1.2 million	\$2.2 million	\$7.2 million
Gates	\$6.7 million	\$7.5 million	\$5.1 million
Omidyar Network	-	-	\$1.2 million
Google.org <sup>2</sup>	-	-	\$2 million

<sup>1</sup>Please note that after 2006 there was an overhaul of portfolio structures. The 2008 is for Ford’s 2009 funding. This and the 2010 figure were drawn from Ford’s new grants database, filtered for international media funding.

<sup>2</sup>Google’s 2010 partner grant to the Knight Foundation was applied to both U.S. and international components of projects.

An informal survey of funders and implementers in the summer of 2009 indicated that all of those cited in a 2007 survey are still in some way involved in the field of international media funding. But the dynamics of the group have altered a great deal, due in large part to the 2008 and 2011 economic setbacks, which cost many foundations 20 to 30 percent of their assets. Today, many of the traditional foundations are at the very least placing a moratorium on new funding for international media development, and some are scaling back.

It appears that the leading U.S.-based implementers in the field—for example, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the International Center for Journalists, and Internews—are in a good position to weather the storm. (CPJ has the benefit of an endowment, while ICFJ has been diversifying its funders to include non-traditional sources such as Deloitte, Merrill Lynch, and AT&T. These organizations also have access not only to media assistance funds, but also to support for freedom of expression, which pertains to human rights, good governance, and transparency.)

But other worthy projects will undoubtedly struggle, and may ultimately be orphaned. According to Gordana Jankovic, director of OSF’s media program, as of 2009, the organization “has had to increase funding in media assistance. It wasn’t huge, but we doubled the amount because other funders were dropping out.” However, OSF was not able to increase support in every area. “The economic crisis killed those sectors of companies that gave money to freedom of expression. Our support to freedom of expression was not increased. There was simply not enough available.” Jankovic reported that the situation has changed little in this regard between 2009 and 2011.

*“The economic crisis killed those sectors of companies that gave money to freedom of expression.”*

— Gordana Jankovic, Open Society Foundations

The foundations tied to newspaper companies were among those hardest hit. The New York Times Company Foundation, which had contributed to international press freedom initiatives, was an extreme case, ceasing its grant-making activities on April 23, 2009.<sup>6</sup> The McCormick Tribune Foundation, which had been a major funder of media assistance in Latin America, found itself in a similar position. “Both papers in Chicago are essentially bankrupt,” Clark Bell, McCormick’s journalism program director, pointed out in a 2009 interview. “The fault is with the debt load that both companies took on. It was too much to both pay on the debt and operate the newspapers.” Bell added that “a hundred percent of the foundation assets were in Tribune stock,” which rose to \$2 billion only to plummet to half that value with the crash. The McCormick Foundation took drastic measures, cutting its ties to the *Chicago Tribune* and moving out of the Tribune Tower (as well as removing “Tribune” from its name). As of 2011, the foundation’s international grant-making was still limited.

The Ford Foundation is another institution that suffered in the downturn. Ford responded with a large-scale restructuring of its program, creating eight program areas and administering them through regional offices. International media development funding is spread out among a host of



initiatives, concerning public service media, government transparency, immigration, freedom of expression, and minority rights, among others. Nonetheless, Ford has remained one of the central players in the field, and some grantees say that the reorganization has clarified their relationship. Sam Gregory, program director for Witness, the video human rights documentation platform, appreciates the way Ford's grants contextualize their work. "Some other donors look at projects as innovative, but don't necessarily embed them in the broader media ecosystem." The organic approach is especially important in the new era of fragmented information, in which an NGO such as Witness can offer video documentation of international developments that economically challenged news broadcasters no longer cover.<sup>7</sup>

The MacArthur Foundation has long been a respected member of the media funding community, represented by Elspeth Revere, vice president of media, culture, and special initiatives. In 2009 Revere reported that MacArthur had an \$8.5 million media portfolio (out of \$250 million total), but much of that is for U.S. organizations. These included the Center for Public Integrity, which organizes international investigative projects, and the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, which has a program in Internet freedom and security. "[The media program doesn't] have overseas recipients. Only Internews and the grant for partners in crisis send money overseas," she said. (This grant was designed to help local media respond to humanitarian crises and disasters as they occur.<sup>8</sup>)

In 2011, Revere described the focus of the foundation's media support. "Our support for international media development is for projects that are integral to other work," she noted, such as human rights, education, and women's reproductive health. Although few of these projects engage with traditional journalism, they do address a broad range of public information needs. The foundation has funded a number of projects involving citizen journalism run by Global Voices, Ushahidi, and Internews, while its special interest in global cyber security is reflected in its ongoing support for the Berkman Center's Open Net Initiative.

At the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Vice President of External Affairs Susan King, a former broadcast journalist who is slated to become dean of the University of North Carolina's journalism school in January 2012, has served as a leading voice in the field of media development. Her organization supported a small but innovative international portfolio during the past decade, including programs on journalism in countries with a Muslim majority. Nonetheless, King noted that international funding is continuing to shrink at her organization: "Ten years later we're less and less into media, and even that's more and more domestic because our own model is falling apart." As of 2010, Carnegie's grants in the field shrank to \$50,000, and King said that she does not expect them to reverse this course in the near future.

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The crisis of confidence in U.S. media has compounded the crisis in resources in media assistance. Many U.S. organizations feel they can no longer point to the "American media business model" as a template. Not only are U.S. newspapers and broadcasters losing income and audience—the society's entire means of communication is undergoing what many experts call the largest transformation in centuries.

Newton of the Knight Foundation said, "It's like the century after Gutenberg—there's a change in the model of knowledge. We don't understand it because we're in the middle of it." But, Newton argued, "in this situation you have to run towards the confusion, not away from it."

The Knight Foundation was one of the organizations that suffered in the economic downturn, but at the end of 2008, President and CEO Alberto Ibarguen published assurances that the foundation would continue to energetically explore the future of journalism through new media.<sup>9</sup> This sense of mission sets Knight apart. According to Carnegie's King, in the foundation community, "Media is a secondary funding string—except for Knight."

The Knight Foundation has created the flagship "Knight News Challenge" (<http://www.newschallenge.org/>) to stimulate ideas for expanding and building journalistic enterprises using digital, open source technology. The competition welcomes international proposals; past winners include the "Freedom Fone" project in Zimbabwe and the "Community Radio in India" project, based at the University of Waterloo (Canada).

The Knight Foundation has maintained a longstanding commitment to the Knight Fellowships at ICFJ and is experimenting with new forms of collaboration among its grantees. ICFJ President Joyce Barnathan said, "We're now teaming up with Knight News Challenge people to see if their applications work in our [international] projects." Newton said that private foundations have a unique role to play in propelling journalism into the future. "You can't assume any particular future media system, so you have to experiment," he argued.

Still, the age of experimentation has generated a certain amount of discomfort. "It's all about communications and rights, but everyone seems to be coming at it from a different direction," noted Bell of the McCormick Foundation. "It's hard to find the demand for projects—there's a difference between a need for something and a demand for something." In other words, the experiments have found new ways that digital media can serve the public, but nothing has yet produced the means to pay for the production of quality content, an underlying requirement for media development.

OSF's Jankovic worries that if foundations get too caught up in promoting experiments, it may be at the cost of helping existing independent media survive this rough passage: "There are so many experiments. Some are providing good arguments but are getting generalized too much.

*Nothing has yet produced the means to pay for the production of quality content, an underlying requirement for media development.*



The engagement in media is so marginalized that it only allows for small experiments, and they hope they'll be taken over by businesses." Jankovic points out that in many developing countries, traditional media with established newsrooms and editorial processes can perform a critical watchdog function that is essential to political and economic progress. Given that OSF media programs span the globe, Jankovic may approach this from a broader perspective than some of her U.S. colleagues. A 2011 World Association of Newspapers survey showed that newspapers were flourishing in many regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, often while simultaneously expanding audiences and improving content.<sup>10</sup>

Newton maintains that the foundations' focus should be the new universe of possibility: "You can now skip over hundreds of years of inequities—with cellphones where no landlines have been put in place. The funding community can't decide priorities, so we can't use these breakthroughs

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— Eric Newton,  
John S. and James L.  
Knight Foundation

to improve the lives of the people we're trying to help. There's slightly more money in media development than there was 20 years ago, but nothing compared to the opportunities of the new age we're in. The gap between the potential and what's being done is even greater."

The Gates Foundation may not have invented "media for development," but in recent years it has undoubtedly helped to set the agenda. Media was not an initial concern of the foundation's philanthropic efforts.

Early on, the foundation made a strong commitment to global health. Gates declared an ambitious list of public health goals, including massive vaccination programs against the infectious diseases that ravaged Africa. But these programs soon ran into public resistance. It became apparent that the conventions and institutions of

Western medicine were misunderstood in many areas where the foundation sought to work, on both a local and a national level. The foundation found, in the words of one foundation officer, "We couldn't get vaccine in the arm unless we could get information in their heads."

With such very practical goals in mind, Gates joined the community of foundations funding international media projects. Not surprisingly, its entry has influenced its foundation counterparts.

Gates's involvement in international media is only a few years old, but, as the 2007 CIMA survey shows, it started towards the top of the list in the size of its grants and made an immediate impact.

Like many other foundations, Gates's endowment lost money in 2008—about 25 percent. "We had to quickly adjust in 2009 and beyond," foundation officer Vanessa Mazal reported in 2009. "We had three to seven percent growth planned. [In 2009] there were cutbacks." However, the size of the foundation is so vast that it will still exert a major influence on the field of media

assistance, even in an unstable market. In recent years grants from Gates have accounted for \$3 million of ICFJ's \$9 million budget, while the BBC World Service Trust, a pioneer in the use of media for public health messaging, received about 20 percent of its budget from Gates. In August 2009 Gates awarded a major grant to Internews for a new study on the impact of media on global development.<sup>11</sup> As of 2011, the mapping project was reported to be in search of a new source of funding.

Gates's early emphasis on public health led the foundation to explore media from a platform-neutral standpoint: How do you inform the largest number of people in need, in the most effective fashion? With its roots in digital media, the foundation was open to pursuing non-traditional approaches to this question, and its implementers experiment with everything from educational soap operas on state broadcasting systems to messaging via cellphones. The foundation concentrates many resources in Africa and India, and has helped to transform those regions into laboratories for media for development.

Mazal, who oversaw a period of rapid expansion in Gates's media funding, noted that the foundation saw great promise in media as a vehicle for the development themes of agriculture and financial services for the poor and was "getting into water, sanitation, and hygiene."

Mazal was also frustrated by the fragmentation of the foundation community in the field of media assistance. "Media will continue to be an area of dabbling for funders, because it's such a confusing space right now. There's no coherent strategy on new media," she commented. "In terms of internal communications work, we have no doubt that the biggest bang for the buck is digital, but it's just not known where production of content is going—and even more so in developing countries with a lack of knowledge of media."

The Gates Foundation hoped to bring more coherence to the field by funding an Internews research project, a study on the impact of media development on other development indicators. The 18-month project was launched in conjunction with the World Bank, building on the ideas of former World Bank official and governance expert Daniel Kaufmann. "We're trying to plot where we've seen movement. We've done investment in media, but a lot of media funding is haphazard," Mazal reported. "A lot of money has been poured into this sector. What are the results?"

Gates has stepped up its interest in the issues of transparency and governance, and this theme may be an important bridge between the "media development" and "media for development" communities. A large state broadcaster in a developing country may reach the largest national audience for the purpose of education on HIV/AIDS prevention, but it is unlikely to be the most effective watchdog on the subject of government corruption.

*"Media will continue to be an area of dabbling for funders, because it's such a confusing space right now."*

— Vanessa Mazal,  
Bill and Melinda  
Gates Foundation

## Support for Content, Independent Media, and Press Freedom

Of course, no one in the media development community is against using media for public education on health and other vital issues, just as no one in development more broadly is against independent media performing a watchdog function. For the moment, there are two pressing issues: evaluating the impact and effectiveness of various programs in the rapidly evolving media landscape and balancing the allocation of resources between the two approaches.

Some programs suggest a creative confluence of interests. At ICFJ, the Knight Health Journalism Fellowships received a three-year \$1.7 million grant from the Gates Foundation to send accomplished health reporters to five countries in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Knight Fellowship website, they worked with local media organizations to improve the “quality, quantity, and impact of health coverage.” According to ICFJ’s Barnathan, the impact of the program on public health has been striking. “In Uganda, we got credit for significantly increasing polio vaccinations because of really good smart coverage,” she said. “In Nairobi, we want to see if,

***No one in the media development community is against using media for public education on health and other vital issues, just as no one in development is against independent media performing a watchdog function.***

through better journalism, you get better governance. They needed to do their first nitty-gritty look at the hospital system. We had a Knight Fellow based at the *Nation* in Nairobi and [the paper] blasted it on the front page.”<sup>12</sup> (This program advanced the traditional training model by working closely with both reporters and management, and creating ongoing editorial beats and networks of health reporters.)

In this respect, a “media for development” project can directly serve media development, as local journalists learn investigative reporting skills to hold the governments accountable for their promises and for allocating public spending properly.

ICFJ has been exploring a number of “media for development” topics; besides public health and good governance, it has been looking at immigration, financial literacy, and distance learning. As far as the center is concerned, there is no reason to debate “media for development” versus “media development”—Barnathan argues that the two are natural partners.

The BBC World Service Trust has made the same argument. The trust, which was founded in 1999, was rooted in BBC World Service journalism training programs and has rapidly expanded into the newer field of media for development and social marketing, with funding from both government agencies and private foundations. Its grants from U.S. foundations have been a mix of media development and media for development, including support from Gates (for public health projects), MacArthur (for transitional justice), and Ford (for journalism training). The trust, which recently named a new chairman and a new director, received non-profit status in the United States in 2010.

## New Donors Emerge

The Gates Foundation has been joined by a roster of new foundations emerging from the West Coast. (For a brief overview of this new community, see “Eight Ways Tech-Based Philanthropies are Changing Philanthropy,” PBS MediaShift.<sup>13</sup>) One important addition is Omidyar Network, which is exploring new frontiers in media development. The network was created by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife, Pam, in 2004, and describes itself as “a philanthropic investment firm” with an interest in two fields: access to capital, and media, markets, and transparency.<sup>14</sup>

In late 2008, Omidyar hired Stephen King, former director of the BBC World Service Trust, as director of investments for the media, markets and transparency initiative. (He is now investment partner at Omidyar.) The network has already funded some media-related projects that promote transparency in the United States and the developing world, including the Sunlight Foundation and Global Integrity. King stated that the network spent \$110 million in 2008 and \$85 million in 2009. The network has been looking closely at four countries in Africa—Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia—with an eye to how media hold government accountable.” King explained: “We prefer funding operations instead of projects. We have a lead investment person who often will take a seat on the board and asks what we can do to improve the organization.” Omidyar initiated this strategy with several U.S. companies, including Digg and Linden Lab (the creator of Second Life).

The Omidyar Network has taken a strong interest in digital media projects with a cross-border impact. In 2009 it awarded \$1.4 million to Ushahidi, the Kenya-born international crisis-mapping platform, to be paid out over two and a half years. Global Voices, the international curated blogging platform, received \$1.2 million in 2010. These funds were followed by nearly \$5 million of new grants in the international media field in 2011. Omidyar signals that it intends to expand this portfolio with a range of for-profit and not-for-profit opportunities. The network has a strong interest in projects relating to transparency and good governance, which can overlap with news and information.

Google was launched in 1996; its philanthropic arm, Google.org, was founded in 2004. (There are indications that the company is moving away from the google.org model, as it bases more of its philanthropic activity in policy offices and its expanding regional offices.) Like its core business, Google’s philanthropic efforts make a practice of experimentation. This has included traditional grant-making, staff volunteer projects, and the creation of online platforms for worthy causes, such as the “Person Finder,” an online crisis mapping platform to help disaster victims locate missing friends and relatives. In 2010 the Google Inc. Charitable Giving Fund of Tides contributed \$2 million to Wikipedia. That same year, Google.org contributed \$5 million to partner with Knight Foundation projects, followed by a \$2.7 million grant for African digital innovation to the Vienna-based International Press Institute in 2011.

According to the *Financial Times*, Google’s philanthropic arm, Google.org, granted more than \$100 million in 2010, “the bulk of the \$184 million that the company gave to non-profits and

charities).<sup>15</sup> In October 2010, the company created Google Ideas, with six staff members in New York, based in its business operations and strategy division as opposed to its philanthropies. Eric Schmidt, Google’s executive chairman, told the FT that he considers Google Ideas to be a “think/do-tank” as opposed to a mere “think tank.” This reasserts the company’s interest in philanthropy that includes direct interventions in problem-solving efforts, especially those involving technology. However, some of its leadership is aware that technology in itself will not be a panacea. (Schmidt told an audience at the Council on Foreign Relations that the expansion of the digital media universe was “not necessarily producing a better democracy, just a louder one.”)<sup>16</sup> Google’s global business interests and its relations with local governments undoubtedly continue to influence its involvement in funding media development and press freedom initiatives.

The Skoll Foundation, for example, stresses social entrepreneurship, and has not yet developed an explicit media program, but it is funding training in digital media, such as the Change through Digital Inclusion program, active in 13 countries.

***The new generation of donors has encouraged both foundations and implementers to rethink their approach.***

Jeffrey Skoll has also been exploring avenues of direct investment, such as his experiments in producing films with a social mission through Participant Media. (One of its recent projects was the feature film *Contagion*, created in consultation with the Council on Foreign Relations, to alert the public to the dangers of pandemics.<sup>17</sup>)

The new generation of donors has encouraged both foundations and implementers to rethink their approach. Barnathan, a former business journalist, recognizes that many new programs function “the way venture capitalists

work—make the pitch and see if you get the investment.” She claimed that this approach has helped her organization and others improve their performance. “Now Knight Fellows go in with a game plan—what is the baseline? You send a fellow out with an agenda; it’s that [monitoring and evaluation] skill set.”

Carnegie’s King also appreciates the influence of her new colleagues: “The West Coast foundations understand the power of media; they get it. The East Coast is more stuck in the past, funding research.” She feels that the East Coast media bias is still too tethered to newspapers and an advertising model. “I like to quote Clay Shirky: ‘We’re not here to save newspapers, we’re saving journalism,’” she said. “Democracy was not built on advertising; it was built on a free press.”

Although new media technology garners much of the attention, it is equally important to note a quiet revolution taking place in the way media projects are implemented. In these projects, traditional media may attract new donors and yield new results.

One example is the International Women’s Media Foundation’s (IWMF) African Media Project. The four-year project was launched in 2007 with a \$2.5 million grant from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation to promote African media coverage of agriculture, rural development, and women.<sup>18</sup> The project trained reporters in six existing print and broadcast organizations in Mali, Zambia, and Uganda, and worked with editors to create beats and other structural changes that will carry the work into the future.

Was this “media development” or “media for development?” “We take both roles,” reported IWMF Executive Director Liza Gross. “We’ve developed a unique method that seeks to establish sustainable projects. This involves in-depth preparation.” The first stage of the project was a needs assessment, resulting in a major report called *Sowing the Seeds*.<sup>19</sup> According to Gross, this initial stage was followed by “agreements with the media houses; then the training; and finally a recap of the results,” with built-in monitoring and evaluation. The program created an online platform to help participants stay in touch, as well as participate in additional training.

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation is a new entrant in the field of media donors. The foundation was created by the oldest son of investor Warren Buffett to support agricultural and environmental causes. (It is unusual among foundations in that it does not list contact information on its website, and does not accept unsolicited proposals.) “His [Buffett’s] interests do not lie in media, they lie in agriculture and sustainable development,” Gross said. But the IWMF grant suggests the considerable potential for related growth, as additional foundations explore media funding as a means to other philanthropic goals.

***Different generations of donors correspond to different eras of regional emphasis.***

**Another Continental Shift**

The range of new grants suggests another continental shift underway. Different generations of donors correspond to different eras of regional emphasis. In the post-war period, the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation played a critical role in the creation of the Marshall Plan to rebuild European economies and institutions, including the news media. In the final stage of the Cold War, Latin America received attention. In the aftermath of the 1989 collapse of Soviet Communism, the Open Society Institute and other foundations poured millions of dollars into an effort to help the former Soviet bloc transition to a democratic free-market system.

The nations of Western Europe are now donors, not recipients of aid, and while Russia and some backsliding countries in Eastern Europe are generating growing challenges to freedom of expression, these do not always respond to monetary assistance. OSF and, to a more limited extent, the Ford Foundation have maintained an active roster of global programs across a wide range of media issues, but they are the exceptions.

In terms of geography, the new generation of tech-based foundations devotes most of its international attention to Africa and India. Both regions are also counted among the most dynamic markets for digital media, which makes them fertile ground for experimentation in media and development.



Many donors express a strong interest in China but see little opportunity for foreign donors to participate. The Chinese government has embarked on its own vast media development program that integrates innovative approaches for social impact, including an ambitious ICT plan for the poor western agricultural regions of the country. However, these programs are constructed to allow the government to exercise tight control of political content.<sup>20</sup>

## The View from Academia

Within this spirited discussion, one sector has been fairly subdued: the academic community. In various interviews with leading foundations and implementers, there were repeated references to the Berkman Center at Harvard, the Annenberg School for Communication's Center for Global Media Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and interest in media research at MIT and Berkeley's Information School. However, there is little sense that the overall academic community is setting the pace, in either training or research.

*Within this spirited discussion, one sector has been fairly subdued: the academic community.*

Monroe Price, the director of the center at Annenberg, has long been a leading figure in the field of media development. His organization faces the same challenges of fragmentation the foundations describe. "We're pulled in several directions," he said. His center has dealt with this challenge by establishing regional partnerships with research counterparts in Oxford, Budapest, Beijing, and Amman, each specializing in a different area of international media assistance. He sees the new emphasis on media for development as a healthy trend. "I agree with a shift toward media for something—not just itself, but topics foundations are engaged in—conflict, civil society, China."

In some cases, the grants will go to institutions based in the regions in question. OSF offers support to the China Media Project at Hong Kong University (which enjoys broader latitude than mainland institutions) as well as to a range of media training programs spanning the globe.

In other cases, U.S.-based institutions are serving as global observatories. Harvard's Berkman Center began with a fairly U.S.-oriented research agenda, which rapidly extended into international themes. Its cutting-edge work on Internet filtering and censorship is of prime interest to the media development community, and the center has attracted funding from many of the major foundations mentioned in this paper, including Ford, Hewlett, MacArthur, McCormick, and Omidyar.

Several basic trends are apparent. Funding that is anchored in the traditional U.S. news media will be extremely constrained moving forward. As Barnathan points out, it is important to distinguish between structural change and cyclical change, and one way or another, many of America's old media empires will cease to exist in their current forms. It is too soon to envision what will take their place, but we do know that it will reflect a new world, in which technology and human connections transcend national boundaries and challenge our traditional notions of

"news," "media," and "community." At the same time, recent research has made it apparent that in many parts of the world (including volatile areas of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa), traditional print and broadcast journalism continue to play a critical role in civil society and political transitions. The challenge for the future will be to define the core values and goals of media development and find the right balance between supporting media that serve present needs and building out for the future.



## Recommendations

- It is more important than ever for donors to maintain a consultative process and to build a more sophisticated awareness of the big picture. Several promising initiatives have been launched, such as the Global Forum for Media Development’s mapping project and Intermedia’s extensive media research. But this work is often underfunded, uncoordinated, and conducted on a project basis that fails to sustain and build on past research. The various research functions should be made available on a sophisticated online platform.
- Analysis and mapping should be part of an “early warning system” to indicate when media and societies reach critical junctures and to help coordinate flows of assistance. Currently there are repeated cycles of “surges” and “droughts,” when numerous donors overwhelm media organizations in a given region with more assistance than they can absorb (as is currently the case in Egypt), contrasted with groups in regions that are no longer the “flavor of the month” and have difficulty sustaining basic operations despite ominous signs on the horizon (such as in Hungary). Various international networks and organizations, including the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Global Forum for Media Development, Freedom House, and Global Voices can help to inform this process.
- Donors and sectors of donors are developing increasingly distinctive approaches to funding. Some like to offer seed money for innovation; others prefer a venture capital/equity model; yet others favor providing core funding for ongoing support. Many worthy grantees need each of these kinds of support at different points. Donors should make it easier for grantees to determine where they fit in the ecosystem and coordinate among themselves to allow the best applicants to create a logical, structured approach.
- Donors should create a consultative process on the subject of monitoring and evaluation of projects, and if possible, create a “common application” approach that would allow grantees to use common metrics and reporting mechanisms, rather than be required to respond to various donors with different M&E requirements.
- The donor community should remember that providing quality content is the ultimate goal of media assistance. Although it is extremely important to stimulate innovative new platforms, it is at least as important to help trusted sources—from both journalism and the civil society—make the necessary technological transitions to reach contemporary audiences.

*The donor community should remember that providing quality content is the ultimate goal of media assistance.*

- Donors should renew their efforts to bring new partners into the fold. Many new players, both foundations and wealthy individuals, are entering the media field. If their projects are uninformed regarding the broader community, they run the risk of cancelling each other out or even proving counter-productive. Discussions should include the topics of monitoring and evaluation, innovation, direct investment, the creation of quality content, and the relationship between education and digital media.
- Donors should jointly create and support think tanks and academic centers to promote research on the many pressing issues in the field. There has been excellent work devoted to the subjects of censorship and intellectual property, but the field of media development is far too vast and rapidly growing to fit within existing programs. Such an institute could generate a new cohort of graduate students to enter the field as researchers, practitioners, and analysts.
- The foundation community should continue to advance programs to help support the generation of quality content and good business practices by media organizations. The philanthropic activities of technology businesses should make a special commitment to this field. More foundations are realizing that training news media is of limited utility if media organizations lack the business knowledge to sustain themselves. As U.S. media continue to seek new, sustainable business models, there may be hybrid approaches that combine U.S. projects with international media experiments in the field.
- U.S. foundations and implementers should try harder to think beyond their cultural context. The American market has been based on the legacy infrastructure of landlines, television, laptops, and literacy. In many developing countries, convergence is arriving in a handheld configuration. Radio and cellphones are the starting points for much of the world beyond the grid. Foundations should stimulate ideas for developing quality content that can emerge from a handheld device.
- Foundations should be attentive to the urgent, ongoing need to defend freedom of expression. As the aftermath of the Arab Spring continues to unfold throughout the region, many vulnerable online activists will find themselves in dire need of legal representation and assistance. Support for these rights should go hand-in-hand with every form of media assistance.
- Donors should be aware of the value of in-kind services, such as the construction of platforms and the provision of services that can be provided by technological companies and their philanthropies. These may not be visible on the usual grant radars, but they could have a significant impact over time. These initiatives offer another important opportunity for partnerships among the donor community.

## Conclusion

The field of media is currently a rapidly expanding universe, and media assistance is now highly subject to the “law of unintended consequences.” Many basic suppositions about media and civil society have been called into question. This is not a reason to pull back from media assistance. On the contrary, it is an argument to proceed, but with a more coherent, strategic, and informed perspective than ever before. Private foundations have a long and important history of crafting media policies that support human rights and democratic development, and their independence and expertise are required now as never before.

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