By the People:
The Rise of Citizen Journalism

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Eugene L. Meyer

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CIMA Center for International Media Assistance

NED National Endowment for Democracy
Supporting freedom around the world

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.

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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Eugene L. Meyer is an award-winning Washington, DC-based freelance journalist who worked for four decades in daily journalism. For most of that time, he was a staff reporter and editor for The *Washington Post*. Meyer serves on the board of the Freedom to Write Fund and is a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. He is the author of two books and numerous magazine articles for regional and national publications. His work has covered a wide range of topics, including politics, real estate, urban affairs, police brutality, health care, travel, agriculture, history, the environment, and the economy. He has been a writing coach and taught journalism at Ohio State University as the James Thurber Journalist-in-Residence. Meyer currently contributes to several publications and is the editor of *B'nai B'rith Magazine*.

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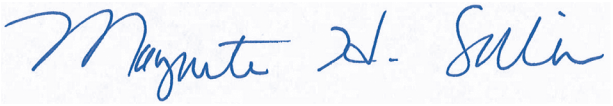
Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study about the rise of citizen news media. The report examines both the opportunities and the challenges facing citizen journalism, especially in countries where the news media is not free or where practicing independent journalism can be dangerous.

CIMA is grateful to Eugene Meyer, a veteran journalist, for his research and insights on this topic.

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



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Executive Summary

Citizen journalism–it has an almost Norman Rockwell ring to it, something akin to his iconic town meeting cover for the *Saturday Evening Post*, with citizens rising to speak their minds in furtherance of the democratic ideal. Only now, citizens are speaking online, in many cases helping to disseminate the information an informed electorate needs for democracy to exist and flourish.

The phrase has become the talk of media circles. Along with its close cousins "citizen media" and "crowd sourcing," it is increasingly and approvingly invoked among communications academics, researchers, media development implementers, and funders as a bright light in the otherwise dimming environment of news gathering and dissemination that has marked the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Citizen journalism is seen by some as an antidote to the widening information gap in societies where traditional news media–print and broadcast–are in decline. The seeming proliferation of citizen journalists has accelerated with the growth of global digital technology that has in many ways erased national borders, resulting in worldwide media able to reach citizens everywhere.

Citizen journalism is seen by some as an antidote to the widening information gap in societies where traditional news media–print and broadcast–are in decline.

But there are two large caveats: Outside the democratized West, there is no consensus on how to define the term. Further complicating the issue is the reality on the ground in societies that could stand to benefit the most from such enterprise: Repressive, authoritarian regimes will often stop at nothing to suppress freedom of the press, whether in the traditional "mainstream media" or in the brave new world of citizen journalism. In such countries, traditional journalists either engage in self-censorship or risk their lives in pursuit of the truth, and the ideal of citizen journalism seems even more removed from reality.

As technology becomes more sophisticated, and platforms for transmitting news, information, and opinion more diverse, governments of all stripes–even democracies, including the United States–seek to monitor communications and obtain personal information.

Usually in the name of national security, governments want access to e-mails and social networks, or to learn who is visiting which website. This chilling development was highlighted by the United Arab Emirates' August 2010 threat to ban BlackBerry e-mail unless its Canadian manufacturer, Research in Motion Ltd., allowed it to monitor encrypted messages. The UAE alleged that BlackBerry's smart phones caused "judicial, social and national security concerns."[1] Soon after, India–where the Mumbai terrorists were said to have used BlackBerry devices–said it would shut down the service unless it was given access to the encrypted data.

This paper seeks to examine both the challenges and opportunities facing citizen journalism in foreign lands, focusing especially on the so-called purple (not free) and yellow (partly free) zones, as defined by the Freedom House Foundation's Map of Press Freedom 2010[2], which ranks 196 countries and territories. In many such places, the definition between citizen journalism and advocacy blurs, and traditional newsroom standards are a luxury if not entirely irrelevant. So any discussion of citizen journalism in countries where the press is partly free or not free cannot be separated from the governmental environment and atmosphere that limit its practice.

Methodology

This study is based on more than 20 interviews by telephone, e-mail, and Skype; primary and secondary documents; commentaries; websites; blogs; and other sources. In a few limited cases, anonymity was granted to protect the work of individuals and organizations operating discretely in authoritarian countries.

The author is grateful to the following, who were consulted in the preparation of this report:

Blog del Narco – anonymous blogger in northern Mexico

Dawn Arteaga – Communications Director, International Center for Journalists

James Breiner – Director, Digital Journalism Center, Guadalajara, Mexico

Brenda Burrell – Technical director, Freedom Fone

Mona Eltahawy – writer and lecturer on Arab and Muslim issues

Hanzada Fikry – Country Director, Egypt, International Center for Journalists

Aki Hashmi – chief marketing manager, AllVoices

Susan Moeller – Professor of Media and International Affairs and Director, International Center for Media and the Public Agenda, University of Maryland

Sharon Moshavi – Senior Director for new initiatives, International Center for Journalists

Eric Newton – John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Vice-President, Journalism Program

William Orme – United Nations Development Program

Constance Phlipot, Senior Diplomatic Advisor, Community of Democracies

Kathleen Reen – Internews, Vice-President for Asia, Environment and New Media

Hans Staiger, program consultant, International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)

Ivan Sigal – Executive Director, Global Voices

Amra Tareen – Founder and CEO, AllVoices Inc.

Elisa Tinsley – Director, Knight International Journalism Fellowship Program, International Center for Journalists

Judith Torrea – journalist and blogger in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Natasha Tynes – Director, Middle Eastern program, International Center for Journalists

Douglas Wake – First Deputy Director, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Mark Whitehouse – International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) Director of Global Media Initiatives

What is Citizen Journalism?

The term citizen journalism "doesn't mean very much," contends Ivan Sigal,[3] executive director of Global Voices, which combines staff and unpaid volunteers to produce a website that is both aggregator and originator of content. "There are a lot of sloppy definitions and a lot of assumptions on where people are coming from, or whether or not citizen journalism is a good thing, and a lot of anecdotal sorting without much data-driven or cluster analytics together."

Definitions range widely across the spectrum. In Asia, writes Kathleen Reen, Internews vice-president for Asia, environment and new media, "I'm not sure that the more widely understood or shared definitions … reflect the U.S. perspective at all."[4]

Eric Newton, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's vice-president overseeing its journalism program and a strong advocate for citizen journalism, likes to cite the experience of Deerfield, New Hampshire, (population 3,678 in the 2000 census) in defining what citizen journalism is and can be.

Deerfield is "a small town without a paper, TV or radio station, a very, very modest civic website done by the town hall," he said.[5] "Yet it's an educated community with Internet access. Friends of the Library five or six years ago were sitting around, bemoaning the fact that hardly anyone wanted to stand for local election. And in fact only a couple of the many races were contested. So they got a very small grant, through J-Lab at [American University],one of our grantees– $18,000 the first year, $7,000 the second year–to launch their volunteer [online] news and information platform, the *Deerfield Forum*.[6] They found in each subsequent year that the voter turnout increased, the number wanting to stand for office increased, the number of contested offices increased."

All well and good in Deerfield, New Hampshire, and in other parts of the world that are free and democratic. However, Newton adds, in countries such as Cuba, Iran, and North Korea, "it is quite the opposite. A person could end up in jail, being chased by the law, and have to flee the country, because they engage in what we call citizen journalism in the United States.

"So, citizen journalism is going to be effective in some areas and not in others. Each community has its own micro-climate. There are some things you can write about in some parts of Mexico and other parts you'd be killed. We are very far behind in our understanding of the cultural microclimates and community microclimates and how they affect all kinds of news and info flows."

What, exactly, is citizen journalism? "I suppose it is any kind of information, publication, and diffusion of information done by people not trained as professionals, who haven't worked in established media," said James Breiner, director of the Digital Journalism Center in Guadalajara, Mexico.[7] "I really don't know how to deal with that term. It's all over the landscape."
And when do social media become outlets for citizen journalists? "I don't consider Facebook a

news medium," said Breiner, "but it's certainly a communications medium. More and more, you are seeing Facebook being used as an outlet for news media and a way for non-traditional voices to be heard."

There is also this overriding question: Are citizen journalists, even in the best of circumstances, real journalists? David Simon, former *Baltimore Sun* journalist and writer and producer of *The Wire* and other successful cable television shows, thinks not. "You do not (in my city) run into bloggers or so-called 'citizen journalists' at City Hall, or in the court house hallways, or at the bars where police officers gather," he told a Senate hearing on the future of journalism in May 2009.[8] "You don't see them consistently nurturing and then pressing sources. You don't see them holding institutions accountable on a daily basis. Why? Because high-end journalism is a profession. It requires daily full-time commitment by trained men and women who return to the same beats day in and day out."

But, of course, in totalitarian states or countries that place restrictions on the free flow of information, upholding such professional standards can be problematic. It may be little comfort–but it also may help shape our worldview–that more Internet journalists than those working in any other medium were jailed as of December 1, 2008, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.[9] In the December 2009 survey, 68–or half of journalists in jail–were bloggers, Web-based reporters and online editors–a numerical increase of 12 and a percentage jump of 5 points.[10]

In the December 2009 survey, 68–or half of journalists in jail–were bloggers, Web-based reporters and online editors.

These twenty-first century bloggers are, of course, merely the latest manifestation of a tradition that predates the digital age. "I like to compare the bloggers here and elsewhere to the underground writers and partisan reporters of France during the World War II," wrote Stephen Franklin, a Knight International Journalism Fellow in Egypt, in praise of Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas, recipient of the 2007 Knight International Journalism Award and the first blogger to be so honored. "They were hardly perfect or well-trained. They were not observers but activists, because they rightly felt that their lives and their futures were on the line. They wrote snippets of truth, not whole truths and hoped that alone would help … A handful of today's bloggers in various parts of the world have inherited their proud legacy and costly responsibilities."[11]

"It's difficult to put your finger on the difference between a blogger and citizen journalist," said Mona Eltahawy,[12] a New York-based, Egyptian-born writer and speaker on Islam and the Arab world. How much "fact-checking and the ethics should be there?" Teaching a course in Egypt on citizen journalism, she heard her students say they preferred blogging "because they didn't want to abide any anyone else's codes. I don't think that definition has been definitively worked out. It's something people struggle with."

The Middle East: Cats and Mice

Citizen journalists in the Middle East walk a fine line between reportage and advocacy, and almost always against a background of government intimidation or control, ranging from the deceptively benign to the truly totalitarian.

In Iran, information posted on Facebook and Twitter and videos on YouTube told the world of the government crackdown following the disputed election of June 2009. Most notably, the death from a single bullet of a protesting student, Neda Agha-Soltan, was posted on YouTube, turning her into a martyr and potent symbol for the cause of democracy.[1] A George Polk Award went to the anonymous bystander who took the video of her death that shocked the world. However, such citizen journalism seemed to have no lasting impact in the so-called "Green Revolution" against the country's regime and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

On Facebook, Iran Citizen Journalism professes neutrality but provides a platform for information that reports alleged government abuses and atrocities. A typical posting, from June 7, 2010, reported, "The Islamic Republic is preparing another round of mass executions in an effort to terrorize the Iranian people into submission in advance of the one-year anniversary of the ongoing Iranian uprising, June 12. Urgent action is required by all concerned people to pressure the regime to refrain from implementing these executions."

It is unclear from the site who administers it or where it is hosted, but many of the posts are in German. "Iran Citizen Journalism is NOT affiliated with any political party, nor do we have any political agenda," the site says. "Our sole interest is to gather information that can be used to help the people of Iran. ALL viewpoints and political parties are encouraged to post. The goal of Iran Citizen Journalism is to create a safe and informative environment for EVERYONE."

However, in its mission statement Iran Citizen Journalism says its purpose is "To start discussions that will help keep lines of communications among all freedom fighters open." Straight journalism, or advocacy, or perhaps some of both? This is the dilemma and reality in the Middle East.

In Syria, a law has been drafted to regulate online media, requiring them to register and to submit their writing for government review. This restrictive atmosphere pervades the Middle East, but there are some limited openings.

In Egypt, citizen journalists are being trained by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ),[2] without apparent interference from the tightly-controlled government of President Hosni Mubarak. A recently-completed program trained 60 citizen journalists and 30 professional journalists in the basics of news gathering. "There are always [censorship] issues and everyone's aware of that, but Egyptian citizen journalists are known for crossing these boundaries and red lines," said Natasha Tynes, Washington-based director of ICFJ's Egypt project.[3] One of ICFJ's citizen journalists managed to interview eyewitnesses to a fatal police beating of a blogger, leading to an official investigation of the incident.

But the pressures, if more subtle, still exist, and sometimes they are not so subtle under an "emergency" law in effect since 1981 that allows an errant journalist–independent or traditional–to be arrested and detained without charges.

Mona Eltahawy, a New York-based writer and lecturer on Islam and the Arab world, has taught the subject of citizen versus traditional journalism in her native Egypt. There, she said, students struggle with differentiating between the two.[4] "What came out most is the reason they started to blog was they didn't want to abide by anyone else's codes," she said. "But they realized it can't just be a free for all, that they have a responsibility. They see themselves as activist journalists providing services other journalists aren't. In many cases, these citizen journalists put on the news agenda things that the mainstream media ignore." In 2006, she noted, there was a "rash of wilding and sexual assault" in downtown Cairo the authorities had ignored. Bloggers posted photos, "forcing independent and foreign media to report what happened." This lead the Egyptian parliament to address the issue, by defining and criminalizing sex harassment in public. An Egyptian

rights group undertook a survey and mounted a public awareness campaign, "all thanks to the bloggers," Eltahawy said.

"Bloggers in Egypt operate under tremendous pressure," Eltahawy said, citing the case of a blogger arrested without charges and then jailed for four years after being convicted of insulting the president on his blog. The emergency law was invoked in the arrest of another blogger, Mosaad Abu Fagr, who wrote about the state of Bedouin life in Sinai. He has been detained since February 2008, despite 18 judicial orders to release him.[5]

"YouTube has become a clearing house for police brutality" in Egypt, she said. A video of police sodomizing a man in 2009 was used to convict the officers who were then sentenced to two years in prison.

Egyptian Wael Abbas became the first blogger to receive the Knight International Journalism Award, in 2007.[6] He considers himself both journalist and blogger. "The bloggers in Egypt are the last independent voice," he has written.[7] Abbas receives and posts videos from many sources. "Whenever someone has footage, they send it to Wael," Eltahawy said.

In September 2010 in Syria, where online journalists use pseudonyms for their own security, a video of teachers beating students made it onto Facebook, which is officially banned in Syria.[8] Bloggers piled on, and Arab media reported the story. The teachers were reassigned. Said the *New York Times*: "The episode was a rare example of the way Syrians using Facebook and blogs can win a tenuous measure of freedom within the country's tightly controlled media scene, where any criticism of the government, however oblique, can lead to years in prison."[9]

But the need to use pseudonyms, the *Times* account said, prevents these citizen journalists-cum-bloggers "from developing professional standards." And there are no certain ways for them to know their audience. One Web journalist said his readers consisted of "my friends and the secret police."

"None of these young people who are citizen journalist-bloggers are going to overthrow any regime next week," Eltahawy said. "But these regimes may underestimate" them.

In the global age of the Internet, she added, "Social media have become incredibly important. In the Middle East, the idea that these young people who form the bulk of the opposition are able to watch themselves being able to challenge authority is very important. We are not going to see the effect for a while, but we are going to see it have a very important and vital effect."

With the new technology, said Hanzada Fikry, who trained citizen journalists in Egypt for the ICFJ, "Nobody can really hide. With independent media now so common and popular … everything is spoken about. Some see it as a way of democratization, and others believe it is psychological therapy, a relief of tension."[10]

1 "Neda Agha Soltan, killed 20.06.2009, Presidential Election Protest, Tehran, IRAN," *YouTube*, June 22, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76W-0GVjNEc&skipcontrinter=1

2 ICFJ website, http://www.icfj.org/

3 Natasha Tynes, interview with author, August 31, 2010

4 Mona Eltahawy, interview with author, August 8, 2010

5 "CPJ Urges Egypt to Free Blogger With 18 Release Orders," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, April 8, 2010, http://cpj.org/2010/04/cpj-urges-egypt-to-free-blogger-with-18-orders-for.php

6 "Wael Abbas, 2007 Knight International Journalism Award Winner," Knight International Journalism Fellowships, International Center for Journalists, http://knight.icfj.org/Awards/WaelAbbas/tabid/807/Default.aspx

7 "Wael Abbas, 2007 Knight International Journalism Award Winner," Knight International Journalism Fellowships, International Center for Journalists, http://knight.icfj.org/Awards/WaelAbbas/tabid/807/Default.aspx

8 Worth, Robert F. "Web Tastes Freedom Inside Syria, and It's Bitter," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2010 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/30/world/middleeast/30syria.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=%22Online%20Media%20Taste%20Freedom%20Inside%20Syria%22&st=cse

9 Ibid.

10 Hanzada Fikry, interview with author, September 3, 2010

Is this new platform for content performing a public service if so-called citizen journalists are spreading–along with occasional truths–rumors and half-truths? Or is it contributing to the cacophony of unreliable sources with axes to grind?

Said one American diplomat, who requested anonymity in order to speak frankly: "I see it as great tool but not a panacea, and it does have this dark side. There's no fact-checking, and it can be used to ridicule people that don't need to be. In these democracy movements, there's a lot of in-fighting. This [citizen journalism] can be misused. There's no control over content, so that can be good and bad."

To which Natasha Tynes, Jordanian-born director of the International Center for Journalists' Egypt project, which trains citizen journalists there, replies, "It's really hard to distinguish, especially in places where they have oppressive regimes, between citizen journalists and activists. In repressive countries, it's hard to get two sides."[13]

Internet contrarian Evgeny Morozov, a native of Belarus and a Stanford University scholar, raises even more basic questions about the utility of social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, to serve as conduits of useful information much less be transformative agents of reform in authoritarian societies, whose regimes may use the new technologies to propagandize. "It is safe to say that the Internet has significantly changed the flow of information in and out of authoritarian states," he wrote in 2009. "But drawing conclusions about the democratizing nature of the Internet may still be premature."[14]

Having an Impact

Yet, there are instances where citizen journalism in inhospitable places clearly has had a direct impact on the course of events. The question is whether such online activism is advocacy or straight journalism, and how much the distinction in such countries actually matters.

OhmyNews, launched on February 22, 2000, with the mantra "Every Citizen Is a Reporter," is widely credited with influencing the 2002 presidential election in South Korea. The citizen journalist website provided an alternative news source, and successful candidate Roh Moo-Hyuan benefitted from counter-arguments his supporters posted on *OhmyNews.*

In Mexico, through an Internet-generated campaign spurred by dissatisfaction with corruption in government, voters protested the July 2009 elections not by staying away from the polls but by making an "X" across their ballots. The "voto nulo" campaign came out of the blogosphere and videos posted on YouTube. It was a powerful use of the Internet to galvanize citizens into taking action. Not citizen journalism, precisely, but powerful nonetheless.

"The great thing about citizen participation is you can publicize stuff that formerly wouldn't get publicized, and in a medium that is mass distributed."

— James Breiner

Underscoring the importance Mexicans place on access to the Web was "InternetNecesario," a movement to protest a 3 percent internet service provider tax proposed by the administration of President Felipe Calderón. After the movement generated 35,000 tweets from more than 7,000 Twitter participants and more than 8,300 members on Facebook, the Mexican Senate voted to overturn the tax in October 2009.[15]

In Guatemala, also in 2009, Jean Anleu urged followers on Twitter to withdraw their money from banks associated with corrupt politicians. Anleu was identified and arrested on the grounds he was inciting the collapse of the economic system. Within hours, the online universe was ablaze with indignation, and funds were raised to bail him out.

"Something like that never would've happened without Twitter and Facebook," said James Breiner. "It used to be you could just arrest anybody and disappear them. Case closed, they're gone. You can't do that now. The great thing about citizen participation is you can publicize stuff that formerly wouldn't get publicized, and in a medium that is mass distributed." [16] Social media are also credited with turning out 10,000 anti-government street protestors in Moldova in the spring of 2009.

Citizen advocacy or citizen journalism? Whatever one chooses the call it, the news got out—and had consequences.

Mexico: Filling the Void Left by Self-Censored News Media

On Sunday September 19, 2010, the day after one of its photo interns was gunned down emerging from a mall where he had eaten lunch, the daily print voice in the embattled border city of Ciudad Juárez offered to hit the mute button in order to continue to publish with impunity. In a front-page editorial[1], *El Diario* appealed to the drug lords for a truce, offering to withhold information in return for peace.

It was an odd twist to the credo, "publish or perish." In Ciudad Juárez, the new mantra seemed to be, "publish *and* perish."

In the drug war-torn country of Mexico, a nation with a democratically elected government, it appears that self-censorship is the only way for a "free" press to survive–by becoming, in effect, less free. The consequences of publishing are clear: More than 30 journalists killed or vanished in the last four years, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.[2]

For most print journalists, the subject on everyone's mind is off-limits. "Cartels are very conscious of what kind of coverage they are getting," said James Breiner[3], director of Digital Journalism Center at the University of Guadalajara. "They'll call the paper, tell you they don't want you to publish the names or photos of our people, and if you do there will be consequences. And there are."

In theory and law, Mexico has a free press. But the reality is that there is self-censorship. With the drug cartels more than threatening journalists who seek to report the truth, the mainstream media often pull their punches. Violent incidents, even murders, go unreported - and unprosecuted.

And then there's www.blogdelnarco.com. This fearless, if anonymous, citizen journalism website has, since it began on March 2, 2010, gone where others fear to tread, posting reports it receives from other anonymous sources. Blog del Narco, according to its anonymous creator and administrator, answering questions by e-mail, "is a site where we try to collect all the information about drug trafficking and war in Mexico. Its main purpose is to help the Mexican people take the necessary measures against the insecurity.

"The blog, its originator says[4], arose from the government and media "trying to pretend that nothing happens, because the media is threatened and the government apparently bought." The blog is "a means of communication with which we inform people what happens, write the events exactly as they were." Only stories that can be verified are posted, he says.

The blog has attracted approximately 3 million hits a week. "It has become so successful because the Mexican media threatened not to publish reports of clashes," says its creator, who describes himself as "a twenty-something college student" in computer systems. He spends at least four hours daily working on the site and lives somewhere in northern Mexico.

"I have no relationship to drug traffickers, as many have said," he adds.

The website carries news stories and grisly homemade videos and images– not shown in the mainstream media–of executions juxtaposed on the computer screen with video advertisements for "Easy Off" kitchen cleanser. The site invites visitors to "send photos, videos, notes, links or information. All 100% Anonymous."

The administrator of Blog del Narco says he plans to continue the site as long as the news goes unreported elsewhere.

Does it matter that print newspapers are intimidated in an environment that is increasingly online? In a country of 110 million people, about 30 million have Internet access and 14 million are on Facebook, compared to 2 million and shrinking for newspapers, notes Breiner. "Newspapers are elitist here, in that they are read by very few people. The Web reaches much more people."

In addition to the anonymous Blog del Narco, there is Spanish journalist, Judith Torrea, who blogs under her own name from Ciudad Juárez and New York about the city *en la sombra*[5] (in the shadow) of the drug traffic.

"My work is very different than the Blog del Narco," Torrea wrote[6] in an e-mail. "I am a journalist. My blog is [done for] free ... and I am not giving publicity to the narcos. I risk my life to do it. For me, the important thing are the victims and what is exactly is happening in Ciudad Juárez."

Juárez citizens also rely on Twitter reports[7] to learn about what's going on locally, Breiner said, "because the mainstream media is not reporting a shootout in their neighborhood. It is just like information you would hear on the street corner, in the barber shop, in a restaurant." Blog del Narco is also on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (with 1,842 tweets and 16,592 followers, as of September 23, 2010).

Blog del Narco's author says he does not take sides in the drug war, but, according to an Associated Press report on August 13, 2010, one posting may have resulted in the arrest of a prison warden who allegedly freed inmates at night to murder for a drug cartel.

But what if the information is unreliable, inaccurate, or one-sided? "Journalists underestimate the ability of people to evaluate this stuff," Breiner says.

"Obviously," he adds, "there's a lot of misinformation all the time all around us, whether it's on the Web or not. You listen to it, evaluate it, make a judgment. In the past, there was this [newspaper] monopoly." You read it in the paper, "therefore it's true. [Now] we don't have that monopoly."

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1 Archibold, Randal,, "Mexico Paper, a War Victim, Calls for a Voice," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2010 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/21/world/americas/21mexico.html?_r=1&hpw

2 "Calderón to Support Federalization of Anti-Press Crimes," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, September 22, 2010, http://cpj.org/2010/09/calderon-to-support-federalization-of-anti-press-c.php#more

3 Breiner, James, Centro de Periodismo Digital, in interview with author, August 17, 2010.

4 Blog del Narco,email message to author, August 19, 2010.

5 Ciudad Juárez, en la Sombra del Narcotráfico Blog, juarezenlasombra.blogspot.com

6 Torrea, Judith, Ciudad Juárez, en la Sombra del Narcotráfico Blog, email message to author, September 23, 2010 9

7 JuarezAwareness Twitter website, http://twitter.com/juarezawareness

A more direct expression of citizen journalism is underway in Panama, where major media have been working with Transparency International to create a website based on Ushahidi's technology.[17] The project, begun in the summer of 2010, asks citizen journalists to text or e-mail information about crime and corruption. That information, after being checked for accuracy, is to be aggregated and posted in map form on the website.

As media development advisor in the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the West African country of Sierra Leone, Bill Orme had a front row seat to watch citizen journalism at work in a troubled land.

"It's kind of remarkable," he said. "Here was this nation that had undergone a tragic, brutal horrific nearly dozen years of civil warfare with a huge number of casualties, followed by a large United Nations presence, 35,000 troops at the peak. Despite all those divisions, it has now had two sequential national elections, very hard-fought and very close, and the populace at large accepted the results immediately and without any question and challenge."[18]

Platform is an increasingly important and varied factor in any discussion of citizen journalism. In some areas, the Internet rules. In others, lacking broadband, cellphones and text messaging dominate.

Orme attributes the peaceful elections directly to the role citizen journalists played via the medium of radio, which the UN instigated. "If it wasn't for that radio coverage, everyone agrees that wouldn't have been the case," he said.

"Radio is really the only medium" in Sierra Leone, he said. "TV exists in very rudimentary form in the capital city. The combined newspaper circulation in the country is 40,000 to 50,000, if that, divided between 15 or 20 papers, almost all in Freetown [the capital]," in a country with a population of 5.3 million in 2010.[19]

Orme's office recruited volunteers to gather news to be broadcast. "Part of the strategy was to ensure that the actual vote count and processes all went according to international norms, and also that the public had a chance to follow the news in real time and believe in the credibility of the process. So all the independent radio stations created a joint national coverage network.

"Local reporters in most places weren't professionals. They were volunteers given training and tape recorders and cellphones and told how to cover elections. It's kind of remarkable."

Cellphones are used to text to radio stations, and they are "the revolutionary change, approaching 100 percent in Sierra Leone," Orme said. Texting is cheaper than voice calls, and it is anonymous. "You text, the radio station gets it; you can ID the phone number but not the person. In politically or ethnically charged situations, people are a lot feel freer to be more candid in their messages or questions they send to radio programs."

Use of cellphones for citizen journalism is still in its infancy in Sierra Leone, he said. However, in much of Africa, cellphones and radios are "the two dominant media, overwhelmingly."

While much of the continent lacks newspapers and broadband, Africa is in some ways light years ahead of the more developed world. "You're really starting from scratch," he said. "They never had land line phones; cellphones are the first they ever hand. They leapfrogged that old-fashioned technology. In some ways, they're more in the vanguard than we are, figuring out how to use these tools in very affordable, inclusive ways. If we're interested in where journalism is going globally, it's one of the more interesting laboratories."

To observers like Orme, platform is an increasingly important and varied factor in any discussion of citizen journalism. In some areas, the Internet rules. In others, lacking broadband, cellphones and text messaging dominate. Elsewhere, radio remains the primary interconnecting medium.

"There's a cautionary tale here for Americans, to understand that the way much of the world engages with the media, they not only do not see a bright line but no line between social media and journalism," said Susan Moeller, director of the University of Maryland's International Center for Media and the Public Agenda. [20]

"Sitting in Washington," she added, "it's very hard to see how blurred the line is between news and information. "If you are a fisherman off the coast of Africa, you're coming to three different ports and you can use social media to figure out which port will give you the best price for your catch. Is that information or is that news?

In Morocco, a blogger filmed and posted traffic police asking for bribes. "The Moroccan public became much more aware; police became accountable," said Eltahawy. "At the beginning, they would arrest the blogger, but it became his protection."

In Saudi Arabia, bloggers offered first-hand accounts of flooding in Jeddah on the west coast in which several died. "Eyewitness accounts from bloggers forced the Saudi royal family to form a commission to look into what had happened and why services were lacking," Eltahawy said. "They never felt the need to answer to the public in the past. But here they were conducting investigations …

"I think it's important to remember in the case of some of these absolute dictators who've controlled everything forever, they allow these openings because they don't think it will lead to much," said Eltahawy. "None of these young people who are citizen journalists or bloggers are going to overthrow any regime next week. But these regimes may underestimate what they are doing over time. They are the first generation to answer back and question online and show everyone things in ways other generations could not."

Belarus: Citizen Journalists' Risky Business

When the editor and founder of Charter97, a citizens' human rights organization with a Web presence, was found hanging in his home near Minsk on September 3, 2010, authorities ruled it a suicide. But Oleg Bebenin left no suicide note, and friends and supporters were skeptical.

Within three weeks, the site had carried 598 comments, mainly expressing outrage and condolences. Citizen journalism, or opinion? Or was the torrent of reaction itself the news, conveyed by citizens?

Prior to the suspicious death of Bebenin, the Charter97 site had been attacked and made inaccessible to users. Distributed denial of service "attacks against charter97.org have been organized very often in the last months," the website reported. "Earlier attacks were carried out during opposition demonstrations and elections, when people can take to streets in protest against rigging elections results."

On July 16, 2010, Charter97's site[1] was temporarily disabled by "the strongest" cyber-attack after showing a documentary not otherwise available in Belarus accusing authorities and President Alexander Lukashenko of "implication in disappearances and killings of famous Belarusian politicians, public figures and journalists."[2]

Such is the climate in the increasingly autocratic former Soviet republic of Belarus that journalism–whether practiced by citizens or professionals–can be a risky affair. So risky in fact that outside funders and supporters work discretely and would speak about conditions only if they and their organizations were not identified.

"We have a media assistance project in Belarus, but due to the sensitivity and the potential danger to our local partners on the ground," said one such person[3], "we do not publicize this at all."

His organization is working well under the radar to support citizen journalists. The modus operandi is reminiscent of darker days but with a new technological twist.

"The only way to communicate is by Skype," the source said. "Because it is encrypted, they feel a little bit safer. Citizen journalists don't want to communicate by phone or e-mail. They have good reason to feel intimidated."

Traditional media are subject to frequent tax inspections. Media must register, and the address must be an office building, at commercial rental rates, and not a private residence. Outside funding organizations cannot make payments directly to Belarus. Instead, grants are made to local organizations in Vilnius, in neighboring Lithuania, and the recipients get paid in person and return to Belarus with cash.

"We are training young people, establishing informal journalists' schools, usually at a private address, limited to one day because after two or three days running, the secret police figure it out," the source said. "This is primarily for young people who want to get involved in citizen journalism. They are using their cellphones, the Internet. We are helping them develop websites and platforms for chat rooms."

There is a lot of texting on cellphones, he said, but use of the Internet has become "very, very difficult," especially since a new law known as Decree No. 60 went into effect on July 1, 2010. It requires all websites to register with the government, and, according to Euroradio,[4] "Providers of services of websites have to limit the access of their subscriber equipment to information considered to be deleterious."

Even before then, on January 4, 2010, President Lukashenko signed a law[5] giving the Operating and Analytical Center, which reports to him, the right to control online correspondence and monitor website browsing, all under the guise of clamping down "on criminal activity."

Under another government resolution,[6] adopted in April, Internet cafes are required to collect personal

information about users, including names and which websites the user visited.

These restrictions went into effect in the months leading up to the fall 2010 elections—a time when the government would be most active in silencing its critics or negative news reports, and a time when the free flow of information is critical to a functioning democracy. How can citizen journalists function in such an environment?

One way is for websites to be hosted outside the country.

Charter97.org, the "oppositional" website, is hosted on a server located in Houston, Texas. According to Pastebin, which tracks Web traffic, the site has an estimated 61,312 visitors a day, which generates $196 daily in advertising income.[7] Charter97 contributors get paid but "not very much," according to a U.S. government source who requested anonymity to speak frankly about the situation. The organization is "propped up by donations from Western countries and foundations."

The blocking of the site led Charter97 to post other stories, including "How to circumvent site blocking?", "Dictator vs. Internet: who will win?", and "Dictator says Internet is a 'dump,' but is going to regulate it."

Charter97.org is named for a 1997 declaration calling for democracy in Belarus and echoing Charter 77, the Czechoslovak human rights declaration issued 20 years earlier. It characterizes itself as non-partisan, but is clearly in opposition to the government. Is it journalism, or is it advocacy, or independent citizens' voice? And in a country such as Belarus, does the distinction matter?

"In Belarus, its website is the main independent source of human rights and free expression activities in the country," said Human Rights House[8], of the United Kingdom, giving it an Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award in March 2010. "The site comes under constant attack by hackers thought to be working for the country's secret service … Along with her team, head of press Natallia Radzina works to bring to light the cases of arrest, detention and harassment of critical journals and human rights activists, despite being arrested on a regular basis." [9]

Journalists in Belarus–professional or otherwise–are not alone in their struggle to report the news. Supporting organizations meet twice a year, in the spring and fall, and usually in Vilnius, which Belarusians can visit without a visa.

At the Belarus Media Sector Coordination Meeting in May 2010, this one held in Warsaw, a representative from the Belarus Association of Journalists noted, "Access to information is still a big problem in Belarus."[10]

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Monetizing Citizen Journalism

They don't call it the news *business* for nothing.

The experiences of *OhmyNews* and *AllVoices*–global operations based in South Korea and San Francisco, respectively–strongly suggest that private investment and online advertising alone cannot pay for citizen journalism. *OhmyNews*' business model failed, and *AllVoices*, its founder acknowledges, is still far from financially secure. [See Sidebar on Page 22.]

"Some initiatives have virtually no financial model at all, or are entirely volunteer run, and others are elaborate attempts to create that option from traditional media platforms," Reen, of Internews, said via e-mail.[21]

OhmyNews fit into the latter category, and it seemed to succeed, at first. "Eight years ago, it fit into the constellation of existing newspapers, filled a niche the mainstream media were not responding to because of existing political affiliation," said Ivan Sigal, of Global Voices.[22] "It helped to bring a political party into power. It evolved as a model, with citizen journalists and staff. It tried different things over the years. It allowed people to participate as piecework, and the editing process was guaranteed."

But, ultimately, *OhmyNews* was a financial flop and ceased to generate original content. It did a re-set in September 2010 with a new site that would be merely a forum for unpaid posters to discuss the present and future of citizen journalism.

"Nobody's figured out yet how to pay for this," said Breiner, of the Digital Journalism Center in Mexico. "I think it's going to become stronger as this develops. When they figure out how to commercialize that audience, when they figure out the business side, I think a lot of these sites will be fine."[23]

Breiner cites the experience of a Mexican freelance journalist Cesar Angulo, who also blogs about the environment at http://bionero.org. "He's got day job and he's got this other thing he's trying to develop so can quit his day job. It's a work in progress." The website generates about $9,000 a year in advertising revenue.[24]

In Panama, the joint venture of traditional media and citizen journalists to identify and map crime on the Internet is being underwritten in part by the Knight Foundation–as are many other citizen journalist efforts.

Said Sharon Moshavi, senior director for new initiatives at the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ): "Citizen journalists do not replace professional journalists, but the two together have incredible value, and experimenting with that in a variety of ways is hugely important, and donors need to be responsive to that. There is a need right now for a lot of experimentation. We don't have the rules written. There's huge potential to achieve donor goals by supporting these kinds of projects."[25]

It is difficult to determine precisely how much public and foundation funds are being funneled into citizen journalism. "A tremendous amount of money is going to fund those projects," said Moeller, of the University of Maryland. "Some are very much under the radar. They just don't appear in public view."

But what happens when the money runs out?

In pre-conference notes for the Global Voices Citizen Media Summit in Santiago, Chile, in May 2010, Anne Nelson, Columbia University professor of journalism, described "the lifecycle" of a citizen journalism project from a funding perspective.[26] "A good project emerges, donors offer seed money, the project grows. The crunch arrives at the next phase: grant expires, next proposal is submitted. Now the bar is raised–it's not enough to have an interesting idea. The project must either make the leap to being sustainable … or develop a business model."

With finite funds available, donors might also ask themselves whether their financial support of citizen journalism–sometimes unedited and un-fact checked–is preferable to helping online news operations professionally staffed and paid, or even traditional print and broadcast media whose coverage has declined along with their revenues.

"Citizen journalists do not replace professional journalists, but the two together have incredible value...and donors need to be responsive to that.

— Sharon Moshavi

However, for private ventures that seek to play in the online citizen journalism arena, the future is now … or perhaps never.

"We need to grow, raise more money, build brand, add more people and monetize this sucker," is the blunt assessment of *AllVoices* founder Amra Tareen. "That's why either AllVoices will become big to that scale and monetize or it won't. We're at that point. We haven't figured it all out. We're still figuring it all out. That's what start up businesses are. Citizen journalism is a start up business, it absolutely is … it's not mainstream."[27]

Can Citizen Journalism Pay Its Own Way?

What does it take to "monetize" citizen journalism?

Apparently, no human editors. Instead, leave it to algorithms to separate the wheat from the chaff. And even then, with exceedingly low overhead resulting from minimal paid staff, the bottom line is far from assured.

OhmyNews and *AllVoices*[1] are two global efforts at Web-based citizen journalism that offer lessons in the challenges that even funded organizations face in a world where the notion that "information wants to be free"[2] is often uttered.

OhmyNews, founded by Korean journalist-activist Oh Yeon-ho, first launched in beta version on December 21, 1999, and fomally at 2:22 p.m. on February 22, 2000. Its motto, from lectures he had given promoting the idea: "Every Citizen Is a Reporter."

Under the *OhmyNews* model, citizen reporters would be paid up to $20 per article, depending on its placement on the site. In addition, the reporters could receive up to $54 from readers as "tips" for particularly good stories. By September 2000, *OhmyNews* had 5,000 citizen reporters; by November 2001, it had 15,000, and 42,000 by May 2006.[3]

The citizen journalist website provided an alternative news source leading up to the 2002 presidential election.[4] Successful candidate Roh Moo-Hyun benefitted from counter-arguments his supporters posted on *OhmyNews*. But that may have been the high point for *OhmyNews* and citizen journalism in Korea.

Critics faulted *OhmyNews* for not reporting Roh's failings in the areas of high unemployment, the economy, and lack of diplomatic progress with North Korea.[5] Financial problems developed by mid-decade, with the *Los Angeles Times* reporting on June 18, 2007, that *OhmyNews* had lost money in fiscal year 2006, despite ad revenue of $6 million. Also troubling was the rise and demise of *OhmyNews* Japan, which Yeon-ho had launched with high hopes.

By 2009**,** Yeon-ho was resorting to soliciting donations, asking that 100,000 "members"[6] each contribute 10,000 won ($8.86 a month) to keep the site afloat.

Months later, however, *OhmyNews* had attracted only a little more than 5,800 financial donors. "Time running out for *OhmyNews*' members' club," a British journalists' website noted. [7]

"One of the world's oldest 'citizen journalism' experiments in trouble. Is this the future?" tweeted "ryanscribe" in the comment section. "Wasn't this the future for journalism two years ago?" asked "paddyhoey," in another comment.

In July 2009, Oh Yeon-ho disclosed that *OhmyNews* was losing 700 million won a year ($6.02 million) and appealed for more contributions.[8] "Let us change the course of media once more," he urged readers. "Together with you, we would like to become the first model of citizen participatory internet media that becomes financially self-reliant through the power of the people, awake and acting with their conscience.

"In the past, about 70 to 80 percent of *OhmyNews* revenue came from corporate advertising and sponsorships. In contrast, contributions from readers only totaled five percent of total revenue. I have always believed that if we are truly a citizen participatory Internet media than the contributions from readers should be at least half of the total revenue.

"*OhmyNews* has about 70 employees on staff. Every month, about 450 million won is spent to pay wages, article submissions and server costs. Every day, over 4 million readers read our content. However, only about 2,000 freely contribute financially. That is why we have relied on corporations, large and small, for their advertising revenue.

"However, with the international financial crisis at hand, corporate advertising dollars have dropped dramatically. We are grateful for the remaining advertisers that have stayed with us. But we cannot continue to ask our advertisers for further support … At the half-way mark this year, we are 500 million won in the red. Last year, we initiated salary cuts and we have lost 10 employees since, however with the situation as is, it would be impossible avoid another deficit …

"Next February, *OhmyNews* will celebrate its 10 year anniversary. Let us declare the following for the 10 year anniversary: that we have enabled financial independence for citizen participatory internet media. If we can realize this hope, then the world will once again focus on *OhmyNews* and the Korean citizens. And our democracy will flourish."

OhmyNews did indeed mark its first decade in February 2010, but the hoped-for financial bailout did not materialize. On September 10, 2010, *OhmyNews* ceased to publish reported news on its website and relaunched with a new website[9] devoted solely to an open-ended discussion of citizen journalism and its future, a "blog dedicated to covering and discussing the world of citizen journalism itself."[10]

San Francisco-based *AllVoices* also has a global reach. It was launched in 2008 by Amra Tareen, a native of Pakistan educated at the University of New South Wales and who holds an MBA from Harvard University.

"My whole goal was regardless of where a person was, whether Baghdad, Lahore [Pakistan], or San Francisco, they could share with rest of world what was going on where they were," she said in an interview.[11] "The whole concept was people would write it, our system would categorize and post, others would add or create their own report. We don't give assignments. It's whatever they want to write about."

The site also blended its citizen journalist reports with links to stories from traditional media, acting as an aggregator-plus.

Tareen, a former investment fund executive, launched the site with an initial $4.5 million infusion from VantagePoint Venture Partners, of San Bruno, California, which invested $3 million more in January 2010.[12] There would be a skeleton staff, focused largely on marketing and technology, and no editors. Instead stories would be vetted and ranked in importance through a proprietary algorithm that could even detect copyright violations.

"We have 410,000 citizens posters, reporters, CJs, whatever you want to call them. From 180 countries," Tareen said in the interview in September 2010.[13] "The assumptions in the model are keeping cost low, using technology and citizens. When you do it that way, it makes sense from a model perspective, but have we proven it out? No we haven't."

This was "citizen journalism" at its most basic, but there were incentives. "Start reporting, reach millions, and make money!" the *AllVoices* site boasts.[14] *AllVoices* promises royalty payments two times the "industry standard." Payment is based on the number of hits, and there is a graduated scale, in which contributors can rise from stringer to reporter to anchor. Aki Hashmi, *AllVoices'* chief marketing manager, however, says the site's top earners "are making $2,000 a month."[15] But not all contributors have felt fairly compensated, some going so far as to call *AllVoices* a scam.[16]

"We've seen people who've complained in past, gone elsewhere, they eventually come back to us, become more active than before. And they come back and stay," said Hashmi. Added Tareen: "My goal was not for people to make money. I wanted them to write because they wanted to write. Not to make income, but to share with rest of the world. We got suckered into this incentive program."

Still, *AllVoices* has grown rapidly,[17] with 3 million unique visitors by May 2010, of whom 730,000 were from the United States. The content is not all straight news; it includes blogs, images, and videos. "Over the past few months, *AllVoices* has been ramping up its the presence of its platform internationally, launching global news desks[18] in 30 different cities around the world, where both professional and citizen journalists will

provide regular in-country reports from the ground," wrote Leena Rao in July, on the TechCrunch website.[19]

Tareen said *AllVoices*' primary income comes from advertising, but the venture has yet to turn a net profit. "It's very early in monetization stage, two years old from launch."

At this writing, Tareen is looking for another investor with deep pockets, "to build the brand and improve on monetization," in part by adding to the sales force. But there are no plans to hire human editors. "Investors," she said, "want quick cash flow in this environment." Can its business model of citizen journalism succeed?

"I do believe citizen journalism is in its infancy," said Tareen. "What scares me is we may be a little too early. From an investment perspective on the value of citizen journalism … it's not a good time to have a start up, unless you have very strong financial backers. We have a business model we haven't fully executed. Whether we have bright future, whether we can monetize it, those questions are still to be answered. Only time will tell."

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Conclusion

Citizen journalism–or citizen media–didn't begin with the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter, or with the advent of cellphones. Even in societies ruled by authoritarian regimes, the word has historically gotten out, whether from the mimeograph machines run in basements by the French underground during World War II, or in self-published manuscripts replicated with carbon paper or photocopied in countries of the former Soviet bloc.

But thanks to technology, today's iteration offers a greater bandwidth of opportunity and the ability to reach more people with both news and views, despite governmental efforts at suppression. "Citizen journalism requires not just an environment where it is possible to use the Internet and get the word out but also where there are enough activists willing to try. There is no place where that is completely absent now," said Douglas Wake, first deputy director, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.[28]

Should donors, including governments, support citizen journalism directly, or indirectly?

Based on the evidence, such a bold assertion seems correct. Questions arise, however, over matters of definition and standards.

"In many parts of Asia," said Internews's Reen, "citizen journalists are unencumbered by legacy media; initiatives start from scratch, and are often less concerned with traditional newsroom models or whether or not they are linked to newspapers, or TV or print. There's a good deal of leapfrogging of experience going on."[29]

Said Elisa Tinsley, director of the Knight International Journalism Fellowships at ICFJ, "Citizen journalism takes different forms in different places, depending on the attitudes of society. They can't be advocates, and therein should lie the difference between professional and citizen journalists. It's difficult to hold citizen journalists to the same standards without [their] understanding the rules and guidelines of professional journalism. I don't think it's easy to put a definition. It can be a very gray area."[30]

It can be a gray area not only for media thinkers and implementers but also for funders, who have their own perspectives and agendas and are seeking to render assistance in a changing political and technological landscape. One threshold question: Should donors, including governments, support citizen journalism directly, or indirectly?

"It's fine to support infrastructure–to build up broadband networks, support legal environmental, education and training, digital media literacy," said Sigal, of Global Voices. "But governments should stay away from directly funding individuals because it looks like they're buying them off, and they are."[31]

Sigal believes funders need more data-driven research to justify their investments. "Funding governments have foreign policy and economic agendas; corporate funders, such as the Gates Foundation, see citizen journalism projects as a means to an end and insist on measurement," he said.

"It's now easy to measure Web traffic, clicks, and sales. It's hard if not impossible to measure democratization," Columbia's Nelson said at the Global Voices Citizen Media Summit in Chile.

Amra Tareen, of *AllVoices*, believes that donors "should not fund local, small things. People want to belong to something big. Small communities stay for a while but lose steam. All these people funding local citizen journalism need to get together. That's how this will become a big movement–or it won't."[32] Aki Hashmi, *AllVoices* chief marketing manager, thinks that funders hoping to effect change "need a platform like *AllVoices* to enable the masses in parts of the world. They need this to power this type of movement." [33]

Still, there is reluctance among funders to support citizen journalism in conflict areas, though some do, covertly. So much of the focus, at least in public, has been on citizen journalism success stories. Treading in more dangerous waters may be necessary.

"We are so intent on finding and celebrating successful citizen media projects that we might be blinding ourselves to the lessons we can learn from failures," Sigal said at the Global Voices Media Summit.[34]

"I think a lot of the media training groups, the free press groups–when they are involved not just in a place like Burma but in the Balkans, in Central Asia, and a good swatch of Africa–understand that there is no way you can support an independent journalist without essentially working against the current government," said Moeller. "In so many of these places, the [governments] are on record as trying to repress free and independent media. Is that advocacy, activism, objective journalism? Or at once all of the above?"[35]

Such a question may not sharpen the focus on citizen journalism, but it necessarily widens the lens through which such efforts must be viewed.

Recommendations

- Funders should promote digital media literacy and support educational and training efforts for citizen journalists, especially in emerging democracies and, to the extent possible, where authoritarian regimes rule.

- While supporting such enterprises in countries where merely to raise questions is to challenge authority, media implementers should more expansively define "citizen journalism" to include blogs and opinion pieces.

- Foundations, think thanks and governments may need more data-driven research to justify expenditures in this arena. Funders should support such efforts. What are the metrics, platform by platform? They may vary from country to country, but once the numbers are known, funding decisions can be more focused and perhaps have more lasting impact.

- Funders should increase their support of "citizen journalism" efforts in conflict areas, despite the obstacles, to inform citizens about the news that affects them, their communities, and their daily lives.

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