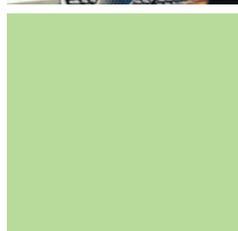
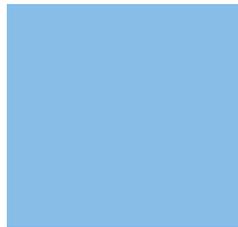


Rethinking Public Service Broadcasting's Place in International Media Development

BY SUSAN ABBOTT

February 2016





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

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Introduction

In the Internet age, the notion of public service broadcasting—television or radio that is publicly funded but independently operated in the public interest—may seem quaint. After all, most members of the public now have almost limitless channels to express themselves and receive information via a plethora of digital and mobile platforms.

Yet international donors who support the development of free and independent media around the world would be well-served to pay attention to the role—and the potential—of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the information systems of countries. Despite pronouncements going back more than 20 years that PSB is an obsolete, ineffective, and costly form of media, PSB has endured as a means of providing news, entertainment, and information to millions of people around the world.

Resistance to promoting PSB as part of media development, particularly from U.S. donors, stems from two concerns, one about political will and the other about state capacity. First is a traditional distrust—and plenty of examples to feed that distrust—of governments that refuse to allow independence of PSB operations and content. Second is the history in developing countries of weak institutions that are incapable of protecting the independence of publicly-funded media, even when the government is ostensibly committed to do so.

Indeed, efforts to promote independent media generally take place in countries with a long history of state-controlled media, with little or no experience operating in an environment of freedom of expression or open access to information. And these countries are also less likely to have widespread access to the Internet or mobile technologies, leaving broadcast media the dominant form of public information. Simply leaving state-run media to control the airwaves is not an option when it comes to democratizing media space.

In recent years, another more worrying trend in the commercial media space is the collusion of private owners with semi-democratic regimes. In country after country, private owners of media are working hand in hand with governments to promote a particular power structure and to limit robust debate about matters of public interest. This so-called capture of the private media—a phenomenon that affects to varying degrees almost every country in the world—means that simple privatization is not a cure-all for creating a diverse media sector that promotes a variety of views and opinions.



Despite pronouncements going back more than 20 years that PSB is an obsolete, ineffective, and costly form of media, PSB has endured as a means of providing news, entertainment, and information to millions of people around the world.

Media developers and donors are taking a second look at public service broadcasting. Could it be that PSB, even with all its challenges and pitfalls, might offer a new path for opening up the media environment?

And even in countries where the private media has not been fully captured by the government, the commercial media sector's main focus will always be about profit-making, growing its advertising base, and securing high ratings, with no imperative to provide programming in diverse languages nor to offer cultural, educational programming.

For these reasons, media developers and donors are taking a second look at public service broadcasting. Could it be that PSB, even with all its challenges and pitfalls, might offer a new path for opening up the media environment? And while no one is advocating that PSB be the exclusive method of delivering news and information, could it be a critical building block of a diverse media sector, one piece among a variety of ownership and management structures that might help in the struggle to ensure media diversity?

For the media development community, these questions are coming back to the agenda with a growing urgency. Indeed, PSB has a mandate to offer news and information that is in line with the core rationale and justification for donor-supported media development—independent, objective media accessible to all. The “elephant in the room,” however, is how to best support the creation of a PSB, and notably for many of its critics, how to ensure that it will be free of government interference and financially viable.



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What is PSB and How Does It Differ From State-Run Broadcasting?

PSB, broadcasting funded directly or indirectly by the state, came about during the early twentieth century, and originated in large part from the founding and evolution of ideas, principles, and charters of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC).

Originally conceived at a time of spectrum scarcity, having a national public service broadcaster was deemed essential on grounds of fairness and ensuring that all citizens of a nation have access to quality, impartial, independent news and information that was shaped and delivered with the nation's interests, values, and ideals in mind.

In the view of David Levy, formerly the controller for public policy at the BBC until 2007 and now the director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, a PSB is a broadcaster that tries to deliver programming to a wide range of the public and serves the people's needs—the consumers and the citizens. It has a primary responsibility to listeners and viewers—more so than to the government. This is difficult because governments create the legislative framework. **At the heart of the matter when it comes to defining PSBs is independence from the government.** There must be significant support from the public, and the broadcaster must be responsible to the citizens, behave professionally, and have a strong code of ethics.¹

As Marius Dragomir, senior manager/publications editor for the Open Society Foundation's (OSF) Independent Journalism Program, says:

Of course, the definition of PSB varies broadly from region to region and country to country, but in the community of practitioners, experts, and policy makers, we all have more or less the same understanding of what a public broadcaster should be. The definition has to do with its status and governance (independent public entity), funding (publicly funded) and mission/programming (whose mission is to serve the general public with programming that caters to all layers of society, including minorities and marginalized ones).²

Public service broadcasting is an institution that provides a service to everyone, according to Dr. Winston Mano, a Zimbabwean media scholar based at the University of Westminster in London. And it can serve as a model for the media development community. "When it comes to offering a



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What is Public Service Media?

“The defining characteristics of public service media are many. For instance, the concept includes the classic features like universal service (meaning widespread and free availability); nation-building; children’s and minority-interest programming; educational, cultural and language development, etc. But one especially noteworthy feature is news and current affairs. This is particularly relevant for democratic practices like elections, accountability of governments, and people’s participation in civic affairs.”

— *Beyond Broadcasting: The Future of State-Owned Broadcasters in Southern Africa.*

diverse range of types of programming content, quality, the languages, the cultures in a diverse society,” he says, “only PSB can help, especially when it comes to providing information and content for minority populations.”³

The notion of publicly offered content in a variety of languages and perspectives was emphasized by many experts interviewed for this paper as one of the most essential reasons why PSB is needed as one of the elements of the media environment, especially given that sufficient pluralism or diversity of content is unlikely to be offered by commercial media providers. As an example, Radio Television Serbia offers news packages and programs, especially through its radio service, in Serbian, Hungarian, German, Roma, and other languages. If funding were cut for these language services, the impact would be a paucity of programming for these minority communities throughout the country. Every European country has variants of this, and in media development terms it is a considered a key component of a successful media system that news, information, and even entertainment programming be provided in a manner consistent with standards of pluralism.

In addition to the issue of independence, the matter of financing models was highlighted as crucial for defining PSB. Toby Mendel, executive director of the Centre for Law and Democracy and formerly with Article 19, adds “Most (perhaps all) successful examples also receive public funding, which I would probably say was a requirement.”⁴ Mixed funding models for PSB in the eyes of many experts, i.e., a combination of advertising and public subsidies, is problematic for the authenticity of the PSB.

For some, PSB comes down to values. As James Deane, director of policy and learning for BBC Media Action, reflected on why he thinks that investing in public service broadcasting is important, he said that for him it comes down to “trust, audience, creativity, and respect.” Deane referred to the BBC mission and values,⁵ which he said guides not only the world of BBC Media Action, but also its vision for supporting PSB in places such as Afghanistan, an example of where the development of national PSB is tied to its support of nation-building in a fledgling democracy and as a means to transfer the types of values and purposes that have guided the BBC to the Afghan media sector.

In order for the PSB system to take root, however, there needs to be societal commitment to the values and purpose of PSB. Media provide the “connective tissue of democracy,” explained media scholar and PSB expert Michael Tracey, professor at Colorado University, Boulder—and this is often lacking. “There’s a certain intractability of the problem,” he said in an interview. “Democracies are not Lego sets.” Simply creating a media system will not amount to much if society does not have the commitment to the media system as a whole.

The BBC Model is Inspired by Its Values and Purpose

BBC

BBC Values

- **Trust** is the foundation of the BBC: we are independent, impartial and honest.
- **Audiences** are at the heart of everything we do.
- We take **pride in delivering quality and value** for money.
- **Creativity** is the lifeblood of our organisation.
- **We respect each other and celebrate our diversity** so that everyone can give their best.
- **We are one BBC:** great things happen when we work together.

The BBC's six public purposes are set out by the Royal Charter and Agreement, the constitutional basis for the BBC as presented to Parliament. These purposes outline the values the BBC holds when striving to achieve its mission to inform, educate and entertain.

SIX PUBLIC PURPOSES AND HOW THEY WILL BE DELIVERED

1 Sustaining citizenship and civil society

The BBC provides high-quality news, current affairs, and factual programming to engage its viewers, listeners, and users in important current and political issues.

2 Promoting education and learning

The support of formal education in schools and colleges and informal knowledge and skills building.

3 Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence

Encouraging interest, engagement and participation in cultural, creative and sporting activities across the UK.

4 Representing the UK, its nations, regions, and communities

BBC viewers, listeners and users can rely on the BBC to reflect the many communities that exist in the UK.

5 Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK

The BBC will build a global understanding of international issues and broaden UK audiences' experience of different cultures.

6 Delivering to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services

Assisting UK residents to get the best out of emerging media technologies now and in the future.

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING AND MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

In the late 1990s, academics, pundits, government officials, and media leaders voiced their opinion that public service broadcasting was in the final throes of its existence, or as Tracey called it, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*.⁶ This "deepening crisis" of PSB refers to threats from market pressures, digitalization and convergence, globalization, the rapid spread of satellite technology, and the rise of mobile devices and Internet-accessible news and entertainment programming. A variety of reasons have been identified for the predicted eventual demise of a media construct that some say only made sense within the confines of the media ecologies and systems of the twentieth century.⁷

Despite the skepticism about the future of public service broadcasting, it continues to be a major focus of many media development efforts. For many countries, PSB offers the best means of reflecting the values, norms,



Contrary to the idea that digitalization provides a panacea for all that's wrong with media systems, many experts believe that what is fundamentally still needed across the world is better journalism, along with a means of ensuring that all people have access to fair, balanced, and quality news and information.

and public policy preferences that are enshrined in the socio-legal systems and constitutional cultures for their countries.

Indeed, a quick scan of media systems around the world reveals very few places without an existing, functioning PSB or some kind of effort underway to create one. While PSB transitions have had their fair share of problems—and in some countries efforts to create a viable PSB have not panned out—there are in fact many instances of success. These provide examples that can help make sense of the complicated business of transforming a state-run media system as well as for inspiration for re-imagining public service broadcasting in a digital age.

In the context of international assistance to support the development of free and independent media in developing and transitioning countries, debates about how, when, and whether to support the transition of a state-run broadcaster into a public service broadcaster echo the spirited debates in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK about whether in the twenty-first century public service broadcasting remains necessary in light of austerity and competing demands for public funds. Issues of cost, control, management structures, competition, and technology are of concerns for whether it's appropriate to channel limited donor funding to help set up a PSB system. Central to the debate is whether commercial media systems alone can adequately provide for quality news and information with sufficient democratic value.⁸

A review of key literature and interviews with more than 20 public service broadcasting experts around the world makes clear that a reasonable case can be made that public service broadcasting is an enduring component of media systems in many parts of the globe. PSB provides a vision and a public sector governance model for what people would like to see in a free, independent, democratic media. The potential of convergence and digitalization has made PSB both more complicated yet perhaps even more warranted, in the eyes of some. Contrary to the idea that digitalization provides a panacea for all that's wrong with media systems, many experts believe that what is fundamentally still needed across the world is better journalism, along with a means of ensuring that all people have access to fair, balanced, and quality news and information. Adding to this already challenging situation is the effect that the rapid spread of global media, including satellite channels, cable, and Internet-based communication has had on local media ecosystems. These threats and challenges have created a new opportunity for rethinking PSB.

In an important paper produced by USAID in 1999, *The Role of Media and Democracy, A Strategic Approach*, the following rationale for media development was offered:

Within the context of supporting democratic transitions, the goal of media development generally should be to move the media from one that is directed or even overtly controlled by government or private interests to one that is more open and has a degree of editorial independence that serves the public interest. If the media is to have any meaningful role in democracy, then the ultimate goal of media assistance should be to develop a range of diverse mediums and voices that are credible, and to create and strengthen a sector that promotes such outlets... A media sector supportive of democracy would be one that has a degree of editorial independence, is financially viable, has diverse and plural voices, and serves the public interest.⁹

This rationale still guides media development work today. It's debatable what type of media system is most conducive to supporting public interest goals and what counts as the public interest. There isn't even firm agreement on the meaning of the phrase "public service." As noted British media scholar Paddy Scannell writes, what public service means is elusive at best.¹⁰

Efforts to develop a PSB ultimately are often in response to reforming a state broadcasting system, which may help explain why PSB models have resonated around the world and have received significant backing from the OSCE, UNDP, UNESCO, various European funders, and several private institutions such as the Open Society Foundations and the Ford Foundation. Elizabeth Smith, a veteran PSB expert who has held leadership positions at the BBC and the Public Media Alliance (formerly the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association), points out, "PSB has a huge effect on social cohesion, democratic understanding, and social development."¹¹

So, what is the mission and vision of PSB? UNESCO, generally acknowledged as one the most ardent supporters of public service broadcasting, defines PSB as follows:

PSB is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned. It is free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through PSB, citizens are informed, educated and also entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.¹²



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Why support public service media? UNESCO's rationale:

*PSB can also make a major contribution to democratic development. Fair news coverage, in which both good and bad things are reported about the governing and opposition parties, helps the electorate to reach an informed view of the quality of the candidates, and to keep governments accountable. So moving towards Public Service Broadcasting is not just "nice to have." It is a major supporting pillar of a functioning democracy.*¹³



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This view is shared by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and in two recent cases, in Central Asia and in Ukraine, Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, has called for support for PSB as a means of nation-building and conflict resolution. Lending her support for the transition of state-run media into PSB, Mijatović said, "Public service broadcasting has a number of benefits for societies—it is able to foster social cohesion, national identity and promote the country's common culture and heritage."¹⁴

Given the complexity of media development and the rapid regression of press freedom around the world,¹⁵ it would be worthwhile for the media development sector as a whole to think about the models of media system support, and in light of how the sector has matured, what types of media interventions actually yield the most impact and lead to overarching goals of nation-building, democratization, and stability.

QUESTIONS KEY TO THIS DEBATE:

- Should the media development community do more to provide support for the development of public service broadcasting in developing and transitioning countries?
- Would the development of stronger, more robust national PSBs be more conducive to achieving media development goals?
- Are there alternative visions of public service broadcasting that would make sense in light of twenty-first-century challenges to the goals of supporting democratic media, and if so, what do they look like?
- What are the supporting institutions that ensure independence and how do weak or transitional countries build and sustain such institutions?
- How do we analyze the level of public support for PSB and the government's political will to allow it to operate as an independent public entity?

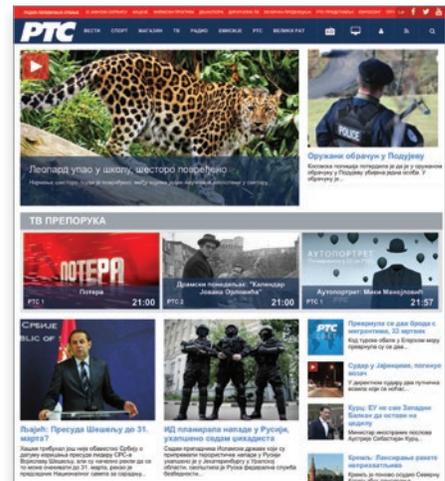
These are questions that the media development community—donors, NGOs, academics, and media outlets—should be debating. At this juncture in the history of media development there needs to be more critical reflection and assessment about the value and place of PSB (or, increasingly, public service media writ large) in the countries where media development takes place.

With respect to the first question—should the media development community do more?—the short answer would appear to be yes. After all, if one looks at the legacy of media development programs in post-communist Europe, for instance, it has been the PSB that has proven the most likely to endure after the donors have gone. In Serbia, for example, the recent closure of B92’s radio news services, once a symbol of success for independent media development, offers a stark example of how difficult it is for high quality private, commercial media to survive under current business conditions. Meanwhile, Radio Television Serbia, once considered the mouthpiece of Milosevic, is by comparison doing well as a relatively new independent PSB. Both B92 and RTS received substantial donor support.

Concerning the question about alternatives to PSB, this is a matter of considerable debate with some experts contending that PSB has transitioned into an era of public service media (PSM), a term that more adequately captures the expanded range of services and platforms on which information, journalism, entertainment, and other communication is offered. The media development community should lend its voice to the debates going on about public service media. Given the expense and technical expertise required for digitalization, not to mention the considerable digital divide that exists in many countries where media assistance is most active, media outlets and journalists in developing countries would be well-served to have their views represented in any discussions about how new technologies will affect their efforts to bring about PSB or PSM in their countries. In Africa, for example, at a time when growing numbers of people are getting access to the Internet through mobile devices, few state or public media have successfully undergone the digitalization process.

Most media development programs operate in a situation where there is parallel transition of many aspects of a society that is formerly state controlled or part of an existing authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regime. Against this backdrop the role of the state and the ability of broadcasters to have any degree of independence matters a great deal for media development.

When it comes to international media assistance aimed at democratizing media, support for the development of public service broadcasting has long been part of potential policy choices that aid providers can endorse and help to nurture. Early examples of such support were led by American and British forces in Germany and Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War. In both cases, foreign aid and military interventions were used to create what are now arguably two of the most successful examples of PSB in the world—Germany’s ARD and ZDF as well as Japan’s NHK.¹⁶ In both cases, the idea of developing a PSB was deemed essential to the act of nation-building.



Radio Television Serbia

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The communist era state-run media systems were riddled with all the qualities of media systems and journalistic practices that supporters of independent media development rally against—government control, bias, and the use of media channels for political favor and the personal gain of power elites.

The events of the post-communist transition, and the outpouring of foreign aid that was aimed at supporting media transitions in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union often included technical support and financial assistance to reform decades-old state-run broadcasters that were relics of an authoritarian past. The communist era state-run media systems were riddled with all the qualities of media systems and journalistic practices that supporters of independent media development rally against—government control, bias, and the use of media channels for political favor and the personal gain of power elites. Reforming old, bloated, and government-controlled media systems involves serious downsizing of staff, modernizing and updating the way media houses function to bring them in line with industry standards, introducing media law and policy that would be supportive of an enabling environment for free and independent media, journalism ethics, self-regulation, and rule of law mechanisms that would make areas such as defamation and libel conform with international standards and good practices.

For most of the countries that were part of the post-1989 wave of media development support in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Council of Europe and EU requirements to have PSBs in place were essential aspects of EU expansion and membership. Unlike Germany and Japan's media transitions after the Second World War, however, the media transitions in post-communist Europe:

- are often subject to competing visions of what independent, free media should look like;
- suffered from uncertainty about levels of donor support or financial investment for their long-term planning and survival;
- are subject to the simultaneous efforts to create a space for commercial, private sector media as well as non-profit, community media, in environments that previously had no free market or history of charitable contributions needed to support alternative media; and
- is going on at a time of growing international, borderless media.

“There are several lessons that emerge from BiH's experience in broadcasting reform. A key lesson is that the process of media reform is just as important as the content. In many ways, the processes of formulating and implementing media reform strategies are closely related to the state of democratic governance in a country—culture and practice concerning transparency, participation, accountability as well as how media reform is integrated into wider democratic governance support.”

— From UNDP study, *Supporting PSB: Learning from BiH's Experience*

THE “BBC MODEL” AND OTHER VISIONS OF PSB FOR MEDIA TRANSITIONS

One of the most often heard refrains from media and media development stakeholders is their desire to have something like the “BBC Model” for their country. While the BBC is symbolic for many of what makes PSB a great institution, due to specific circumstances that have formed its history it may not be easily replicated or exported. In 1920, Lord John Reith, an engineer turned innovator of modern day broadcasting, led the build-out of what would become one of the most important contributions to media and journalism in modern history. Lord Reith’s efforts led to the decision to collect license fees from all households and commitment that the broadcaster would be independently operated and governed.¹⁷

While the BBC provides a prototype of public service broadcasting that from an outsider’s perspective is an enviable institution, for many developing countries it is merely an aspirational model. The amount of money collected through license fees, the enabling environment in which the BBC is situated, and its longstanding history and own period of institutionalization that has grown up in many ways with modern mass media and broadcasting practices give the BBC a somewhat privileged position that would be very hard for newly created PSBs to match. That said, is the BBC a good model of PSB for developing and transitioning countries to look to? Experts are divided:

Monroe Price of the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, put it this way:

While the BBC is for most people an ideal type of what they would like the their PSB to resemble, in reality every country’s path to creating and sustaining a public service broadcaster will be slightly different, and will ultimately culminate in something that is unique to the set of circumstances of the media transition in that particular country.

I also personally believe the BBC’s dominance in the PSB debates worldwide has to do with its cultural and linguistic domination. Germany has an equally independent, well-funded, robust and broadly praised PSB system, but although known and discussed among experts, it does not make it into the popular debates. Finally, the BBC has been the first player in this field and its long history has played a major role in cementing the corporation’s image worldwide.¹⁸

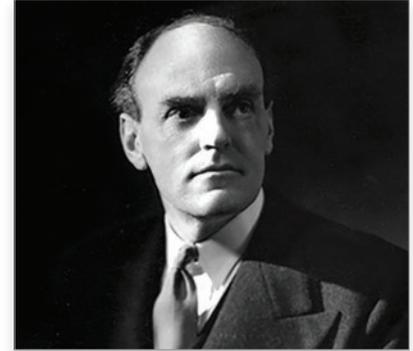


Photo courtesy: BBC

Lord John Reith

Lord Reith’s efforts led to the decision to collect license fees from all households and commitment that the broadcaster would be independently operated and governed.

The BBC model is by no means alone in the range of broadcasting models that present interesting and diverse case studies of how PSB works, is financed, is governed, and is situated against the backdrop of numerous other media and communications choices that make up a broader media ecology. For instance, Germany’s ARD, and Japan’s NHK, present their own merits in the overall story and history of public service broadcasting—both evolved out of previously state-controlled media systems; both were supported and nurtured in their development by Western forces in a period of post-conflict; and both have become an important part of the socio-political culture of the countries they reside in. New Zealand was also highlighted as a model system by some experts, who said that given its size and geographic position, it might be a more suitable model for smaller nations.

WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF A WELL-FUNCTIONING PSB SYSTEM?

PSB transitions around the world present a number of models and prescriptions that might be followed. Standards put forward by development actors such as UNESCO or USAID are one source of ideas, along with media business blueprints that proceed on the basis of audience figures, return on investment, and profit-loss margins. They could also be evaluated in terms of academic, theoretical thinking that seeks to understand the relationship between the state of a media system and

PROPOSED KEY ATTRIBUTES OF BROADCASTING-LED PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

In a Public Media Alliance guide on PSB transitions, Elizabeth Smith proposed key attributes of broadcasting-led public service media:¹⁹

 <p>1 A clear and legal mandate</p>	 <p>2 Nationwide access with maximum interactivity and cross-platform strategies</p>	 <p>3 Opportunities to learn about, and participate in, national cultures</p>	 <p>4 An independently-appointed strategic board of directors, with guaranteed protection from government and commercial interests</p>
 <p>5 Editorial impartiality on political issues</p>	 <p>6 Content for all communities, including all ages and genders, as well as linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities</p>	 <p>7 Substantial funding, ideally on a three-year basis, with regular inflation reviews</p>	 <p>8 A range of accountability and transparency mechanisms</p>

the corresponding political state, i.e., how a media system impacts the overall condition of a political system, discourse, public participation, and numerous other factors. To give some shape to the discussion, however, and in the context of international media development, institutions like UNESCO, the Open Society Foundation, Article 19, and the Public Media Alliance offer a range of useful resources and materials that could help set the benchmarks and overall parameters for understanding the place of PSB in the media ecosystem of a country.²⁰

In UNESCO's Indicators of Media Development, the following four key indicators were singled out by media development experts as important markers of the relative health or sustainability of a PSB:

- The goals of PSB are legally defined and guaranteed
- The operations of PSB do not experience discrimination in any field
- PSBs operate under independent and transparent systems of governance
- PSBs engage with the public and civil society organizations²¹

As part of an effort to gauge the effectiveness of its PSB support, UNESCO conducted an evaluation of its programs in this area. Results revealed that progress on PSB is more likely to occur:

- When there is collaboration with others (collaboration in UNESCO's evaluation includes: other UN agencies, other multilateral institutions, NGOs, state broadcasters, public service broadcasters, broadcasting associations and unions, government representations and sectoral experts)
- Where there are strategic opportunities
- When UNESCO uses project funds to reward progressive policy change
- Where there are staff in the field who are committed to PSB
- When there is follow-up and follow-through on activities
- Where UNESCO has a long-term perspective.²²

One of the key recommendations suggested by the evaluation team was for UNESCO to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of creating a PSB global index.

The topic of models of success raises the question of how the media development community evaluates public service or public interest more broadly across the sector. Going back to the guidance offered in *The Role of Media and Democracy, A Strategic Approach*, it is worthwhile to mention



PSB transitions around the world present a number of models and prescriptions that might be followed. Standards put forward by development actors such as UNESCO or USAID are one source of ideas, along with media business blueprints that proceed on the basis of audience figures, return on investment, and profit-loss margins.



Indicators and metrics of success notwithstanding, there is no formula or step-by-step guide that a transitional country can follow that will necessarily lead to one outcome over another. Media systems, cultures, and transitional trajectories are wedded to the overall health of a country's political and economic situation.

that the sector as a whole lacks suitable frameworks for assessing and evaluating the democratic value of the news programs and packages that it supports. The development of such frameworks would be a major contribution to the sector and to strengthening media systems.

Indicators and metrics of success notwithstanding, there is no formula or step-by-step guide that a transitional country can follow that will necessarily lead to one outcome over another. Media systems, cultures, and transitional trajectories are wedded to the overall health of a country's political and economic situation. A successful PSB transition or any other type of media transition depends on not only on high quality political leadership but a relative degree of political and economic freedom. Moreover, some experts felt that modes of measurement, metrics, and attempts to rank PSB systems missed the point. "Media's contribution to democracy cannot be measured; it's theoretical nonsense," said Tracey, reflecting on many donors' requirement to put performance measures on everything and to superimpose a business model on PSB that is not really an appropriate fit.²³



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Where Are the PSB Successes?

One of the core questions that this paper considers is whether there has ever been a successful transition of a state-run media system into a viable public service broadcaster. Not surprisingly, a mixed bag of what could be defined as success emerges.

Some countries such as Bhutan, Ghana, Poland, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia, and South Africa were highlighted by many experts as standout examples of where PSB has been successful since the 1989 post-Cold War period. (Although in recent years several of these—most notably Poland—have suffered setbacks in terms of their independence from government). Other countries such as Argentina, Chile, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Thailand, and Indonesia were also highlighted for having periods of success that offer important lessons. Morocco and Tunisia were put forward as examples of where PSB might be possible in the Middle East. In nearly every example, issues of independence from government interference, financing models, and perceived unfair competition from commercial, private-sector media were highlighted as the most problematic challenges of PSB.

Every country in Eastern and Southeastern Europe has a public service broadcaster. The 1997 Amsterdam Protocol states clearly that “it is up to each Member State to confer, define, and organize the delivery of the public service remit.”²⁴ Throughout the 1990s post-communist transition, the European Union and the Council of Europe set the tone for hopeful EU member states in terms of the transition of their broadcast systems. It became a requirement for all future EU members to have a PSB. While the 1990s were tumultuous times for the political, economic, and social transitions of these countries—and the sphere of media was every bit as fractured, tense, and fraught with corruption as other parts of society—the information and media environments that we see today are a far cry from their communist-era reality.

The transition of state to public service broadcasting is but one part of the story. It should be emphasized that the introduction of commercial, private sector media in these countries, based on advertising and profit, was indeed revolutionary. The juxtaposition of newly minted commercial media against struggling PSBs that were in search of legitimacy, financing, and independence has played out in interesting ways throughout Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and offer for those interested in media transition some lessons. Intense battles over how a PSB would be set up, who would govern it, what model would



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Mapping Digital Media and PSB Around the World

The Open Society Foundation's Mapping Digital Media project has examined the impact of the "digital switchover" on journalism, democracy, and freedom of expression in 56 countries. In each country report there is significant material on public service broadcasting. A comparative analysis on PSBs around the world and based on this research is forthcoming.

All reports are available online at:

<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/mapping-digital-media>



be used, or how it would be financed were just part of the discussion. There were also issues of how to deal with redundancies and communist era legacies. Dragomir of the OSF's Independent Journalism Program summed up his experiences working in this region, especially around PSB transitions:

I look first at how well these stations have managed to create conditions and space for their independent operations to exist and secondly how appreciated and qualitative their programming is. In short, I am talking about independence and reputation. In terms of operations, after many years of political infighting, the Czech TV, for example, managed to develop into a relatively independent broadcaster thanks to some of its recent management teams that managed to successfully fight off political interferences and advances. Similarly, the Croatian television has made significant progress modernizing its operations and tending to involve more expertise from the top management of the corporate world. In terms of programming, these stations have managed to significantly improve their news operations, distancing themselves as much as they could from the official, governmental lines but also creating a specific, recognizable identity that distinguished them from private operators. Secondly, these broadcasters have been investing in public service strands of programs that are not at all part of the commercial television diet including documentaries, cultural programming and others.²⁵

East Germany stands out as an important case of one country's media system becoming a functional part of another country's media system. The East and West German PSB merger is perhaps overlooked by some as a "success story," but the fact that the east and west halves of Germany were able to make things work is a real accomplishment in the eyes of many. **THE BALTIC COUNTRIES**—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—were also frequently cited by PSB experts as examples of countries that have developed a successful PSB system.

SOUTHEAST EUROPE has also seen its share of instructive PSB transitions. At the height of the Milosevic era, who would have thought that the former government mouthpiece the "Radio Television Serbia (RTS) would later be seen as a relative success compared to other media in the region? What was once a vehicle of propaganda and a state-run operation started to function independently of the government. It made enormous changes in its operations, set up a financing regime that supported those operations, and established an audience share that garnered an impressive following, outpacing its

commercial competitors. The OSCE, BBC Media Action, and various EU entities all worked with RTS in its overhaul and transition.

In the context of **AFRICA**, South Africa initially made many of the reforms that created the impression that it too would become one of the success stories. Yet in recent years, the South African Broadcasting Corporation's current perceived closeness to the government and ruling political elite can serve as both a living model and a cautionary tale of what countries seeking to transition their state-run broadcaster into a PSB. The key issue is how to maintain the independence of a PSB, and how to best ensure that it does not get co-opted for political gain.

In an analysis for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, on transition of state run media systems into PSBs, Guy Berger (at the time of the FES publication, Berger was head of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes, University, Grahamstown, South Africa; he is now the director for freedom of expression and media development, UNESCO) writes:

Much of Africa inherited the British model, where a state-owned broadcaster funded by public resources was supposed to produce public service broadcasting. This service was defined in a paternalistic way, and it was consistent with this when post-independence Africa expanded this mission to include the delivery of development information. But the theoretical correspondence of public ownership, public financing and public service was never quite there from the start. Under colonialism, the "public" part of "public service broadcasting" meant a tiny minority. As post-colonial and white dominated regimes gained strength, "public service" came to mean "service to the government." Public funding was phased out in favor of advertising driven economics.

...The consequence is that today, most state-owned broadcasters in southern Africa are financed commercially, (including some donor sponsorship). They deliver mainly government service content, with patches of public service content in varying degrees. In most African countries, these institutions remain the biggest players in broadcasting, and they are formidable forces in contributing to—or at the other extreme, working to counter—progress in democracy and development.²⁶



South African Broadcasting Corporation

The South African Broadcasting Corporation's current perceived closeness to the government and ruling political elite can serve as both a living model and a cautionary tale of what countries seeking to transition their state-run broadcaster into a PSB.



PSB transitions in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Ghana, and South Africa are particularly notable. They all have their problems, but, based on her observations and experience, these countries could have PSB if the political commitment were greater, and the ability of PSBs to be independent could be fostered.

Smith concurs with Berger’s analysis. Based on her decades of experience working within the public service broadcasting sector, Smith feels that “it’s a question of seizing opportunity.” She finds it difficult to assess and to verify that the money has made a difference. Moreover, she says that researching how media development has made an impact is challenging: “What do you look at—minutes, coverage? Figures alone are not enough. You need a narrative to explain, you need an experienced local person to put it in context.” For these reasons, and based on her own work in Africa, Smith says the PSB transitions in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Ghana, and South Africa are particularly notable. They all have their problems, but, based on her observations and experience, these countries could have PSB if the political commitment were greater, and the ability of PSBs to be independent could be fostered.

LATIN AMERICA is not known for its PSB culture, but it too is a region where movements and efforts are underway to support and advocate for PSB as part of the overall media landscape. Interestingly, in terms of media development and PSB studies, the World Bank has played a role in convening meetings and providing forums for looking at the future of public service media in Latin America. PSB experts identified Chile as the country where PSB has made the most progress and is institutionalized.

Perhaps one of the most difficult places to document the trajectory of PSB is in **THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**. The two countries where PSB has gained the most traction and where efforts are underway to help bring about PSB are Tunisia and Morocco. The difficulties in this region raise a fundamental question: Can PSB transitions really take place in countries where there has not been a reasonable and meaningful transition to democracy, with both political and economic reforms sufficiently stable and able to support an independent regulator, broadcaster, and environment of free expression and access to information? Despite these challenges, as in every other region of the world, there are scholars and media reform advocates working to reform state-run media institutions and seeking to bring PSB to the Middle East.

Iraq, for instance, has not been so successful in bringing about a viable PSB, although a lot of funding and much project work were directed to Iraq’s overhaul of state-run media as part of the post-Saddam transition efforts. Iraq’s case provides a dramatic example of the importance of sequencing and readiness for PSB transitions. Douglas Griffin, director of Albany Associates who worked closely with the Iraqi Media Council, has been involved with Iraq’s broadcast transition since



the early 2000s. He says that while Iraq may not provide a successful PSB transition story, there have been considerable gains. More importantly, overall efforts to assist Iraq with PSB transition bring to the surface the important question of whether there really is any alternative to supporting PSB aspirations. The alternative would be to simply support the old guard, the way state media functioned in the past. It may take years or decades to move beyond where Iraq is currently, but the work must start somewhere, and even small gains are important inroads to overall progress.²⁷

In **ASIA**, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand have their own public service media, while Japan's NHK has been helping Burma to establish its public service media. Indonesia has a PSB transition that many mentioned is worth considering in terms of both its successes and shortcomings, especially in light of the political transition that took place in the late 1990s in the post-Suharto era. Bhutan's transition to PSB is another example where there are interesting movements towards independence and democratization of the media space.

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The Role of Donors

In thinking about future directions for PSB development, it may be worthwhile to assess the role that international donors play in influencing the development of a country's media system, and whether donor involvement is helpful in the first place. Related to this is the overarching question of whether donors influence the development of a public service broadcaster, and if so, whether it is welcome and what form the influence takes.



Donors do not always release to the public how much they allocate to specific projects, and different funding lines from different donors make it challenging to track expenditures on PSB.

In questioning who is to decide whether PSB is the “right” system to support, Leon Morse of IREX says:

The international community needs to play the role of advisor and allow the country's civil society and media sector to decide what the country [its media system] is going to look like. If there's a public commitment to PSB then the international community can provide advice on setting up government structures, technical equipment. But you have to have the political buy in. Look at Bosnia. The international community created what would have been a very good PSB, but the political environment has not allowed it to happen. It has been hamstrung by the political situation. I am not saying the money was wasted, but the results we were hoping to achieve have not been seen. This is because the political will was not there.²⁸

Support for PSB development comes from many sources—from international journalism and media groups that have a global reach, such as the International Federation of Journalists and the Public Media Alliance, to local and regional civil society groups, such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa and SEEMP in Central and Eastern Europe. The most notable funders of PSB include OSF, UNESCO, UNDP, OSCE, German foundations, Deutsche Well Akademie, and BBC Media Action. There are also examples of PSB projects funded by USAID or the U.S. State Department, but these are much more limited.

In media development terms, it's hard to quantify how much money is spent specifically on PSB development around the world. Donors do not always release to the public how much they allocate to specific projects, and different funding lines from different donors make it challenging to track expenditures on PSB. Research for this paper revealed that it would be highly useful and a major contribution to map and track efforts to aid in the transition of PSBs around the world. There is some literature on the topic, but is scattered, often difficult to locate, and

is presented in such a heterogeneous way that it makes the task of doing comparative research about PSBs in the context of international development quite challenging.

The Open Society Foundations has been a mainstay of support for PSB in media development terms and has offered support in many countries around the world in the form of grants, technical assistance, research and analysis, and convening forums and workshops to bring together multiple stakeholders needed to jumpstart policy discussions about creating a viable PSB.

“I think without any modesty we are one of the few pure donors that have become truly involved in supporting PSBs,” says the OSF’s Dragomir. “Through our research and policy unit, we do comparisons of PSBs, look into their governing structures, extract or produce working models of PSB financing or management and invest in further advocacy for these issues at local level. We’ve been involved in these discussions in most of the Eastern European countries during the past decade. There is a string of German foundations that have been also very much involved in supporting PSBs more or less in the same format as us and sometimes in cooperation with us.”

Another active funder of PSB in transitions is the United Nations. According to Smith of Transforming Broadcasting, “There is a very clear place (where donors have made a difference)—South Africa, Sierra Leone—the UN has helped a lot. There was a grand opening. Everything was going to be marvellous, but it has gone down in recent years, falling back into the grip of government. It would have never gotten as far as it did without the UN. It nearly worked.” Smith went on to say, “Donors have to make their biggest efforts when there is a window of opportunity—when there is receptivity to new thinking and new ideas.”

While early entry into a transitional country may present the best opportunity for engagement, it is important to think through better strategies for ways that the media assistance community can stay engaged. As Smith says, “Efforts at training, consulting, management, etc. are all very well, but this can all turn on a dime if the interest is not there.”

Some experts also contend that without donor involvement, the ability of a state-run media system to transition into a public service broadcaster is unlikely. “Without donor support, the chance that they will remain or relapse into government-controlled broadcasters is much greater. Also, without donor support, these important social institutions...will be less able to play a positive role in terms of providing quality information to the public,” according to Mendel.



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What Does the Future Hold?

Reflecting further on questions related to the significance of PSB in a twenty-first century context and whether it still remains a valuable model for media development efforts, Deane of BBC Media Action has offered a series of questions that in many ways help to frame the policy discussion that the media assistance community should be having:



“PSB has almost everything going for it except the one thing that it needs the most: the understanding and support of the political class.

— DAVID HENDY,
University of Sussex

- Why are we interested in PSB now?
- What do we expect PSB to deliver that others wouldn't?
- What is PSB's role in society?
- What does the debate about PSB tell us about media development?
- For what purpose are we doing this?²⁹

Deane further offers that it's helpful to frame the reasons for engaging in media development in the first place. According to Deane, the basis for any media development program can fall into one or more of the following categories—normative human rights/democracy support; accountability; and reduction of conflict.³⁰

Mendel has this to say about the future of PSB: “I think the idea that PSB will be rendered obsolete by the Internet and the proliferation of channels is pretty much rubbish, and I would ask proponents of this theory to point to any actual example ... What we can see, across a few countries, is that right-wing governments are hostile to PSB and that they can deliver economic blows which it is difficult for middle or left-wing governments to repair due to fiscal constraints.”³¹

Mendel's view is shared by David Hendy, a media and cultural historian at the University of Sussex. In his book, *Public Service Broadcasting*, Hendy writes, “PSB has almost everything going for it except the one thing that it needs the most: the understanding and support of the political class.”³² Hendy contends that we can either accept the view that the age of PSB is over, or we can embrace the view that we should be thinking in terms of an “imagination for the future.”³³

Despite the perceived lack of success of PSB transition stories, OSF's Dragomir had this to say: “I don't think the future of PSB is bleak: I only think the future of the PSB as we know it is going to be fundamentally different from the present and the past.” Echoing Dragomir's sentiment, independent media consultant Magda Walter offers this analysis:

Despite the belief that ultimately the emphasis will shift from platforms to content—PSBs won't disappear in the short term. They are necessary, and in most parts of the world must be continually strengthened. Both changing market forces and the multimedia environment are serious threats and have already undermined them. Regardless of in what form public service content ultimately will be delivered, there will always need to be some form of financial support for such content, whether in the form of donor support, crowd funding, subscription or other.

Perhaps as a provocation and a reminder that sometimes thinking differently will help shed light on what seems to be an unfixable problem, Price of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School says:

I sometimes question whether in a very multi-channel world, there's more of a need for a state broadcaster than for a public service broadcaster—or at least whether there's a need for a state broadcaster. The argument would be that in the modern cacophony, it is hard for the government to get through. Think C-SPAN. It's excellent that C-SPAN exists and one might conceive of a C-SPAN-like entity that projects information about the executive (and maybe the judicial branches). Of course, in a converged period it is useful to think of public service media, not just broadcasting. [It's important to keep in mind] that the idea of a transition from state to public may be a flawed idea as a way of producing a lively PSB sector.³⁴

*[Despite the perceived lack of success of PSB transition stories...]
“I don't think the future of PSB is bleak: I only think the future of the PSB as we know it is going to be fundamentally different from the present and the past.”*

— MARIUS DRAGOMIR,
Senior Manager/Publications
Editor for OSF's Independent
Journalism Program



Endnotes

- ¹ Interview with David Levy, July 2013.
- ² Interview with Marius Dragomir
- ³ Interview with Winson Mano
- ⁴ Interview with Toby Mendel
- ⁵ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoware/mission_and_values
- ⁶ Michael Tracey, *The Decline and Fall of PSB*—OUP Oxford (29 Jan 1998).
- ⁷ See for instance International Federation of Journalists advocacy campaigns on behalf of European PSBs in response to claims that “the foundations of public service broadcasting are being shaken in the EU”—<http://europe.ifj.org/en/articles/journalists-warn-over-deepening-crisis-for-psb-in-europe>.
Also see Raboy and Price, *Public Service Broadcast in Transition: A Documentary Reader*, Kluwer, 2001, for an overview of the main arguments for and criticisms against PSB; available online at http://global.asc.upenn.edu/filelibrary/PDFs/PSB_in_Transition.pdf. UNESCO offers a response to critics of PSB in its book *A Road Map to Public Service Broadcasting*. The book is authored by Elizabeth Smith, former Secretary-General of the Public Media Alliance and a world known expert in the field of electronic media and PSB—<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/news-and-in-focus-articles/all-news/news/unesco-works-to-enhance-public-service-broadcasting/>.
Finally, a summary overview of key arguments about the PSB’s relevance in a multichannel, converged environment is explored in *The Future of the BBC in The Economist* <http://www.economist.com/node/8495029>.
- ⁸ See Stephen Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News: Why Public Service Media Still Matter*; Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- ⁹ (USAID, 1999)
- ¹⁰ See: Paddy Scannell in *Understanding Television*, “Public Service Broadcasting: The History of a Concept,” http://www.academia.edu/3235456/Public_service_broadcasting_the_history_of_a_concept
- ¹¹ Interview with Elizabeth Smith
- ¹² <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/public-service-broadcasting/browse/7/>
- ¹³ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco-works-to-enhance-public-service-broadcasting/>
- ¹⁴ <http://www.osce.org/fom/118938>
- ¹⁵ See for instance the 2014 Freedom House Survey on Press Freedom wherein they cite that only 14% of the world’s population lives in an environment with a free press, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press>.
- ¹⁶ For a detailed overview of the history and efforts to develop national PSBs in Germany and Japan, see Michael Tracey’s book *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*.
- ¹⁷ For an informative account of this process see Paddy Scannell’s chapter on PSB: the History of a Concept, in *Understanding Television*, Eds. Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, Routledge, 1990, 11–29.
- ¹⁸ E-mail interview with Monroe Price
- ¹⁹ See pages 42–56 of *A Road Map to Public Service Broadcasting* for a detailed examination of the key attributes.
- ²⁰ See UNESCO Media Development Indicators for their Subset of Helpful markers for establishing a Public Service Broadcaster, also see Article 19 suggestions for what ideal types or models of PSB legislation could look like. The Public Media Alliance together with UNESCO has published *A Roadmap to Public Service Broadcasting*. And, in a somewhat different vein, the Open Society Foundation offers a global, comparative view of PSB around the world as part of its Mapping Digital Media project.
- ²¹ UNESCO, Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development, March 2008, available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/media-development-indicators-a-framework-for-assessing-media-development/>
- ²² See “Towards an Improved Strategy of Support to Public Service Broadcasting Evaluation of UNESCO’s Support to Public Service Broadcasting 2002–2005,” available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001473/147332e.pdf>.
- ²³ Interview with Michael Tracey
- ²⁴ Karol J. in Marc Raboy and Robin Mansell (eds.), *Global Media Policy Handbook* (page 221).
- ²⁵ Interview with Marius Dragomir
- ²⁶ Guy Berger, *Beyond Broadcasting: The Future of State-Owned Broadcasters in Southern Africa*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, January 2010, page 8.
- ²⁷ Interview with Doug Griffin
- ²⁸ Interview with Leon Morse
- ²⁹ Interview with James Deane, June 2013
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Interview with Toby Mendel
- ³² David Hendy, *Public Service Broadcasting*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, page 130
- ³³ Ibid, page 3 and 127.
- ³⁴ Monroe Price, email interview, 6/8/13
- ³⁵ Interview with Dr. Winston Mano

Appendix

Key Publications Looking at the Future of PSB Around the World

- *Public Service Broadcasting in the MENA Region: Potential For Reform* (Panos Paris and Mediterranean Observatory of Communication) <http://wsaw.iau.edu.lb/publications/documents/PSB-Book.pdf>
- *Beyond Broadcasting: The Future of State-Owned Broadcasters in Southern Africa* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/afrika-media/07367.pdf>
- *Public Service Broadcasting in Africa Series* (covering Benin, Cameroon, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) (Open Society Foundations) http://www.osisa.org/sites/default/files/schools/afrimap_pba_overview_18nov0900.pdf
- *Cajas mágicas/Magic boxes: El renacimiento de la televisión pública en América Latina/The rebirth of public television in Latin America* (Galán, Becerra, Castillejo, Santamaría for World Bank, UNDP and FIAPP) <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/08/21/International-Conference-Public-Media-Brazil-Latin-America>
- “Looking for Shortcuts?: Assistance to—and Development of—Public Service Broadcasting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania” (Mark Thompson, Working Paper for Analitika) http://analitika.ba/sites/default/files/publikacije/thompson_m_-_rppp_looking_for_shortcuts_wp09_3dec2013_final_for_publishing.pdf

Helpful Resources on the State of PSB around the World

- *In the Service of the Public—Functions and Transformation of Media in Developing Countries* DW Akademie, MEDIA Development Jan Lublinski, Merjam Wakili, Petra Berner (eds.) <http://www.dw.com/en/new-publication-transforming-state-media/a-18082898>
- “Five Theses on Public Media and Digitization: From a 56-Country Study,” in *International Journal of Communication* Damian Tambini <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2795>
- Re-Visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise (RIPE)
The RIPE Forum is annual meeting of scholars and practitioners who are deeply engaged in thinking about the future of Public Service Broadcasting around the world. In addition to hosting a bi-annual conference, RIPE offers a selection of papers and briefs about key topics in PSB. The RIPE archive is accessible online at: <http://ripeat.org/about-ripe/>

Key Resources for PSB and Media Development

- *A Road Map to Public Service Broadcasting*, Elizabeth Smith for ABU, UNESCO, Public Media Alliance. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002156/215694e.pdf>
- *Public Service Broadcasting: A Best Practices Handbook*, Edited by Indrajit Banerjee and Kalinga Seneviratne for UNESCO <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001415/141584e.pdf>
- *Public Service Broadcasting: a comparative legal survey*, Toby Mendel for UNESCO. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/public-service-broadcasting-a-comparative-legal-survey/>

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