Media and Governance

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In fast-changing media and communication environments more people are connected than ever before. While most acknowledge that the influence and impact of changing media and communication on governance outcomes is growing, the degree to which new media landscapes are contributing to more informed, peaceful and accountable societies remains in question. For some, increasingly networked young, educated and information-empowered global citizens have the potential to be democratically, socially and economically transformative. For others, increasingly fragmented and co-opted media and communication environments are driving political polarisation, extremism and violence.

Access to internet and mobile phones is rising rapidly, not least in fragile states, but radio and TV remain the key sources of information for most people. Over the last couple of decades powerful changes in media markets have had a substantial impact on patterns of information, communication and governance: the number of media stations has rapidly increased (Afghanistan alone is now home to 75 terrestrial TV and 175 FM radio stations); media environments have become increasingly fractured, with more stations catering for specific ethnic, linguistic or religious communities; advertising models are often unable to sustain quality journalism; and, in many countries, it is increasingly hard to see how the market can support inclusive media that reaches across divides. Political, religious, ethnic or other factional actors have stepped in, supporting media outlets to promote their agendas.

For much of modern democratic history, media has been considered one of the most powerful agents of democratic accountability. Extensive empirical research has demonstrated the connection between a free press and good governance, including the association between access to balanced, independent programming and improved knowledge and political participation. However, since the Rwandan genocide and the Balkan wars researchers have devoted increasing attention to the links between media,

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fragility and violent conflict. More recently, an emerging evidence base has shown the ability of media interventions to reduce polarisation.

There are some notable exceptions, but overall, development actors spend relatively small sums on media support, often not investing for the long term and struggling to integrate the media into broader policy agendas. When they do, it is usually with the aim of achieving one (or more) of the following objectives:

- Democracy and human rights: To build an independent media sector as an intrinsic good, essential to the functioning of a democratic society and a key platform for freedom of expression.

- Accountability: To enhance the accountability of governments to citizens, often in order to: improve service delivery, state responsiveness and state-citizen relations; support more informed democratic/electoral decision-making or marginalised groups to assert their voice; or decrease public tolerance of corruption or poor governance.

- Stability and conflict reduction: To improve debate, dialogue and tolerance in fragile or conflict-affected societies, often in order to: increase the availability of balanced, reliable and trustworthy information; reduce the likelihood of hate speech or inflammatory media likely to exacerbate conflict; and enhance social cohesion or build state legitimacy.

- Communication for development: To create demand for services and use the media as an instrument to shift behaviour or change the social norms that prevent such behaviour. For example, improving immunisation uptake.

Development actors have often struggled to have collective conversations on how best to support media, in part because they have these differing objectives. As the evidence base for media interventions builds, now is the time for the development industry to develop a more strategic approach to media support.

Key readings

Reading 1: Deane, J. (2015). Media and communication in governance: It's time for a rethink. In: *A governance practitioner's notebook: Alternative ideas and approaches* (eds. A. Whaites et al.). Paris: OECD – DAC, 265-280.
http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/governance/docs/Governance%20Notebook.pdf#page=267

This book chapter provides: a framework for thinking through the different development outcomes media support might achieve; arguments for why successful governance strategies are likely to involve a stronger media support focus in future; the challenges development actors have in prioritising effective support to media; and some suggestions of how support to media can be better integrated into governance-focused development strategies.

Reading 2: UNESCO. (2008). *Media development indicators: A framework for assessing media development*. Paris: UNESCO.
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001631/163102e.pdf

This report provides a set of indicators for measuring interventions designed to support independent media. It focuses on a set of media support objectives, such as regulation, diversity of ownership,

and media as a platform for democratic discourse, rather than governance objectives (e.g. accountability, social cohesion, political freedom or participation). It remains the most comprehensive and commonly referred to framework for media support.

Reading 3: Arsenault, A. & Power, S. (2010). *The impact of media development worldwide: Review of literature.* Washington DC: Media Map, Internews.
http://www.mediamapresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Media-Map-Literature-Review-Final.pdf

This report from the Media Map project provides a reasonably comprehensive literature review, and an analysis of the history and roles of media support.

Reading 4: Rothman, P. (2015).*The politics of media development: The importance of engaging government and civil society*. Washington DC: Centre for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy.
http://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CIMA-The-Politics-of-Media-Development.pdf

This report provides guidance on how to engage governmental and political systems in attempts to reform or support media.

Reading 5: Deane, J. (2013). *Fragile states: the role of media and communication. Policy briefing 10.* London, UK: BBC Media Action.
http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/policybriefing/fragile_states_policy_briefing.pdf

This policy briefing summarises key trends shaping the relationship between media (including digital media) and fragility, including how media environments are increasingly reflecting, and sometimes driving, divisions between different identities or factions. It draws on analysis from Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya and Somalia, and makes a series of recommendations for policy responses to media in fragile states.

Questions to guide reading

1. What do we expect to achieve by supporting media? What are the barriers to media playing an effective role (e.g. in holding government to account) and how can they be supported to overcome them? Does it make most sense to support media as a set of institutions in society or, given our increasingly networked lives, support initiatives that consider all the ways in which people actually access information and communicate?

2. How can questions over the role of media be better integrated into governance assessments, political economy analysis, electoral support strategies or other processes?

3. How does development support to media reconcile the tension between effectiveness and values? Should media be supported as an intrinsic democratic public good or should it be framed in terms of improved development outcomes?

4. How can development interventions that include a media component ensure that in seeking to deliver short term policy change they don't compromise the ability of the media to play a balanced, independent role in a country's public life? Does sponsoring paid for content distort incentives for media to pay attention to their publics?

5. What are the most effective strategies for sustainable change in media organisations? How should institutional support strategies for media organisations integrate support for media content?

6. How can media support strategies be better connected to broader social accountability objectives and programming (such as access to information, open data and budget monitoring activities) or other efforts aimed at improving social cohesion?