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Public service media in divided societies: Relic or renaissance?

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Front cover

State broadcasters continue to command the greatest audience penetration across most fragile states, making them a prized asset for those in power as well as a target for protest and violent attack. Transforming state broadcasters into independent public service broadcasters is challenging, but may be increasingly important for fragile and divided societies. This picture, taken on 21 September 2014, shows a burnt building at the headquarters of the Yemeni state television broadcaster.

MOHAMMED HUWAIS/AFP/
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Executive summary

This briefing focuses on the media of countries that are divided, undergoing crisis or conflict, or where governance is weak. It argues that the role of public service media in such societies – sometimes called fragile states – is increasingly relevant and sometimes critical to underpinning political and social development for the 21st century.

It argues that a free, open, plural media, in all its forms, is essential to democratic development in all societies. It focuses especially on public service media – more traditionally called public service broadcasting – arguing that such media organisations have special characteristics relevant to divided societies. They can provide trusted news and platforms for independent public debate for all people in society. They can contribute to social cohesion and political stability where much of the rest of the media (both traditional and social) may be fragmented along factional, religious, ethnic or other lines. And they can help people in divided societies to find common cause with each other, enabling them to transcend the politics of identity to rebuild their often fractured nations.

It argues that renewed energy and resources should be invested in strategies that support media systems rooted in public service values of trust, independence, universality and putting the public interest before all others. Despite formidable challenges, support strategies should include a revitalised and more imaginative focus on supporting the reform of state broadcasters to help them become editorially and financially independent public service broadcasters.

This briefing, written by the former Director of News at the BBC World Service, Phil Harding, is one of a series on media in fragile states. Earlier country reports have focused on Afghanistan,¹ Iraq,² Kenya,³ Pakistan⁴ and Somalia,⁵ and research reports on Kenya,⁶ Libya and Tunisia.⁷ Overview reports have included *Fragile states: the role of media and communication*.⁸ This report is published alongside another examining the role and prospects for public service media: *After the Arab uprisings: The prospects for a media that serves the public*.⁹

Part 1 provides a brief summary of the technological and other factors that constitute the waves of change sweeping the media in such countries.

Part 2 examines how increasingly fragmented media systems are providing fresh energy and dynamism to politics, economics and society, but also how some parts of the media are becoming increasingly partisan, reinforcing societal divisions and polarising political opinion.

Part 3 provides a brief overview of a growing crisis of trust both in political institutions and in 21st-century media, and the consequences of that crisis for democratic governance in divided societies.

Part 4 examines the current role of state broadcasters in this context, and argues that they remain a significant contributor to this crisis of trust and will, unless they are reformed, struggle to achieve legitimacy in the 21st century.

Part 5 describes the goals and principles of public service broadcasting, arguing that the abiding values of trust, universality (reaching out to all parts of society), impartiality, editorial independence, and putting the public at the heart of everything they do, have growing relevance to the challenges faced by 21st-century divided or fragile states.

Part 6 examines the prospects of transforming state broadcasters into public service media organisations capable of being relevant to increasingly young and technologically connected populations, useful in providing genuinely trusted news and platforms and capable of helping to bring divided societies together. It looks at the successes and failures of the past and the lessons that can be drawn from them. It concludes that the prospects for such reform are daunting, that the main obstacles to such reform are political rather than technical but that the value of genuinely independent public service media in divided societies justifies a fresh concerted effort.

Part 7 explores whether there are media models that offer an alternative to reforming state broadcasters while fulfilling the public service broadcasting criteria of providing universally accessible, trusted, impartial and editorially independent information and public debate. It considers options ranging from highly dynamic commercial media models, networks of citizen journalists and other online platforms. It concludes that, while there is much promising innovation, it is not clear that compelling sustainable alternatives are yet emerging, especially given the intense political pressure confronting media in many of these societies.

Part 8 examines by way of conclusion how the traditional concept of public service broadcasting needs to be supplemented by a fresh concept of a public service media that embraces technological and other changes. It suggests that a refreshed vision of public service media, adapted for the modern media ecology but firmly rooted in the traditional principles of public service broadcasting, could have increased and urgent relevance for the realities of divided states.

PART I

A media revolution: Waves of change

“There has been an explosion of technology and an explosion of choice. But it is as nothing compared with the waves of change to come.”

The revolution in media in the developing world in the last 10 years has been astonishing. There has been an explosion of technology and an explosion of choice. But it is as nothing compared with the waves of change

to come. The effects on the future shape of the developing world will be profound.

It is a revolution which predates the advance of digital technology but one which has been dramatically accelerated by digitisation. The television landscape in virtually every country has been transformed by the

satellite revolution. Where once a viewer had a choice of a handful of television channels, today there are hundreds. The satellite operator, Arabsat, lists no fewer than 651 channels on its satellites alone and the number of channels will multiply still further.¹⁰ The phrase “the Al Jazeera effect” now has a meaning beyond the Arab world and that specific channel. It has become a short-hand for describing the impact on global politics seen as new media sources circumvent previous government monopolies on information and reach and are used by groups who had previously lacked a political voice.

In terms of radio, which is still a vital means of communication in many places, there are now thousands of radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa where once there were only a handful. Twenty years ago, there were only 10 non-state radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ The mobile phone has also caused a second surge in radio listening, with many listeners now joining and interacting with programmes via their mobile rather than an actual radio set.

So far, the use of mobile phones in the developing world has been uneven. Simple mobile devices with texting are becoming ubiquitous, but the use of smartphones is not yet widespread. While more than half of the adult population of Kenya now uses their mobile phone to access the ground-breaking M-Pesa banking system, billions of people are still without any form of access to the digital world.¹² This is changing rapidly. In Uganda, 59% of the population now own a mobile phone; in Kenya, 82%; in Tunisia, 88%.¹³ In countries where a stable electricity supply can still not be taken for granted, never mind a wifi connection, the mobile is becoming a daily necessity.

Smartphones with internet access are still relatively rare. These are expensive, as is data downloading, but cheap Chinese phones are becoming increasingly available and data costs are dropping. It is estimated that internet use on mobile phones in Africa will increase twenty-fold in the next five years.¹⁴ In Nigeria, for example, the number of internet users has increased by 26% in the last year to 70.3 million (38% of the population).¹⁵ Hundreds of millions of people who, today, are still living the lives of their grandparents will suddenly have access to an immense store of global information, often in their own language. This will have a profound impact on social and political behaviour.

The young in particular are moving online. In Tunisia, 70% of those aged between 18 and 29 own a smartphone or can access the internet, compared with only 12% of those aged over 50. In Uganda, the figures are 18% and 5% respectively.¹⁶ This age difference in take-up will have a disproportionate effect in such countries given their young populations. (Just under 40% of the population of Tunisia is under 25.¹⁷) For any media organisation, a substantial presence on the internet and social media will be essential in order to reach these younger populations.

The full effects of this media revolution – the ability for everyone to create, view or share sound, pictures and text on their phone or virtually any electronic device – will be transformative. With just a mobile phone, a boy or girl in Cairo or Kampala can attract millions of viewers worldwide on YouTube or followers on Twitter. Traditional boundaries just disappear. An image or a piece of video shared thousands of times can start a revolution.

These changes in how people use the media have major consequences for democracy, for public debate, the future of governance and indeed for the whole future of the nation state.

Below Since opening in Nairobi, Kenya in late 2010, this iHub provides an open space for technology entrepreneurs, investors and designers. Part of what has been hailed as a “silicon savannah”, it has already become a regional nerve centre for new technology start-ups and heralds far greater changes still to come.





TONY KARUMBA/AP/GETTY IMAGES

PART 2

Fragmented media, fractured states

This welter of information available to the increasingly connected citizen or consumer has had many beneficial effects. Well beyond the media sphere, it has brought benefits to banking, to healthcare, to agriculture and to many other sectors.

In broadcasting, one of the biggest areas of expansion has been in local and regional outlets. Minority, community and local-language media organisations have become much more common. As a recent Open Society Foundations report noted, “The biggest gain from digitization is the growing space for free expression by minority groups, particularly ethnic and sexual minorities. More than ever before, marginalized groups have the opportunity to make their voices heard.”¹⁸

But there is a downside. The same technologies that are so adept at spreading information are every bit as good at spreading misinformation. Unregulated, the media revolution has become an open door to those who wish to spread biased news, malicious gossip and hate speech.

The role of some vernacular media in the bloody aftermath of the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya was a reminder of how some media outlets can stir tensions and help to spark communal violence. In many societies, the explosion in media outlets has given free rein to those who wish to use the media for their own agendas.¹⁹ In 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, in an inter-ethnic conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, “an ethnically divided media played an essentially destructive role... both in escalating the conflict to violence and in justifying each community’s actions during the violence”, according to a report from the media development organisation, Internews.²⁰ The conflict resulted in hundreds of deaths, thousands of refugees and significant loss of property.

A recent report from DW Akademie argued that there was a “dark side of the media” in the 21st century, which often means that, “Instead of serving the public and speaking truth to power, many media act as mouthpieces of the powerful, repeat rumours without verification,

Above There are downsides to social media, which can polarise and stigmatise sections of society. Here, members of the Somali community residing in Kenya air their grievances at being portrayed as dangerous in social media following a spate of terrorist attacks in Kenya, most of them claimed by Somalia-based al-Qaeda linked al-Shabab militants.

discriminate against minorities and feed the polarization of societies.”²¹

Many parts of the world have seen a vast growth in the number of private individuals, political parties, religious groups and ethnic factions buying up the media or starting

“This growth of sectarian media alongside the fragmentation of audiences means that it is increasingly possible for individuals to confine their media consumption to only those outlets that conform to their own beliefs and norms and that confirm their own fixed view of events.”

their own. A recent study of 11 countries in Eastern Europe found that 25% of the 503 media outlets monitored had links to politics and 10% to crime.²² In Afghanistan, it is claimed that a growing number of the 30 TV channels in the country are now owned by warlords.²³ According to a BBC Media Action report, the effect of this growing ownership of media by factional groups is that “they have provoked divisive conflicts and prompted concerns that they are exacerbating an already worrying trend towards the ethnicisation of Afghan politics”.²⁴ The most

extreme examples of co-option of the information space can be seen in the highly effective online operations of violent extremist organisations such as IS, the so-called Islamic State.

These increasingly fragmented, fractured media systems, documented in more detail in another BBC Media Action policy briefing, *Fragile states: the role of media and communication*,²⁵ are both reflecting and being shaped by the increasingly fractured state of politics in many of these countries. The briefing also describes the increase in the sheer number of media entities in fragile states

and the inevitable consequence that the more media there is the more fragmented audiences will become. All this is often happening when the unity of many of these nations is under threat.

This growth of sectarian media alongside the fragmentation of audiences means that it is increasingly possible for individuals to confine their media consumption to only those outlets that conform to their own beliefs and norms and that confirm their own fixed view of events. At the same time, online and social media allow people to live increasingly in their own worlds. In this electronic “echo chamber”²⁶ people may only hear reflected back to them views that match what they already think, leading to an even greater polarisation of political opinion.

This fragmentation has meant that, in many countries, there are now two serious democratic gaps. First, there is no reliable national provider of accurate information. Second, there is no one organisation providing a neutral universal “public space” – a place where the whole country can come together, interact and debate.

Without widespread access to accurate media and information that people can trust, and without coming across views that challenge their own, voters do not have a reliable way of deciding who to vote for or how best to hold authorities to account. This can have grave consequences for the future of the development of a country. Indeed, it can threaten its integrity and existence. Without these universal yardsticks, there is little to help a country in forging a shared identity, with the attendant risks that carries for the integrity of the nation.

SIA KAMBOUJ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Left A woman in Abidjan reads daily newspapers leading with stories about the recent events in Burkina Faso, in October 2014. At the time, Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaore had rejected calls to step down but called off a state of emergency imposed after a violent uprising against his 27-year rule saw parliament set ablaze. A free media, manifested in the explosion in newspapers, broadcast outlets and online media, continues to provide a critical source of accountability in many fragile states – but trust levels in the media have been declining.

PART 3

A crisis of trust

This growth of media is coupled with a widespread and growing distrust of the media. Often audiences do not believe what they are seeing and hearing. The 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer survey²⁷ showed that overall trust in the media had dropped to one of its lowest levels ever and that “media as an institution is distrusted by 60 percent of countries” surveyed.²⁸ Only 12 out of 27 countries showed any increases in trust and these were in countries with previously low scores.²⁹ Similar results were obtained by Gallup in an earlier but more extensive survey of 128 countries. Gallup concluded that, “In half the countries surveyed, less than a majority of residents expressed confidence” in their media.³⁰

Some caution should be exercised here. Distrust in the media is highest when levels of trust in other institutions are also low and when the motives of all those in power

are distrusted. Conversely, higher levels of confidence in the media in a particular country sometimes correlate with higher levels of confidence in other institutions and with approval of the country's leadership.³¹ This lack of trust can sometimes be attributed to people benefiting from more media freedom and being able to make more informed judgements on corrupt or incompetent administrations. This may go some way towards explaining the apparent paradox in some of the figures showing that distrust in the media is often highest in countries with supposedly high levels of media freedom (as measured by organisations such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders).³²

Nevertheless, trust between citizens and their governments and elected representatives is a complex but vital element of a well-governed society. Trust is based on judgement. To make that judgement the public need to have access to reliable information. To get that information they need media they can trust, and there is growing evidence to suggest that the trust invested by people in the information they have access to is declining.

Without a certain basic level of trust and without access to sources of reliable information, citizens become cynical about their political system and disaffected with the existing order. A collapse of trust between citizens and the state, between different political factions or parties, or between ethnic groups can lead ultimately to conflict, to revolutions and civil wars and to failed states.

“This growth of media is coupled with a widespread and growing distrust of the media. Often audiences do not believe what they are seeing and hearing.”

ABD DOUMANY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Above Syrian children re-enact scenes they claim to have seen in videos from the so called Islamic State. Jihadist and other extremist groups have invested heavily in producing brutal but highly sophisticated media strategies.

PART 4

State broadcasters: Too biased to trust, too big to ignore

In many countries a major factor in this crisis of trust is the state broadcaster. Most state broadcasters are little more than government propaganda machines, owned and controlled by the government. They are widely distrusted by large sections of the population. Despite this, they can still play an important part in the life of the country. That means that most countries in transition must decide what to do with their government-funded broadcasting service. They are often massive bureaucracies with immense problems. Simon Derry, Regional Director for Africa and the Middle East at BBC Media Action, says: “What you have in a lot of these countries is a behemoth state broadcaster that is becoming increasingly irrelevant, and unless they are reformed they are going to die.”³³

Jerry Timmins, the former Head of Africa at the BBC World Service and now Director of GMT Media, describes the usual structure: “Senior staff are political appointees who owe their jobs to politicians, with whom they remain in close and sometimes daily contact on editorial matters. In countries that are trying to move towards more open political debate, frustration with state broadcasting is a common theme.”³⁴ As several observers have pointed out, the news broadcasts of

a state broadcaster usually follow a familiar pattern: first, footage showing that the country’s political leaders are very busy, then footage showing that the people are very happy, and lastly footage showing that the rest of the world is in chaos. Opposition figures are usually invisible.

But despite the levels of distrust that their output provokes, state broadcasters still matter. In Tunisia, a relatively sophisticated country, the state broadcaster, Wataniya, plays a significant part in the daily

routine of many of the population. A recent BBC Media Action report explained why: “Tunisians consume a broad range of media, especially the national news aired by the state broadcaster, yet they place more trust in what they hear from family and friends.”³⁵ It describes how Tunisians “shop around” in order to piece together stories, with many relying on the internet, as it is often seen as a similar medium to the family and friends they speak to face to face. Yet despite this, said the report, “Tunisians seem unwilling to give up on the

state broadcaster and, in fact, hold a sense of loyalty towards it. It is part of the family, although perhaps not the most popular member, and its audience tunes in regularly.”³⁶ Eve Sabbagh, BBC Media Action Country Director for Tunisia, has a further explanation: “Because the public pay for it through their electricity bills, they do have a strong sense that this is something they own and that it is there for them.”³⁷

This same paradox of distrust and emotional attachment seems to apply in many other countries. In Egypt, for example, while ERTU, the state broadcaster is widely disbelieved as a mouthpiece of the government, it is that status that makes people want to watch it to get the “official” view, especially at times of crisis. The headquarters of ERTU in Cairo has become the focal point for all sorts of political demonstrations. The demonstrators come there not because they want to protest against ERTU’s programming, though sometimes that is the reason, but more often because ERTU is seen as an important national institution and the space in front of it as a place for people to gather.

In Georgia, too, the buildings of the state broadcaster have become the focus for demonstrations, although here the programmes were the focus of the protest. According to a 2014 report by Marek Bekerman, “opposition protests started to take place in front of the GPB main building, following the re-election of Mikhail Saakashvili. The demonstrators’ demands for balanced and objective news at the time of elections made the international community aware of how important the former state broadcaster was for the Georgian public life.”³⁸

There is every sign too that state broadcasters have often kept their audiences to a surprising degree. The main evening news on the state broadcaster in Tunisia is seen as a national institution: 72% of the population still tune in.³⁹ In his recent survey of the effects of the digitisation of media for the Open Society Foundations, Damian Tambini found that, of the 43 countries studied, where reliable data could be found, no fewer than 32 state broadcasters were in the top five of most used sources of news: “It seems apparent that states have not lost control of distribution to the extent that users are moving decisively away from state broadcasters to more independent sources of news.”⁴⁰

The state broadcaster will often be the only broadcaster capable of having the transmitter infrastructure to offer

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universal – or near-universal – coverage of the whole country. Many of the commercial stations and channels that have sprung up in the burst of de-regulation in recent years are local or regional and have a limited transmission reach, largely confined to urban centres. For example, in Afghanistan many of the proliferation of transmitters that have sprung up on Asmayee mountain outside the capital, Kabul, have a transmission radius of only about 40 miles beyond the city. The state broadcaster is often the only truly national broadcaster. For any society that is trying to establish or re-establish a national identity and culture, this is crucial.

Too biased to trust, too big to ignore, the question is what is the future of these monoliths? There are differing views according to a 2012 report by Naomi Sakr on public service media in the Arab world, but, “after so many decades of regimes using their monopoly over terrestrial transmission to generate government propaganda, leaving audiences to rely on satellite channels for credible information and watchable entertainment, one Arab-American activist drew an analogy between Arab state broadcasting and a house infested with termites saying: ‘sometimes it’s safer to burn the house’ ”.⁴¹

Is it better to burn the house down or try to repair it?
Rebecca Stringer, former BBC Media Action Country

Director for Tanzania, who has worked on reform programmes with the state broadcaster Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation, is clear which option she prefers: “It is incredibly important to try to reform state broadcasters. Although they might just be the government mouthpiece, they are still held in great affection because they are part of the nation and part of the founding of the nation.”⁴²

In an era where media is becoming more fragmented and increasingly co-opted for partisan purposes, the state media is currently adding to the crisis of trust. Unreformed, it will continue that role, often constituting a big brooding

malign influence. That is why, difficult though it may be, the arguments for looking again at the reform of state broadcasters are strong and growing. If that is accepted, the question then becomes not *whether* the state broadcaster should be reformed but how it can be reformed and *what sort of media organisation* it can be turned into.

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Why independent media is vital for development

At the heart of solving the question of trust – so essential to a stable democracy but threatened by an increasingly fractured media – is the role of independent media. This refers to media that does not have an agenda or ulterior motive, media that is independent of influences that will distort or cause bias.

The evidence for the positive role that independent and free media can play in a country's development is overwhelming. It is crucial in fostering transparency and accountability; it aids economic development; and it aids the development of democracy.

A key role of independent media is that it guards the interests of the public, protecting the population from incompetence, corruption and misinformation by promoting transparency and accountability. A 2015 evidence paper for the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) on what most makes a difference to reducing corruption found that, "A long-term association exists between a free and independent media and reduced corruption."⁴³ There are numerous examples from countries all around the world of politicians being called to account as a result of media exposures of their corrupt behaviours.⁴⁴ The evidence is more than anecdotal. In coursework produced for their Core Course in Controlling Corruption, the World Bank has compiled a graph plotting a clear link between media freedom and lower levels of corruption.⁴⁵

There are several studies suggesting a correlation between economic development and media development.⁴⁶ As the Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has pointed out, in the same way that the public need reliable information to make informed political decisions, so too do consumers in economic markets need trustworthy information about products and services, so as to make the most informed economic decisions.⁴⁷

The idea of a link between media development and democratic development depends on two key notions: that voters in a democracy need accurate information from an independent media to make informed political choices and that the media can provide a precious public space where competing political claims and choices can be debated by an

informed citizenry. Sally-Ann Wilson, CEO of the Public Media Alliance, says: "If you can have an effective public media space for information that can be trusted, then you will have the foundation of a democracy."⁴⁸

There is now a wealth of data, much of it collected at country level, that points to the existence of a strong link between media development and various indicators of a democratic society. For example, in a study for the United Nations Development Programme, Pippa Norris and Dieter Zinnbauer found that "media systems characterized by widespread mass access and by an independent press are most closely associated with systematic indicators of good governance and human development. In particular, nations with these types of media system experience less corruption, greater administrative efficiency, higher political stability, and more effective rule of law, as well as better development outcomes such as higher per capita income, greater literacy, less economic inequality, lower infant mortality rates, and greater public spending on health."⁴⁹ They cite several studies to back this up.

But the role of independent media goes further than simply providing reliable information about events and issues or allowing citizens and groups to present their points of view and debate the arguments. Media also plays an important part in shaping the very nature of a society. It helps us to define who we think we are and where we think we fit in (or don't fit in) in the world. Media plays a major role in forming our cultural and national identity. This role of the media has sometimes been described as "nation building" or "nation forming": creating a common sense of identity and contributing to a consensus on the type of nation a country wants to be. Shared beliefs – the nature of them and the extent of them – are central to the culture of a given society. The role of media in nation building has historically taken the form of a state media transmitting a clearly determined vision, often from a dictatorial or authoritarian centre. In a 21st Century characterised by ubiquitous access to information, national platforms for the whole of society, and not just the state, to debate and determine the character of national identity may become increasingly valuable.



BBC MEDIA ACTION

PART 5

The special relevance of public service broadcasting to 21st-century divided societies

If independent media matters for development (see Box 1), then public service media matters greatly because, when implemented properly, it is potentially one of the purest forms of independent media. The very *raison d'être* of a public service broadcaster (PSB) is that it is independent; it is run solely for the benefit of the public, independent of political causes and independent of commercial interests. As the Tanzanian journalist and David Astor Journalism Award winner Sylvester Ernest puts it: “Public broadcasting is broadcasting that is for the public and only for the

public and is broadcasting that covers everyone.”⁵⁰

Public service broadcasting – as a public service – offers part of the answer to the crisis of trust. The most recent Reuters Institute survey of news in the developed world noted that, “Many of the countries with the highest levels of trust also have well-funded public service broadcasters.”⁵¹

It is not essential to have a substantial PSB to secure a vigorous independent media sector. The United States of America is testament to that. But in fragile states

Above *Sajha Sawal* is a weekly debate programme broadcast across Nepal. It is the most popular programme of its kind, reaching an audience of more than 5 million. *Sajha Sawal* allows people from all sections of Nepalese society the opportunity to directly ask questions of their political leaders. It is supported and produced by BBC Media Action with the BBC Nepali Service and partner stations in the country.

What is public service broadcasting?

What exactly is a public service broadcaster? There are many definitions – some running to long checklists of defining characteristics. There has even been an attempt at establishing a formal International Standard for a PSB. It is easy to get bogged down in the detail.

A PSB is much easier to recognise than it is to describe. One of the simplest definitions comes from UNESCO: “Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned and 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.”⁵²

Another approach is to compare and contrast a public broadcaster with a state broadcaster. Table 1 on page 12 builds on an approach used by Damian Tambini and others.⁵³



Right Actors in Kigali record an episode of the radio soap opera, *Musekweya*. Set up by the media support organisation, La Benevolencija, the programme is broadcast across the whole of Rwanda and has proved both popular and effective in fostering peace and reconciliation in the country since 2004.

and emerging democracies where, as we have seen, the commercial media sector can be subverted by the powerful and those seeking power, public service media can provide the essential bedrock for an independent media sector.

In part, it is not just about what public service broadcasting does but also what it represents. As Sally-Ann Wilson, CEO of the Public Media Alliance, puts it: “With public service broadcasting it’s not just the actual broadcasting that matters, it’s about the ideas and principles that lie behind it.”⁵⁴ The key editorial values of a PSB – truth and accuracy, impartiality, independence, putting the public interest first and accountability – are not unique to a PSB, but what is unique about a PSB is that these values are placed above all other considerations.

What is often unique to a PSB in divided societies is its potential to be a national unifier, healer and enabler of social cohesion. This role becomes especially important in post-conflict countries, where the fissures of war may still run deep, or in countries where social divisions have left some sections of society marginalised.

By providing a common, trusted platform for national debate and allowing all communities – especially marginalised groups – to have their say, a PSB can encourage dialogue among diverse communities and contribute to the conditions for a lasting peace.

This matters because, in the new media environment, the size of what some call “the public space” – the electronic equivalent of the town hall meeting or the hustings – is shrinking rapidly.

As the Canadian broadcaster and academic Mark Starowicz puts it: “Public broadcasting institutions are even more critical today as we see the disappearance of

public space, and the atomization of audiences into special interest constituencies.”⁵⁵ There appears to be increasing demand for such media from the citizenry, from civil society and from journalists, according to James Deane of BBC Media Action: “Look at the programmes BBC Media Action has produced and the response they get. That’s evidence of demand for this sort of independent media programming.” Deane refers to audience figures for programmes such as *Sajha Sawal* in Nepal and *Open Jirga* in Afghanistan, where political leaders face questions from studio audiences and on social media, arguing that they demonstrate real public appetite for such forums.⁵⁶ Almost 60 million people watched or listened to such programmes in 2014, according to BBC Media Action’s measurement of programmes in seven countries.

For a stable country to function effectively, it is important that all sections of society have a voice and are listened to. Otherwise, there may be discontent and civil unrest, and in the long term a revolution or a coup. Giving a voice to all sections of society, including those that may not be commercially attractive or politically advantageous to private media houses, is a key public service role. A PSB, responsible to all of the public and not just specific sections or the elite, provides a service to all sections of the population. In doing so, a PSB can be an important element in establishing and maintaining an open and stable society.

Table 1:
Characteristics of a public service broadcaster vs. a state broadcaster

Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A state broadcaster: accountable to the government A public service broadcaster: accountable to the public and parliament
Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A state broadcaster: directly controlled by the Minister of Information A public service broadcaster: controlled by a board of independent Trustees
Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employees of the state broadcaster: civil servants or government employees The employees of the public service broadcaster: employees of the broadcaster
News content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state broadcaster mostly features the government and only gives their viewpoint The public service broadcaster features politicians from all parties and civil society and carries a wide range of viewpoints

“What is often unique to a PSB in divided societies is its potential to be a national unifier, healer and enabler of social cohesion. This role becomes especially important in post-conflict countries.”



Left Participants preparing questions for the Afghanistan public debate programme, *Open Jirga*. Reaching an audience of more than 3 million, *Open Jirga* brings people from across Afghanistan's diverse society together – providing them with a public space to question and engage with national leaders. Panellists have included former President Hamid Karzai and current President Ashraf Ghani. Produced by BBC Media Action, the programme is editorially independent of government and other actors, and is broadcast in both Dari and Pashto on the state broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan and the BBC World Service.

A history of public service broadcasting

The first public service broadcaster, the BBC, started almost by accident. In **1922**, anxious to avoid what it saw as the chaotic expansion of private commercial radio in the USA, the British government instead awarded a single broadcast licence to a new company owned jointly by the leading wireless receiver manufacturers. The new company was not allowed to take advertising because that would “lower standards”. Instead, the public had to buy a radio licence to listen. It is not clear whether this initial rejection of advertising was because of some high-minded idealism or for fear of upsetting the powerful press barons who stood to lose revenue. Possibly it was both. Either way, by **1926** the company had become the British Broadcasting Corporation: a public corporation, supervised by a separate board of governors who were charged to put “the public interest” first. Thus was born public service broadcasting.

In the **1930s**, other countries followed with the establishment of similar corporations in places such as Canada, Australia, France and Scandinavia. In **1945**, the post-war settlements in Germany and

Japan led to the Allies establishing PSBs in those countries. In both, the idea of developing a PSB was deemed essential to the act of rebuilding a democratic nation.

Much of Africa and other parts of the British Empire inherited the British model – or at least a version of it. Under colonialism, the “public” part of “public service broadcasting” meant in effect serving the tiny minority in power. “Public service” meant “government service”. The broadcasting bosses were usually colonial civil servants. This model was then carried over to the post-colonial era only with different bosses. Some were (and are) little more than state broadcasters and government mouthpieces. For many, public funding has been replaced in part or totally by advertising revenues.

The next wave of PSBs came with the fall of the Berlin Wall in **1989**. Spurred on in part by the EU and the Council of Europe, post-Communist governments in Central and Eastern Europe attempted to reform their state broadcasting systems and turn them into independent public broadcasters on the Western European model. Some have been more successful than others.

PART 6

The prospects for transforming state to public service broadcasters

Public service broadcasting, properly implemented, has the potential to have a positive effect on a country's development. Because of that, much effort has gone into trying to establish effective PSBs in those countries that do not have them, mostly by trying to reform the existing state broadcaster.

In recent years, there have been extensive reform programmes launched in more than 25 countries.⁵⁷ Funding has come from a wide variety of Western governments and private foundations.

This has produced very mixed results. Many reform programmes have fallen short and in some cases not worked at all. When I interviewed the people who have led some of the programmes designed to support reform and asked them to rate the overall success of the reform process, most went no higher than 4 or 5 out of 10. "Patchy" was a frequently used adjective. Even as ardent an advocate of reform as James Deane, Director of Policy and Learning at BBC Media Action, is harshly realistic: "It's not been terribly successful. There are not many shining beacons you can turn to."⁵⁸

But there are some successes. A thorough recent survey conducted by the DW Akademie, the international media development organisation linked to the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, looked at case studies of reform programmes in 12 countries. It pointed to Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Moldova as countries where real

progress had been made recently.⁵⁹ BBC Media Action Country Director for Tunisia, Eve Sabbagh, says the programme there has produced some good initial results.

There is also one considerable caveat that should be entered into any discussion of success or failure in this field: what exactly do we mean by success?

As Guy Berger, Director of Freedom of Expression and Media Development at UNESCO, puts it: "It depends what you mean by a public service broadcaster. There are so many dimensions to being a PSB: their political programmes, their cultural programmes. A broadcaster could well be public service in one sphere but not in another."

Jerry Timmins also questions the definition of success without qualification: "There is no such thing as a totally successful public broadcaster. Even the ones that would be regarded as relatively successful are based on some compromise. The government is always going to have some sort of involvement." There clearly is a risk of writing off too many reform programmes as total failures just because they fell short of the ideal.

The main obstacle to reform is politics

The topic that came up as the biggest obstacle to most PSB reform programmes was political interference. For many politicians a genuine PSB is seen as at best hindrance, at worst a severe threat.

Tim Suter, who was in charge of content regulation at Ofcom in the UK and has since done work in several developing countries, says: "The political obstacle is bound to be the biggest obstacle because if they don't want you to exist then you can't exist. PSB depends uniquely upon its relationship with the state and with the politicians who run the state. And it exists only with their consent."⁶⁰ Sally-Ann Wilson of the Public Media Alliance agrees: "The political will and the political understanding is the most important factor in establishing PSB. Intensive political preparation for media change is essential."⁶¹

There have been many examples of political interference undermining media reform efforts. In Tanzania, a well-established and successful programme to turn the previous state broadcaster into a new public broadcaster, the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), was stopped in its tracks just after the 2010 elections: an election won by the President and the ruling party but with a reduced majority.⁶² TBC's robust coverage was picked out by international observers. The report of the European Union's Election Observation Mission to Tanzania highlighted how TBC had managed to cover a range of parties.⁶³

Six weeks after the election, the government decided not to renew the contract of the Director-General of TBC and he was asked to leave office within 48 hours. A contract between TBC and BBC Media Action was cancelled. The Director of Information at the Ministry of Information, Youth, Culture and Sports was appointed as the new Director-General of TBC. By most accounts, the Ministry effectively retook control of TBC after that.⁶⁴

Subsequently, there were complaints from opposition MPs that TBC had reverted to becoming a government mouthpiece.⁶⁵ Tanzanian political journalist Sylvester Ernest thinks that TBC has "gone back to where it was". But Ernest also thinks the attempted reforms were not totally in vain. He cites the fact that, in the run-up to the 2016 elections, some organisations are trying again to hold election debates: "What TBC did in 2010 with its debates between candidates had a lasting impact on Tanzanian politics," says Ernest.⁶⁶

“Many reform programmes have fallen short and in some cases not worked at all.”



MASSOUD HOSSAINI/AP/GETTY IMAGES

Looked at from the viewpoint of a ruling politician, it might seem quite rational to want to keep control of the state broadcaster. For the government it might genuinely be seen as an important means of communicating directly with the population. Other government information techniques may be weak. Many countries have witnessed an explosion in online and independent media, much of it in opposition to the government. Some media may be considered divisive and a threat to national unity. The state broadcaster may effectively reach rural populations who are often important political power bases. An independent public service broadcaster could be nothing but trouble. Why would any politician want to surrender control?

Such concerns are not the preserve of dictators. Similar arguments have been highlighted in much of the literature on state building. “In situations where the state is fragile... and where the political process is de-legitimised... unsophisticated liberalisation of the media can potentially undermine the state-building project,” argued an influential 2005 report by the London School of Economics Crisis States Centre.⁶⁷

The argument made here, however, is that continued centralised control of media systems, including the state media, intensifies, rather than defuses political and economic tensions and frustrations in society. These arguments are examined in more detail in another BBC Media Action policy briefing on fragile states based on an analysis of media in Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Kenya. “Some critics... suggest that some form of censorship and containment of the media may be a logical option in support to fragile states,” said the report. “It is difficult to see from these case studies how such censorship would have produced better outcomes for the media, state, society or citizens... greater control exercised over the

media could in fact lead to further anger building with the pressure cooker of political fragmentation in fragile states,” it concluded.⁶⁸

A free media is an essential outlet for the legitimate expression of societal tensions. A free, independent and national media, alongside more localised forms of media, is becoming increasingly important. Conflict often leaves countries with deep divisions: populations are polarised, mistrustful of each other. Political leaders are mistrusted, as is the media especially where it has been taken over by factional interests. There appears to be an increasing need for national media organisations that can be trusted to enable people to forge shared and not just sectional identities in their countries. PSBs can play a key role in doing this.⁶⁹

In countries where economic development has begun to take hold and there is a growing middle class, many leaders recognise, at least in principle, that to meet the new political demands of the middle classes, they will need a stronger and more independent media sector.

In both cases, leaders can and do understand that an independent PSB can be an important guarantor of the good governance needed to run a modern state. But often they do not know how to go about it. That is why they call in partners for help.

The importance of stakeholder analysis

The starting point of any effective media reform programme must be a comprehensive stakeholder analysis, identifying who the key players are, followed by detailed and deep conversations with all those

Above Many state broadcasters retain a large audience thanks to their great reach across the country. However, much of their audience is ageing, and they must adapt their programming to appeal to a newer, younger audience. Here, an Afghan shoemaker listens to a radio in Kabul.

stakeholders. Sally-Ann Wilson, CEO of the Public Media Alliance, says: “What we haven’t done enough of is educating politicians especially parliamentarians and bringing them together with broadcasters and helping them to understand each other.”⁷⁰

Such conversations need to start not with media reform but from much further back, with the bigger picture of the whole plan for the development of the country: what the politicians want for their country and how they hope to achieve it. They must set the agenda and determine the direction of development. It has been far too easy for outsiders to jet in with preconceived agendas.

These conversations need to be as explicit as possible. Things that may be taken for granted in one society cannot necessarily be taken for granted in others. Tim Suter explains: “PSB is one of the most intricate examples of how you do democratic debate in a society but it’s a democratic debate within limits. You take this example from societies that already have PSB and you assume that in the society which you are trying to transform there has been the same debate, the same history and the same assumptions.”⁷¹

Not only will things get lost in translation but sometimes there may be no translation at all. Walid Batrawi, Director of Projects for BBC Media Action in Palestine, points out that “in practice the first obstacle is simply understanding what public broadcasting is. In Arabic, the phrase ‘public service’ immediately translates as ‘public sector’, so it

immediately translates as being official and governmental.” In many countries, there is no such thing as any sort of civic or public space that is not governmental – there is either the government or the private sector.⁷²

One issue that crops up frequently, and where there are often misunderstandings because of different assumptions, is the question of what exactly is meant by media freedom and the right to free speech. Ministers in the developing world often mistake – or choose to confuse – free speech with anarchy: the ability for anybody to say anything. The debate in the West can contribute to this misapprehension: media freedom is often talked about as though it were an absolute

unconstrained right – one not moderated by anything else. In fact, of course, in any country with a free media, it is “regulated” through libel laws as well as by more general laws on incitement and hate speech. Freedom of speech is not exercised in isolation from other rights; it is held in balance against them and legislated as such.⁷³ Politicians in countries where security issues are paramount can be defensive when challenged about the laws they have introduced to restrict press freedom. Part of this defensiveness comes from the fact that they believe their critics are asking them to do away with all restrictions when they are not. This of course has profound implications for the establishment of an independent PSB.

Self-interest and altruism

Other arguments about the politics around the reform of state broadcasters and the potential of public service broadcasting can perhaps be broken down under two headings: self-interest and altruism.

The most brazen arguments are those of self-interest. Guy Berger of UNESCO is blunt: “Even dictators need reliable information.”⁷⁴ Jerry Timmins spells it out: “Politicians can’t trust the people around them to tell the truth. Advisers and others will always bring the good news.” “To sort out some problems you need strong leaders at the top and they need to know the truth about what’s going on, painful though it might be. If you really don’t know what’s going on in your towns and villages then discontent will build up until it blows,” Timmins argues.⁷⁵

Tim Suter uses different language but the conclusion is the same: “What a PSB does for politicians is that it gives them a safe channel for debate, disagreement, and argument. If you don’t have such a safe responsible space then as a politician you will be confined to your own channels of communication which are likely to be distrusted,” says Suter. “You have got to have a fair and trusted means of getting your message over to the public – as a result you could have a political opposition that is less likely to take to the streets or indeed try for a coup.”⁷⁶

Then there are the altruistic arguments. “You have got to convince people [that is the politicians] by looking at it from their mind-set – why this is best for their country,” argues Simon Derry. “It’s important to remember that often people come to power because they genuinely want the best for their country and are not always acting out of individual self-interest.”⁷⁷

Having a relatively free media contributes to a country’s international standing. Countries with repressive media regimes have discovered that sooner or later they will hit a “crisis of reputation” overseas. It becomes embarrassing to be constantly asked on overseas trips about press censorship and broadcasting bans. Although the visible effects have been limited thus far, it is this crisis of reputation that has caused Rwanda to seek Western help in reforming its media sector in recent years.⁷⁸

In conversations about introducing public service broadcasting in fragile and post-conflict societies, often as part of a wider media liberalisation, there are often genuine worries about the risks of free speech becoming hate speech. Simon Derry explains: “You have to understand those motivations and look at the things from their point of view... some of the worries are genuine, including that a free media may cause inter-communal strife.” “You can do a lot to reassure them about these issues – the use of proper guidelines and so on. Hate speech is not a reason to censor the media; it is a reason to regulate it.”⁷⁹

“Successful reform of a state broadcaster requires a massive change in the culture of the organisation. This applies to everyone working at the broadcaster, from those at the top to those at the bottom.”

There are other positive reasons that can appeal to governments for a society to have a public broadcaster: it can be a powerful tool for literacy and development. Broadcasting, especially radio in local languages, can ensure a reach to the entire population, many of whom may still be illiterate. Because of distance, poverty and a lack of education, radio is unique in its reach and influence. Public service radio can do that, while most commercial stations are interested only in the well-off urban elites.

Changing the culture of state broadcasters

Successful reform of a state broadcaster requires a massive change in the culture of the organisation. This applies to everyone working at the broadcaster, from those at the top to those at the bottom. No longer just parroting the government line, bosses, producers, editors and journalists are asked to take independent editorial decisions. It is a big change, which for some is intimidating. Shirazuddin Siddiqi, BBC Media Action Country Director for Afghanistan, expresses it succinctly: “Their brains are in chains.”⁸⁰

According to UNESCO’s Guy Berger, “as often as not it’s the culture within the institutions themselves. People working there think of themselves as civil servants not journalists. Often the state broadcaster is a form of patronage.”⁸¹ As Somchai Suwanban, Director General of Thai Public Broadcasting Service, explains: “In the past the staff were accustomed to ‘serving those in power, or those who have got money’, yet you can only become a PSB when a majority of the staff have a ‘public service consciousness’.”⁸² Arthur Asimwe, Director General of the Rwanda Broadcasting Authority, involved in the beginnings of media reform in that country, describes his experience: “Before, if anything happened across the border, in Goma [Democratic Republic of the Congo], I didn’t have power to send my journalists. We would have gone to the prime minister, or other officials, for permission.”⁸³

Culture change needs to start by convincing everyone working for the organisation of the pressing need for change, and then persuading them that they want to be part of this change. Simon Derry argues that: “Not enough attention has been paid to culture change. Training has been very craft-based rather than asking ‘what’s the culture shift you need to achieve real change here?’ - A concerted programme of culture change needs to be an integral part of any programme of reform.”⁸⁴

Lasting change needs to be led – and be seen to be led – by those inside the organisation. They need to feel it is “their change”. Sally-Ann Wilson of the Public Media Alliance, explains: “You can’t impose it, because if you do it will go wrong.”⁸⁵ Eve Sabbagh, BBC Media Action Country Director for Tunisia, agrees: “It really needs to be a process coming from the inside. It needs to come from the Tunisian people. Our role much more is to facilitate conversations

and helping them to focus their ideas... The important thing is that we have helped them but now they are doing it and they are in charge.”⁸⁶

When training is useless

Another recurring theme was that there has been far too much reliance on training in reform programmes and that it often became an end in itself. A survey of media reform programmes in south-east Europe found that around 40% of total media assistance had gone to training.⁸⁷ Elizabeth Smith, the former Secretary General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, who has worked in many countries on reform programmes, points out: “Training journalists to work in an unfree newsroom is totally useless.”⁸⁸ Rebecca Stringer of BBC Media Action agrees: “There’s a lot of pressure from donors to fill classrooms with, say, a course on investigative journalism... We have found you can completely demoralise people by training them if you don’t change anything else.”⁸⁹ Sometimes courses on investigative journalism are even run in countries with laws prohibiting investigative journalism.

Training programmes are often superficially attractive to donors because they offer quick measurable results. It is possible to fill in an assessment form at the end of a three-week course with lists of lots of people trained and lots of positive feedback from the participants. Some donors under pressure to demonstrate the value they are getting for the public money they are responsible for can consider such short-term impacts easier to justify than a potentially messy and risky longer-term programme of media reform.

Introducing public service broadcasting is a complex and iterative process requiring long-term commitment. The reform process rarely goes in a straight line. As Jan Lublinski of the DW Akademie points out: “Public service media is a continuous struggle for independence, and it’s a really long path that everybody’s taking. For the BBC, it took a very long time before it became what we understand it to be today. It was decades of journalists struggling for independence from the government.”⁹⁰ Jerry Timmins: “Any serious media reform process is going to take 10 years and to pretend otherwise is ridiculous.”⁹¹

Little coordination, little prioritisation within development agencies

While donors have focused heavily, and often successfully in recent years, on improving their coordination of support and enhancing “aid effectiveness”, the strategic coherence of support to media has generally not been

“Lasting change needs to be led – and be seen to be led – by those inside the organisation.”

“While donors have focused heavily, and often successfully in recent years, on improving their coordination of support and enhancing “aid effectiveness”, the strategic coherence of support to media has generally not been included in these efforts.”

included in these efforts. Shirazuddin Siddiqi of BBC Media Action in Afghanistan believes that much has been achieved because of international support to the media in the country but that it has not been as effective as it could have been.

“Donors had no strategic plan. Each donor would develop their own country plan – they would talk about security, about governance but rarely about media,” he argues. “They didn’t think about media strategically... Suitcases of money would arrive but there was no strategic plan. For the private media there was no business plan and a lot of these private media outlets will disappear.”⁹²

Pippa Norris in her wide-ranging study of media development for the World Bank, *Public Sentinel: News media and governance reform*, found the lack of co-ordination of the various elements of reform programmes a recurring theme: “For example, during

anti-corruption program design, the elements of the public sphere are treated separately; passing freedom of information legislation may be an important program component, but it is designed and carried out *in isolation* from other elements of the public sphere. What is missed is the interaction between that legislation and the media sector’s capacity to understand and use it, as well as interaction between the legislation and the broader political culture within the country, which may or may not encourage debate and criticism of government” (original emphasis).⁹³

Rebecca Stringer agrees that, too often, there is a failure to make media an integral part of any reform programme: “With donors, very often the media is an add-on, an afterthought. The bit about media is stapled on to the end of the project.” “Because at the end of the meeting someone says ‘oh and what about the media?’... A lot of donor organisations misunderstand how to use media because they don’t have the media expertise to be able to do that,” says Stringer.⁹⁴ James Deane of BBC Media Action argues that, “within bilateral and multilateral aid agencies there are only a handful of people whose focus is on media support”.⁹⁵

The Chinese alternative

China is now a major global commercial power and wants to become a global media player. As one Chinese media executive put it: “The shift of global economic power will lead to a change in the media line-up too.”⁹⁶ China and Chinese companies are donating or investing billions of dollars in the media. At the same time, China has been using Africa as an important testing ground for the promotion of a new policy of soft power. Chinese Central Television’s (CCTV) new state-of-the-art Nairobi bureau employs over 100 staff.⁹⁷

China has been inviting heads of press authorities and media groups and correspondents on all-expenses-paid trips to Beijing to visit China.⁹⁸ It is now training the majority of journalists and government media officials in Malawi. It has been providing infrastructural and technical support to state broadcasters in countries such as Kenya and Zambia. In Nigeria, the federal broadcaster is involved in a joint venture with Chinese state media. China is also heavily involved in telecoms in Africa and in digitalisation projects, often with soft loans in places such as Tanzania.⁹⁹ The Chinese company ZTE Corporation has installed part of the US\$1.5 billion telecom network in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰

China consistently claims that all this aid and investment is offered entirely without strings. This is disputed by some observers who argue that this cannot really apply to media and journalism because of the Chinese government’s restrictive policies towards its own media.¹⁰¹ In some instances, infrastructural support has been implicitly linked to political ends. In almost all cases, technology has been accompanied by Chinese training packages.¹⁰² In Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, China

has supplied jamming technology that blocks internet sites or radio frequencies.

What is certain is that China’s economic success coupled with the growth of its own domestic media outlets has alerted governments and others to the fact that China, under its banner of “a harmonious society”, offers an alternative model for media development to that offered by the West, with its requirements for human rights and governance reform.¹⁰³

The Chinese alternative media model in turn has parallels with the idea promoted in some African countries of “developmental journalism” – the idea that social stability and development should be placed well above openness and reform – and argues that freedom of the press and human rights are not priorities at all while poverty persists. In Uganda, President Museveni has called independent media “enemies of Uganda’s recovery”. The Gambian president has similarly criticised journalists who he claimed were threatening the stability of the state.¹⁰⁴

Both Ethiopia and Rwanda are explicitly following a Chinese development model. Both countries have articulated strategies of how information and communications technology (ICT) can be deployed by the state in a way that ignores the Western idea of using ICT to promote economic growth through enhancing government transparency, citizen voices and democratisation.¹⁰⁵

The Chinese media model offers a very well financed rival view to any western media development programme which has accountability and human rights at its heart. It is a major challenge.



BBC MEDIA ACTION

PART 7

Are there alternative models to providing trusted, impartial, universally accessible media?

Public service media does not have a monopoly on public service content. UNESCO's Guy Berger and others rightly argue that in many countries the private media has a far better track record than state-funded broadcasters. The media revolution means that there is now more of this content available and it comes from an ever wider variety of sources, professional and non-professional: "Public service broadcasting can no longer be seen as if it existed in a stand-alone and sealed-off world," wrote Berger in 2009, when he headed Rhodes University's prestigious School of Journalism in South Africa, before he joined UNESCO. "Instead, it needs to be located within a wider context of public service media rather than exclusively the domain of broadcasters. The issue becomes one of scanning the entire communications horizon as to where public service content is made available to

the public, and also recognising that it can exist in diverse formats: audio, audio-visual, still-image, graphic and text."¹⁰⁶

This raises the question of whether there are alternative ways of sponsoring public service content that bypass the need to establish a full-blown public service broadcaster. And if there are, do these alternatives meet the full range of developmental criteria that one would look for in a PSB? Do they offer a values-based service of media acting in the public interest? Do they offer reliable news and information, and the space for informed national debate? Do they offer universality – the ability to be seen and

Above BBC Media Action uses radio drama and discussion to encourage political accountability. The Nigerian radio soap *Story*. *Story* is broadcast on 128 local radio stations in Nigeria weekly and on BBC World Service.

“ The question is whether there are alternative ways of sponsoring public service content that bypass the need to establish a full-blown public service broadcaster.”

heard by all of the population and for them to participate? Do they offer the space for a nation to establish its identity and for people to talk to each other about what that identity should be? And do they offer enough of a recognisable name or brand to be able to reach out to and attract a sizeable proportion of the population?

Community media is often mentioned as an alternative and there are many very good community media organisations in many parts of the world.¹⁰⁷ However,

most are by definition local and do not have a national reach and so cannot realistically act as a national unifier.

There are an increasing number of media consortia where like-minded individuals and groups come together and by their collaboration produce substantial public interest work. The most obvious example is the growth of networks of investigative journalists, such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which now has a global network of more than 190 journalists in more than 65 countries. Others are the Global Investigative Journalism Network

and Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ).¹⁰⁸ These groups have produced outstanding national and international public interest stories in the last few years but they have needed an established media partner for their stories to have an impact.

There are now an estimated 15,000 blogs in Kenya. Many are text only but a growing number feature stills and video.¹⁰⁹ A lot of the blogs are personal or about showbiz or gossip but among them there are some public service gems. One site, the Bloggers' Association of

Kenya, brings hundreds of these Kenyan blogs together in a single aggregator site.¹¹⁰ By aggregating the different blogs, the site gives them an impact that several hundred individual websites would never achieve.¹¹¹

Citizen journalism – the collection, dissemination and analysis of news and information by the general public, also known as user-generated content (UGC) – has become an increasingly important part of modern-day media. One of the most far-reaching and innovative UGC projects is run by Taiwan Public Television. It could well be a model for others. Called PeoPo, the project has recruited over 4,000 contributing members. Every year they contribute thousands of video reports to a website set up by the TV station. Every day on the main public television channel there is a daily five-minute programme on the best stories filed that day and at the weekend the main news bulletins carry at least four PeoPo reports.¹¹²

It is a highly imaginative project. But its impact crucially depends on there being a main public television organisation in the first place to act as the host with its own channel to give the UGC profile and impact.¹¹³

All of this suggests that, while there is a lot of good public service media being produced by alternative means, none of it meets the full range of criteria for a public service media organisation – that it is independent, trusted, has nationwide reach and has sufficient critical mass to be able to appeal to and reach a sizeable audience.

There should be encouragement of and financial support for the increasing opportunities for alternative methods of producing worthwhile public service content on other platforms. It will not be a substitute for what can be offered by an established national public service broadcaster but it can be a very useful supplement.

“While there is a lot of good public service media being produced by alternative means, none of it meets the full range of criteria for a public service media organisation – that it is independent, trusted, has nationwide reach and has sufficient critical mass to be able to appeal to and reach a sizeable audience.”

PART 8

From public service broadcasting to public service media in the 21st century

The advent of digital technology changes the media landscape for a PSB radically, requiring a new focus beyond radio and television to the internet and social media.

If the PSB is to stay relevant it must have an online presence. This is especially important given the rate of adoption of smartphones by the young, and the age profile of most developing countries. The traditional public service broadcaster will need to become a public service media provider. It will, in all but the least connected fragile states, need to provide content for digital devices such as smartphones; it will need to be interactive, available anytime and to embrace user-generated content and citizen journalism. At the same

time, it will need to develop a new relationship with its audiences who often these days want to be involved in producing the content. If they do not embark on this journey, PSBs will become irrelevant especially with the younger audience. No public, no public service.

It is a long, daunting and potentially expensive list; for PSBs in the developing world doubly so. According to Tim Suter, who has done much work on the future of PSBs: "If it was a hostile environment for public service broadcasting before digital, with digital it's become even more hostile." These days the PSB can't do it all: "The risk for a PSB with a small budget is that it is often trying to do far too much," says Suter. He suggests that the PSB of the future should become "a

Below *Haba Na Haba* (translated as 'Little by Little') is a radio programme broadcast nationally across Tanzania and provides a platform for people to discuss and become involved in how their country is run. The show encourages feedback through Facebook, Twitter and text. It is part of BBC Media Action's programme 'A National Conversation', which aims to build the capacity of local radio station partners and journalists to produce programmes about local governance issues and outreach activities.



“Exactly what this public service media organisation of the future will look like will vary greatly from country to country, both in the scale and in the timing of the changes needed. However, there are likely to be some common themes.”

provider of some content, an enabler of more content and a supporter of yet more content”. For a lot of online content the PSB becomes an “enlightened curator” and guide to content produced by others.¹¹⁴

The foundation for this change will need to be a strong institution. Its capacity to put the public at the heart of everything it does will rest on having the institutional strength to resist editorial pressure from governments and elsewhere and the institutional capacity, skills, creativity and infrastructure to reach and engage all in society. But it will also need to reinvent itself to cater for 21st-century media

and technology markets.

Exactly what this public service media organisation of the future will look like will vary greatly from country to country, both in the scale and in the timing of the changes needed. However, there are likely to be some common themes.

The core services of radio and television will stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Accurate news and informed debate will remain at the heart of public service broadcasting. There is likely to need to be a much greater willingness to syndicate the alternative

“Public service media reform needs a greater level of understanding from donors of the advantages and potential pitfalls of such programmes. Above all, it needs commitment.”

public service content of others, such as community radio and user generated content from viewers, and bring it to a wider audience. This will enhance the debate about national identity by including voices from across the nation, especially from marginalised communities.

There will be a need for at least a minimum online offering, perhaps a slimline online service designed especially for mobiles and smartphones. Apart from carrying the PSB’s own news service, this may be a curation service aggregating and linking to a variety of sources of the trusted content of others.

Despite the many challenges, an independent public service media provider has even greater relevance in the 21st century. This is what a recent Open Society Foundations report on the current state of the media worldwide found: “Governments and politicians have too much influence over who owns, operates, and regulates the media. Many media markets are rife with monopolistic, corrupt, or untransparent practices.” It argued: “Media and journalism online offer hope of new, independent sources of information, but are also a new battleground for censorship and surveillance... The outcome is an unprecedented crisis in the supply of public interest journalism—meaning journalism that is independent, contextual, accountable, and relevant to citizenship.”¹¹⁵

When parts of the commercial media are being suborned by malign agendas, public service media has a unique part to play in any development programme. Done well, such media can make a major contribution to a country’s economic development, good governance and nation forming.

Programmes of turning state broadcasters into proper public service organisations are far from easy and often face full-scale political opposition. But the cause of reform is far from lost. The obstacles can be overcome if the lessons from previous programmes are learnt. Public service media can lead a wider evolution of democratic governance in a country.

Reform of state broadcasting needs a proper planned programme of political and stakeholder engagement, both deep and wide. It needs honest and open conversations. The assumptions on both sides need to be made explicit from the start.

Public service media reform needs a greater level of understanding from donors of the advantages and potential pitfalls of such programmes. Above all, it needs commitment, patience and a proper understanding that the reform of broadcasting takes time and is not a straightforward process. It needs to be an integral part of the whole development reform programme right from the start. Taken together, this approach would offer a realistic and much needed way of tackling media reform in the future, which would make a valuable contribution to the wider reform agenda.

APPENDIX

List of principal interviewees

Walid Batrawi, Country Director, Palestinian Territories, BBC Media Action

Guy Berger, Director, Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development, UNESCO

James Deane, Director, Policy and Learning, BBC Media Action

Simon Derry, Regional Director for the Middle East and Europe, BBC Media Action

Sylvester Ernest, Political Reporter, The Citizen, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Julia Glyn-Pickett, Senior Programme Manager, Programme Development, BBC Media Action

Paul Mylrea, Director of Communications, University of Cambridge and former Communications Director for the UK Department for International Development and former Head of Media, Oxfam GB

Eve Sabbagh, Country Director, Tunisia, BBC Media Action

Shirazuddin Siddiqi, Country Director, Afghanistan, BBC Media Action

Elizabeth Smith, Transforming Broadcasting Consultants and former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association

Rebecca Stringer, former Country Director, Tanzania, BBC Media Action

Tim Suter, Perspective Associates, and former Partner at UK broadcast regulator Ofcom, responsible for all aspects of content regulation, and head of Broadcast Policy at DCMS

Jerry Timmins, Director GMT Media Ltd, Creative Leader in Media Development and former head of Middle East and Africa for the BBC World Service

Sally-Ann Wilson, Chief Executive, Public Media Alliance

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