

Policy Briefing

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The power of talk

Media and accountability in three African countries

Rebecca Stringer

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Front cover
Interviewing for a
radio programme in
Sierra Leone.
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Preface

A free and plural media rooted in a strong culture of independent journalism – one that holds politicians to account, even when they do not want to be – has long been regarded as a cornerstone of a functioning democratic system. It is also a cornerstone of the BBC.

As the BBC’s international development charity, BBC Media Action subscribes strongly to this principle. Through our work with media and communication in some of the world’s most fragile political settings, we work to ensure that people from all sections of society have a greater understanding of - and ability to uphold - their fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression. Many of our programmes for radio and television reach mass audiences of several million, across whole societies – political and community leaders as well as ordinary people. This creates the potential to increase knowledge, shift attitudes and increase people’s confidence and motivation to play an active role in public and political life. It also gives people the opportunity to hold their leaders to account for their actions and policies.

We recognise, however, that in certain political and social contexts and at certain moments in time, having audiences confront leaders directly and demand responses from them may not be the only effective way to foster accountability. In such circumstances, development practitioners may need

to modify their approach. In some cases, this may mean broadcasting from outside the country. In other cases, it will mean devising flexible strategies that find other ways of bringing public officials together with audiences.

This policy briefing illustrates this latter tactic. It draws on learning from BBC Media Action’s implementation of one project in particular – working to support media in three African countries: Angola, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. The project was originally supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through its Governance and Transparency Fund and ran from 2007 to 2013. Activities included support to an ambitious reform programme of Tanzania’s state broadcaster, capacity strengthening of community broadcasters in Sierra Leone (and later in Tanzania) and co-producing programmes with one of Angola’s few relatively independent radio stations.

The briefing draws on quantitative and qualitative research, as well as insights from those implementing the projects, in order to shed light on some of the political realities that surround media as an institution that helps hold those in power to account. The briefing documents both the successes of the project and some of the shortcomings. It should be of interest to development and media development actors wishing to gain a better understanding of the role of media as a driver of accountability in resource-poor settings.

INTRODUCTION

Media-driven accountability – from best practice to best fit

Few within the international development community question the importance of a free, professional and plural media in contributing to good governance. For some, a vibrant media is intimately connected to a broader set of goals designed to promote human rights and freedom of expression. For others, access to information is a precondition of citizenship, particularly in enabling individuals to select their leaders.

In recent years, development debates have become increasingly concerned with how people can hold, and be supported to hold, their political leaders to account and ensure that resources and services are delivered effectively in the public interest. With the rising emphasis on accountability within development thinking (especially among donors) over the past two decades, it was increasingly the “watchdog” role that emerged as media’s most important function. Rooted in an understanding of the social contract in which citizens, civil society organisations and other non-state actors make the state responsive to their needs, the “demand for good governance” model of development implied – if not necessitated – a media sector that enabled citizens to demand their rights and hold governments directly to account.¹

This demand-based model of accountability is highly aspirational. Donors increasingly appreciate the myriad ways that socio-political context – and in particular, state–society relationships – condition the effectiveness of demand-based governance interventions. As a more locally rooted paradigm of accountability begins to take hold, there is a shift from a mindset of “best practice” to one of “best fit” and to learning-by-doing. So far, however, there has been little exploration of where the media might fit within this more nuanced accountability framework and – critically – how practical experience rooted in the media sector might help to inform it.

This policy briefing does just that. It draws on BBC Media Action’s experience delivering a five-year project, A National Conversation, which used diverse media formats to promote transparency, accountability and participation in three African countries.

Through our work in Angola, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, we found that media formats that encouraged citizens to “demand” services from their leaders could at times risk alienating public officials or the audiences the programmes sought to serve. In contrast, working with the media to create trustworthy spaces that brought disparate groups together to discuss, mediate and collectively problem-solve – especially at the local level – often proved more effective at engaging governments and citizens alike.

The lessons from A National Conversation thus suggest a need for a more complex exploration of the potential for media to drive improved governance in fragile and emerging democracies, one that moves beyond a simple citizen–state “demand” model to one that is more socially inclusive and grounded in experience. At the same time, the project’s evolution across five years also demonstrates the adaptive flexibility increasingly valued within development discourse.

“[There is] a need for a more complex exploration of the potential for media to drive improved governance in fragile and emerging democracies.”

Part 1 provides a brief overview of contemporary donor thinking on accountability.

Part 2 situates A National Conversation – the title of the whole project – within that framework, describing the project’s objectives as well as a summary of its role in each of the three countries.

Part 3 outlines what we learned as we went.

Part 4 lays out how those lessons can, in turn, deepen our understanding of accountability and governance in emerging democracies.

Part 5 summarises the main recommendations for donors and practitioners.

Below In Sierra Leone, BBC Media Action works with the media to solve problems at the local level.



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PART I

Demand-side accountability

Above BBC Media Action producer Amadu Sandy (right) joins the press pack during Sierra Leone's 2012 elections.

During the late 1990s, donor organisations began broadly to classify governance reform in terms of “supply-side” (focused on government reform) and “demand-side” (focused on citizen voice, oversight institutions and civil society organisations). The demand-side approach is rooted in a model where citizens drive improved accountability and governance through voicing their demands for good governance.² This framework remains dominant; however, a more nuanced literature is emerging that questions its universal applicability, particularly within fragile states and emerging democracies.

A National Conversation was funded by DFID's Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF), a funding mechanism established as an outcome of DFID's 2006 White Paper “Eliminating world poverty: making governance work for the poor”.³ The White Paper saw state effectiveness as the “single most important factor that determines whether or not successful development takes place”.⁴ Within this rubric, the

paper situates accountability – the process by which people are able to hold government to account – at the heart of how change happens. Accountability is defined in the paper as the mechanism whereby “civil society organisations give citizens power, help poor people get their voices heard, and demand more from politicians and government”.⁵ The Governance and Transparency Fund provided funding to civil society organisations – including the media – to fulfil this accountability objective.⁶

DFID's approach to accountability was not unique at the time. Many bilateral and multilateral organisations saw – and continue to see – governance and accountability as a cornerstone of successful development.⁷ As summarised by World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim in a recent speech: “Citizen voice can be pivotal in providing the demand-side pressure on government.”⁸ Over time, what came to be known as the “social accountability” (and related “demand for good governance”) framework entailed a range of actions and strategies – beyond

voting – that societal actors and ordinary people could employ to hold the state to account. Examples include participatory public policy-making, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, and citizens’ monitoring and evaluation of public services. What all of these approaches have in common is that they emphasise a direct dialogue and forthright negotiation with governments.⁹

To the extent that the media features in this discourse – which is surprisingly little¹⁰ – it is usually framed as an intermediary institution, one that enables an informed citizenry to participate effectively in policy-making and to sanction the government when it falls short on its commitments.¹¹ The 2006 DFID White Paper, for example, saw the role of the media as one of asking tough questions and encouraging debate.¹² The demand-based accountability model thus embraces a media that principally fulfils what the academic literature refers to as a “watchdog” role focused on monitoring the behaviour of the powerful. To a lesser extent, it also envisions elements of the media as a public forum, a role that ensures an inclusive public debate capable of incorporating a diverse and balanced range of political perspectives and social sectors.¹³

Increasingly, however, leading donor agencies are beginning to question whether demand-side accountability approaches are all that applicable to fragile political settings such as those which characterise many

sub-Saharan African countries. A recent paper by the World Bank, for example, warns against the “tendency to be overly optimistic about the potential of ‘demand-side’ governance approaches to solve difficult and context-specific development problems”.¹⁴ Concerned that such projects are often not grounded in the realities of state–society relations, there is a growing sense that accountability projects need to be *locally resonant* (that is, not purely Western in orientation and aspiration); *complex* rather than linear in their understanding of how change occurs; and rooted in adaptation and *learning-by-doing* rather than adhering strictly to a fixed log frame. Viewed in this light, according to the World Bank, effective policy-making works *with* rather than against a country’s grain, a metaphor we will explore further in Part 4.

Looking specifically at the media sector, we show how the basic premise of demand-side accountability can be overly simplistic, at least when grafted onto political environments characterised by patronage and patrimony. In such settings, our project underscored how a flexible, context-specific approach by the media can yield peaceful and productive dialogue between ordinary people and the state.

“[There is a] tendency to be overly optimistic about the potential of ‘demand-side’ governance approaches to solve difficult and context-specific development problems.”



Left Encouraging a culture of questioning in Tanzania (pictured) and elsewhere was an aim of A National Conversation.



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PART 2

A National Conversation

Above Intensive capacity strengthening with local radio stations such as this one in Sierra Leone was a major element of A National Conversation.

Launched in 2008 in Angola, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, A National Conversation was a five-year, £5 million project across the three countries. The project was squarely conceived within the GTF’s accountability framework, in that it saw the media as critical in giving voice to ordinary people to demand improved governance. Specifically, the project’s goal was to enable the public to participate in informed debate about the way their societies were run, to create demand among communities for more responsive government and to hold governments to account. As stated in the opening of the project proposal, “A strong and free media is synonymous with strong state accountability.”¹⁵

- Political leaders more willing to engage in debate/discussions with the public
- Increased demand among the public for better services

Increased participation:

- Increased media platforms where citizens debate governance issues and influence policy
- Increased interpersonal communication on governance issues

Objectives

A National Conversation had three objectives:

Increased transparency:

- More information released by governments
- Media better able to interpret this information for the public
- Media freer to investigate governance issues
- Corruption exposed to a greater extent

Increased accountability:

- Citizens more able to hold political leaders to account

Right Radio listener, Sierra Leone. A National Conversation increased the number of media platforms for citizen debate.



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The project in a nutshell

Angola

- Production of *100 Duvidas* (100 Doubts) in partnership with Radio Ecclesia: a twice-weekly magazine radio programme and website dedicated to governance issues in the capital, Luanda
- Capacity strengthening of Radio Ecclesia, focused on public service journalism
- Co-production of drama *Estrada da Vida* (Street of Life) in partnership with the Forum of Women Journalists for Gender Equality (FMJIG)

Sierra Leone

- Intensive capacity strengthening of six community radio stations, all members of the Independent Radio Network (IRN)
- Production of national *Fo Rod* (At the Crossroads) with packages focusing on local governance issues

from partner stations; production of local versions of *Fo Rod* by partners

- Production of debate and town hall road show *Tok Bot Salone* (Talk About Sierra Leone)

Tanzania

- Capacity strengthening of the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation in its efforts to transition from state-run to public-service broadcaster with a major focus on supporting elections coverage
- Intensive capacity strengthening of eight local radio stations with a focus on public service journalism
- Production of *Haba na Haba* (Little by Little) in partnership with BBC Swahili Service and partner local radio stations; production of local versions of *Haba na Haba* by partners

The project

In all three countries, production was a core aspect of project delivery. BBC Media Action supported the production of or co-produced five weekly radio programmes with local partners: *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bot Salone* in Sierra Leone, *Estrada da Vida* and *100 Duvidas* in Angola and *Haba na Haba* in Tanzania. Formats varied and included discussion and debate programmes, radio magazines and drama. In Sierra Leone and Tanzania partner radio stations were also supported either to redevelop or launch new governance programmes focusing on local issues. In Sierra Leone, for example, *We Yone Voice* (Our Voice) was launched at Radio Voice of Women in Matruu Jong.

Capacity strengthening was a second core element of the project, and this included mentoring partner radio stations, training newsroom staff, supporting station management, board leadership and financial sustainability, as well as establishing, training and mentoring the production teams of local governance programmes. The idea was to help to strengthen institutional capacity across the media organisations supported. Helping to put partner stations in touch with the needs of their audiences was also crucial to creating lasting change on the ground. Journalists working on *100 Duvidas*, for example, say that they now investigate issues raised by audiences in calls to the station before contacting the authorities for the other side of the story. As one station reporter noted: “With *100 Duvidas* I have learned how to be critical about things and I am not superficial anymore. *100 Duvidas* helps me to look at the background of the issues that affect society.”¹⁶

Countries

Angola

Ranking 157th out of 197 countries in Freedom House’s Freedom of the Press 2013 and deemed “Not Free”, Angola was a challenging environment for a media and accountability project.¹⁷ There has been a single ruling party (the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola or MPLA) since Angola gained independence from Portugal in 1975, and a single president since 1979. The media sector is tightly controlled through ownership and restrictions.¹⁸

BBC Media Action initially worked with Radio Ecclesia, a Catholic radio station based in Luanda that had slightly more freedom than most media outlets due to its religious and public service outlook.

However, in the run-up to the 2012 elections, Radio Ecclesia came under increasing pressure to take a more pro-government editorial line, which led to the end of the formal agreement with BBC Media Action. This necessitated a shift in strategy: from July 2012, activities focused instead on working with the Union of Angolan Journalists (SJA) and the Forum of Women Journalists for Gender Equality (FMJIG) to strengthen capacity and co-produce the radio drama *Estrada da Vida*, which addressed governance and gender issues. The authorities found the drama less threatening as it explored fictional characters and issues.

“With *100 Duvidas* I have learned how to be critical about things and I am not superficial anymore. *100 Duvidas* helps me to look at the background of the issues that affect society.”

Sierra Leone

When the project launched, the legacy of the country’s 1992–2002 civil war was evident: journalists were poorly trained, wages were stagnant and the sector was dominated by partisan and low-quality broadcasters. BBC Media Action’s programming began with the weekly *Fo Rod* magazine show as well as mentoring community radio stations and providing some support to the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists to strengthen their public service remit. In 2012, BBC Media Action launched the radio debate show *Tok Bot Salone*, currently broadcast on 40 partner radio stations.

Tanzania

From independence in 1961 until the mid-1980s, Tanzania was a one-party state with a socialist economic model. The party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), has still not lost an election despite the advent of multi-party elections in the mid-1990s. The first private TV station did not launch until 1994 and the state-run TVT (predecessor to the current Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation) did not emerge until 2001.

The project team in Tanzania initially worked with the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) to support its transition from a state-run to a public-service broadcaster. As a result, TBC’s 2010 election coverage was widely seen to be free and balanced – a substantial success in a

country which had only ever seen the national broadcaster as a mouthpiece of government. The election, in October 2010, also saw the greatest loss in popularity of CCM since the start of multi-party politics.¹⁹ Shortly after the election, the contractual relationship with BBC Media Action was declared null and void (see box on the case study of the TBC, page 18).

The project switched to mentoring local radio stations so as to produce governance programming that could be aired nationally on a new flagship radio programme *Haba na Haba*, broadcast on BBC Swahili Service and local networks. As in Sierra Leone, over time the approach evolved to focus on providing support right across the organisations, including newsrooms, production teams, editorial, management and financial sustainability.

A National Conversation was an ambitious project. The original proposal envisioned something that would simultaneously foster voice, demand-based accountability and participatory policy-making, as well as citizen–government interaction. Matched with this ambition and complexity, however, was the project’s flexibility. This meant that project teams were quickly able to apply lessons from what they had observed and to change their approach based on what was working – and what was not. Part 3 of this briefing documents this learning process, while Part 4 explores what it meant for the project’s evolving understanding of accountability.

Right In Angola (pictured), producing factual programming became increasingly difficult as the government stepped up pressure on media partners.



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PART 3

What we learned

What worked?

A culture of questioning

Media liberalisation in the 1990s and 2000s led to significant changes in many sub-Saharan African countries. Of particular note, the opening up of the media sectors in Sierra Leone and Tanzania produced a proliferation of local and community radio stations, some of which were producing content focused on public service broadcasting.²⁰ By and large, however, most media in the three countries in question fulfilled one of four functions: listing government policy priorities; showcasing expert views (often on airtime funded by non-governmental organisations or NGOs); playing music; or – more recently – allowing listeners to call in to chat shows on topical issues.²¹ The concept of media bringing ordinary people and elected leaders together was – with some notable exceptions – still quite a foreign one. As *Fo Rod* producer Amara Bangura noted: “There has been a culture here that people don’t ask questions.”²²

A National Conversation helped to change that. It provided the opportunity to strengthen the nascent public service broadcasting already in existence. But it also allowed the

media to bring issues such as access to water, poor health services or unemployment to a public (often national) platform where they were discussed directly with elected leaders and those responsible for service delivery (such as health authorities). As John Kidasi, station manager at Radio Ukweli in Morogoro, Tanzania put it, “We are the voice of the voiceless. The government already has a voice [Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation]. Media is for the people ... to solve the problems of the needy: roads, water, malaria, typhus.”²³

In Angola, *100 Duvidas* aimed to establish a culture of talking about issues important to communities. Initially, no one believed that government officials or service providers would appear on the programme, but by the end of the project 62% of *100 Duvidas* episodes featured government officials.²⁴ In Sierra Leone and Tanzania, programmes compiled examples of similar problems faced by local communities in towns and villages from around the country, sparking “national conversations” on shared issues.

Above In Tanzania, citizens were able to air their concerns on both local and national platforms.

“We are the voice of the voiceless. The government already has a voice. Media is for the people ... to solve the problems of the needy: roads, water, malaria, typhus.”

“The programme gives the audience an opportunity to ask questions that they would not ever be able to ask the council.”

For many people in these countries, even the idea of asking a question – let alone expecting some sort of response from the government – was truly novel. As Alice Mustapha, a village correspondent in Sierra Leone observed: “The programme gives the audience an opportunity to ask questions that they would not ever be able to ask the council.”²⁵

Audience response

Audience reactions to the radio programmes produced under A National Conversation were overwhelmingly positive. By the end of the project, the majority (over 80%) of regular listeners in each of the three countries thought that the programmes were a useful tool for enabling citizens to air their concerns about how the country was run and that the programming helped to solve governance issues raised, and also that project programming was playing a “key role” in holding government to account.²⁶

There are other indicators of positive audience engagement as well. For example, visits to the Radio Ecclesia website rose from less than 2,000 visitors a month to an average of 15,000, after a greater variety

of content was produced specifically for the website giving people outside Luanda access for the first time.²⁷ The box on media and accountability in Sierra Leone provides further evidence for the programming’s impact on knowledge of key governance issues as well as participation.

Debate and discussion

To contextualise the research findings, interviews with project staff were conducted by the author. The majority of interviewees felt that the radio programmes that focused explicitly on creating opportunities for discussion between disparate groups (usually but not exclusively ordinary people and government/service providers) were most popular with audiences. This was especially the case where discussion was solution-based rather than directly or overtly challenging or critical.

In May 2011, the youth in Matru Jong, Sierra Leone carried out community service projects under a food for work campaign run by an international non-governmental organisation, including cleaning public structures, repairing roads and working on community farms. But the promised food never appeared. A local *Fo Rod* programme (*We Yone Voice*) was broadcast on Radio Voice of Women in Matru Jong in September



Right Regular listeners to the debate programme *Tok Bot Salone*, pictured here, were more likely to have knowledge of key issues affecting their daily lives than non-listeners.

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Media and accountability in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, regular listeners to the debate programme *Tok Bot Salone* were more likely to have higher levels of knowledge on key governance issues and participate politically more frequently than those who did not listen.*

At the end of the project, data from the 2013 nationally representative survey in Sierra Leone was analysed to answer two research questions:

1. Is listening to BBC Media Action programming in Sierra Leone statistically associated with increased levels of knowledge on women's rights, political party agendas, corruption, and water and electricity service delivery?
2. Is listening to BBC Media Action programming in Sierra Leone statistically associated with more frequent political participation?

A regression analysis demonstrated the following findings:

People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* were more likely to report high levels of knowledge across political party agendas, women's rights, water and electricity service delivery and corruption than people who did not listen to the programmes.

| Listenership | Results explained |
|--|--|
| Regular listener to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i> | Three times more likely to have high levels of knowledge than someone who never listened |
| Regular listener to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i> and sometime listener to <i>Fo Rod</i> | Five times more likely to have high levels of knowledge than someone who never listened |

Relationship between political participation and listenership

People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* were more likely to participate frequently in politics through contacting a national or local official, taking part in an organised effort to solve a problem and/or attending a local council meeting, compared with people who did not listen to the programmes.

| Listenership | Results explained |
|--|---|
| Regular listener to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i> | Two times more likely to frequently politically participate than someone who never listened |
| Regular listener to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i> and sometime listener to <i>Fo Rod</i> | Three times more likely to frequently politically participate than someone who never listened |

Furthermore, as the above tables show, the analysis allowed us to establish that those who listened to both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* were more likely than those listening to just one programme to have higher levels of knowledge and to participate more frequently.

*This analysis controlled for characteristics that were associated with both listening to our programme and levels of knowledge and participation, respectively. Controlling for these characteristics allowed us to remove their potential explanatory effect for high levels of knowledge and participation in our models.

covering the issue. This programme united, for the very first time, the young people involved, the civil society organisation co-ordinator for the campaign, the town chief and a youth leader. As a result of that conversation, the food supply began the following week.

Demand for discussion was also evident on Sierra Leone's town hall-style panel debate programme *Tok Bot Salone*. Each week, after the microphones were turned off, panellists continued to be "mobbed" with questions from the audience that hadn't been asked during the live programme.²⁸

In every region of Tanzania where a radio "open day" was held, the local radio reported improved responsiveness and access to government (see box on Open days in Tanzania). As the station director at Orkonerei FM Radio put it, "Since our open day, the District Commissioner has been calling me night and day demanding his right to reply to issues raised in programmes. He refused to even speak to us before."²⁹

The radio programmes also prompted discussion off air. The quantitative surveys for the project asked audiences the extent to which they discussed issues with family and friends. In Angola 88%, in Sierra Leone 68% and in Tanzania 35% of listeners agreed with the statement that the radio programmes catalysed discussion about governance issues with friends and family.³⁰ In Angola,

Open days in Tanzania: creating space for discussion

In Tanzania BBC Media Action supported partners to host **radio open days**, to which major stakeholders, including local government, were invited. During the open days lively debates were conducted about the role of local radio in the community, and leaders' responsibilities to participate. In each case, the radio station reported improved relationships with local government and better access to officials and information.



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Above Audience members, like this listener in Sierra Leone, prefer programmes which address local issues such as healthcare, education and securing clean water.

each episode of *100 Duvidas* received between 40 and 70 SMS messages from the audience.³¹ In audience research conducted in Tanzania in 2012, most respondents said *Haba na Haba* had benefited their community by providing knowledge and raising levels of awareness. As a result, listeners thought it was worth sharing this information with other community members, including friends, family and work colleagues. “I will advise my fellow villagers on our duties because we keep on blaming the leaders all of the time,” said a female participant from Iringa.³²

Everything’s local

Formative research and the quantitative baseline survey produced key insights into audience preferences.³³ This ongoing research built a rich tapestry of knowledge which was then fed back into local and national production. For example, one question asked which issues mattered most to people in terms of their countries and their day-to-day lives. In Tanzania, respondents consistently answered year on year that corruption was the biggest issue facing their country but access to clean water was the main issue facing their lives (see box on local priority issues in Sierra Leone).

Not surprisingly, radio programmes that focused on local issues tended to be more popular with audiences, as opposed to those which covered national issues (such as policy reform) that did not resonate with people’s ordinary lives (see box on Mile 91). As then BBC Media Action country director for Angola, Soeren Johannsen, put it, “It’s all about service delivery in slum areas. People couldn’t care less if the president had stolen money – it doesn’t affect their lives.”³⁵

Focus group respondents in all three countries were also more enthusiastic and engaged with programmes covering issues that affected their day-to-day lives or that affected a local area with which they could identify. According to the final project report, “Collectively, public service delivery, economic livelihood, and personal safety were identified as the top three concerns ... governance and corruption issues ranked near the bottom of the issue rankings.”³⁶

Local priority issues in Sierra Leone (an excerpt)³⁴

| What are the problems that most affect you in your community? | % of Total |
|--|------------|
| Public service delivery (eg health care, education, waste disposal) | 74.6% |
| Economic & livelihood (eg unemployment, lack of markets, price control) | 18.4% |
| Government & corruption (eg ineffective local government, corruption) | 2.5% |
| Moral/social/gender issues (eg teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, child labour) | 2.4% |
| Personal safety (eg security) | 1.6% |
| Climate change & environment (eg environmental destruction) | 0.5% |
| Grand total | 100 % |

Mile 91

In Mile 91, a town in Northern Province of Sierra Leone, it is common to see disabled people – especially those who are disabled as a result of the civil war – begging on the streets amid widespread discrimination. Ibrahim Conteh, a local journalist in the Mile 91 area, says many of these disabled people are side-lined by political and governance debates and activities such as political meetings, public rallies and other social activities.

In June and July 2011, local *Fo Rod* programmes focused on the lives and stigmatisation of people with disabilities. Following these programmes, disabled people formed the “Mile 91 Disabled Association” to discuss their issues with the wider community and strengthen their voice in political and governance debates.

100 Duvidas used this learning to break down the major issues of corruption into subjects that directly affected citizens’ lives, such as “Why hasn’t that road been fixed?” and “How do you get your identification card?” Framed this way, local officials were more willing to come on to the programme to answer citizens’ concerns and questions. As Angola country director Soeren Johannsen observed, “In one edition we had the vice governor of Luanda responding directly on air to audiences, which has not happened before. It would have been unthinkable two years ago.”³⁷ In general, the project found a much greater opportunity to probe accountability issues, develop relationships with local government and service providers, and see change happen at the local level.³⁸ When discussion was not led by journalists but by constituents, with a fair and transparent mechanism for response by government, this also created an environment of trust, making it harder for district administrations to find fault with the programming.³⁹

Civic education

Another of the project’s success was its use of media to inculcate an understanding of governance and citizenship issues. Of regular listeners surveyed, 59% in Angola, 87% in Sierra Leone and 80% in Tanzania reported increased knowledge of key governance issues as a result of listening to the project’s programming.⁴⁰

In Tanzania, for example, an episode of *Haba na Haba* on the role of local MPs prompted a high SMS response. In focus group feedback on the episode, respondents said they had learned that members of parliament (MPs) were supposed to reside in their constituencies so as to follow up on local development projects. One listener reflected: “I have always known that the members of parliament are the ones who are going to help us but what I learned

is that the citizens have to initiate whatever they want and then the members of parliament help them.”⁴¹

Programmes that explained citizen–state accountability relationships were also popular. A number of participants in the listening groups in Sierra Leone, for example, said that the *Fo Rod* programme had taught them that those in power have a responsibility towards citizens. “Everybody has the right to know what is going on in their community despite their tribe, colour or education background,”⁴² said one listening group participant in Masengbe.

Audiences also responded positively to programmes that looked at what duties citizens owed their governments. In Sierra Leone, an episode of *Fo Rod* explained how the tax system worked. Some focus group respondents reported that they were moved to urge their communities to begin paying taxes, as they had not understood the role of taxation previously. As one participant on *Fo Rod* exclaimed, “From now on we are going to be ambassadors to urge others to pay their local taxes because we now know the benefits.”⁴³

Finally, audiences also saw the programmes as an opportunity for governments to learn from listeners. In focus group discussions in Sierra Leone, for example, one audience panel saw *Fo Rod* as a tool for officials to get policy ideas from citizens.⁴⁴

Stories of change

By 2012, the Tanzania office was receiving a significant number of calls from audience members as well as partner stations claiming that certain national or local episodes of *Haba na Haba* had led to some sort of change within their local area. So the office began to collect these reports, recording some 30 instances between March 2012 and September 2013 where callers claimed changes

“Everybody has the right to know what is going on in their community despite their tribe, colour or education background.”

Below In Tanzania, the Pangani district commissioner (pictured) appeared on *Haba na Haba* to discuss classroom shortages. A village school was later rebuilt.



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were a result of the airing of a particular episode. Over the lifetime of the project, Sierra Leone and Angola also collected a wide range of anecdotal stories about how the programmes had prompted change.

These stories could not be independently verified or attributed – in any causal sense – to the radio programmes. However, some trends did emerge. In all three countries, the majority of these stories related to local issues, usually around poor service delivery (for example, the repair of a ferry, the destruction of an illegal building to allow access

to a village water source, the provision of hospital beds and school desks, land dispute mechanisms and so on). In most of these cases, the radio programmes had involved discussion and debate with a number of stakeholders including the people affected, civil society organisations and representatives from local or district governments. And in all cases, audiences, journalists and stakeholders involved attributed these improvements directly to the airing of the programme. (See box on stories of change, which contains just a few of the examples.)

Stories of change

Right to protest in Angola

One episode of *100 Duvidas* covered the right to protest, including a debate on what constitutes a protest, the legal regulations surrounding protest and how protests get authorised. The episode brought together the Luanda Provincial Government, a lawyer, a national police officer and a student protestor to discuss this issue. Soon after the programme aired protests were held in Luanda, and the Luanda Provincial Government allowed them to go ahead. Subsequently, some international media outlets reported on a growing movement of protests across other regions of Angola in the ensuing months. Although impossible to link these events in any causal manner, this chain of protests does suggest that this episode of *100 Duvidas* may have been a catalyst for encouraging peaceful, lawful assembly in the country, a cornerstone of free speech and holding government to account.⁴⁵

Schools in Tanzania

Haba na Haba in Tanzania aired an episode on the shortage of classrooms in schools, in which it showcased Mtonga Primary School in Pangani where three of its six classrooms had been closed due to cracks in the walls and danger to pupils. The episode included the district commissioner, and was then heard by Chiku Gawala, the regional commissioner. Shortly after this programme the local administrative government identified a new location and built a new school for the village.

Fake drugs in Sierra Leone

“When the episode on fake drugs was played in Kamadugu Sokurela village, it attracted a lot of listeners in the village. In the morning, the village headman passed a law that anybody or any stranger found selling drugs without a licence should be arrested and passed to the Paramount Chief” (Fatmata Sesay, Grass Root Education and Development for Women, Koinadugu, Sierra Leone).⁴⁶

Cholera in Sierra Leone

Between mid-April and mid-May 2012, a cholera outbreak in Sierra Leone caused about 150 patients to be admitted to hospital, and resulted in five deaths. Radio Kolenten Kambia approached the District Health Management Team, but they were, at first, unwilling to talk about the issue because,



Above Children at Mtonga Primary School in Pangani.

according to the health superintendent Dr Mohammed Jalloh, “They don’t want to blow the issue out of proportion because whenever cholera is discussed, the people will be scared.”⁴⁷

After a lengthy discussion, Dr Jalloh agreed to be interviewed on air. In the interview, he admitted that, “We are running out of drugs because of the daily admission of cases ... the council says there is no allocation from central government on health since the start of the year.”⁴⁸ The programme succeeded in breaking the silence on the issue and this gave rise to the prompt intervention of several organisations to help fight the outbreak.

Above all, the Kambia District Council finally disbursed funds for the purchase of drugs to treat patients. The district medical officer Dr Tom Sesay said: “We must say thank you to the media for your timely intervention. This has yielded good fruits because before your intervention, council says there was no money to fight the outbreak. But your intervention has forced them to disburse funds. Now we have enough to respond to any other emergency.”⁴⁹

It is, of course, possible that in some cases such responsiveness on the part of local governments was merely “tokenistic” and did not lead to further substantive policy reform. Even so, the fact that listeners were motivated enough to contact partner stations with these anecdotal stories of change shows that audiences felt that the radio programmes had improved their lives. When seen alongside the research data, a persuasive possibility exists that the radio programmes were in some cases doing more than just increasing voice and encouraging citizens to ask questions. At times, they may actually have been leading to changes in audience members’ lives.

Challenges

A National Conversation brought a fresh approach to journalism, one that was rooted in direct audience engagement with political leaders and programming that reflected audience needs. Like all projects, however, it had its pitfalls and these, too, have helped the organisation to learn. It is to those weaknesses that we now turn.

“Watchdog” role of the media

It is telling that in the fourth year of the project, the Annual Report acknowledged that “The ability of the project programming to hold government to account is

the area of least progress thus far.”⁵⁰ Indeed, feedback from qualitative research and interviews with project teams suggests that trying to support media partners in their role as guardians of the public interest sometimes led to politicians disengaging and arguably reduced accountability and transparency.

There were three particular themes that consistently emerged in all three countries which help to unravel why this more assertive accountability role for the media was so problematic, a topic we return to in more depth in Part 4.

1. Leaders may not respect media as a tool of accountability.

In many democratic countries, if leaders are to be seen as responsible, responsive and accountable, they need to face difficult questions in the media.⁵¹ But elected and non-elected leaders in the three countries featured in A National Conversation at times demonstrated little or no sense of obligation to appear in the national media. Indeed, in those instances where the media attempted to directly

“Trying to support media partners in their role as guardians of the public interest sometimes led to politicians disengaging and arguably reduced accountability and transparency.”



Left In Sierra Leone, journalists covering the 2012 election benefited from production support. Bringing leaders to the table proved more challenging.

“It doesn’t look at all bad for ministers to dodge out of TV debates – people don’t expect them to turn up.”

hold leaders accountable, there was often a kneejerk reaction by those in power to reduce transparency, or even to close the media down altogether.

In Sierra Leone, for example, *Fo Rod* produced a series of programmes on the newly enacted Disability Act, so that people might understand how it would be applied in practice. One of the most heated episodes of *Fo Rod* revealed that the Ministry of Social Welfare itself did not employ any disabled people. After that programme, the team noticed that it was suddenly very difficult to get hold of ministry officials as live studio guests. The programme producers of *Fo Rod* believed that this was because the government had embarrassed itself on the issue of employment for disabled people in government positions.⁵² As a station manager at Jogoo FM in Tanzania put it, “In our area, our leaders fear being criticised and that’s how they look at the radio. They think we are trying to embarrass them ... so in most cases they shy away from such debates.”⁵³

2. Audiences were more interested in how media could provide solutions to day-to-day problems than in holding leaders directly to account.

In each of these countries, a patronage system of governance had traditionally existed (and to a large extent still exists today), whether tribal/feudal in rural Sierra Leone, socialist in Tanzania, or monopolised political authority in Angola. In such settings, ordinary voters are not traditionally given the authority to either question or demand answers from leaders. Like many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, there is no political contract in place based on vertical accountability between citizen and state.

The project’s expectations of an audience preference for accountability may thus have been somewhat unrealistic.⁵⁴ As senior project manager Lynn Morris observed, “It doesn’t look at all bad for ministers to dodge out of TV debates – people don’t expect them to turn up.”⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, perhaps, one audience member in Sierra Leone chastised the author of this policy briefing for allowing audiences to ask bold questions of government panellists, saying, “You should be ashamed of yourself asking questions like this; the government are our parents – you must honour your parents.”⁵⁶

Audiences and partners expressed frustration at times with the lack of honesty and accuracy of answers given by

leaders. As the station manager of a Sierra Leone partner, Radio Voice of the Peninsula, observed, “Sometimes these government officials keep defending their offices, leaving the main issue on the ground.”⁵⁷

However, focus group data shows that audiences generally did not frame this frustration in terms of a lack of accountability. Rather, they repeatedly searched for how the responses from officials could lead to improvements in their day-to-day lives. For example, in focus groups conducted in March 2013 in Tanzania, one participant in Pangani observed: “This programme is good and we are thankful, but just being there doesn’t help, we need to also see changes.”⁵⁸ In earlier audience focus groups conducted in Tanzania in 2012, participants also said that while some government officials seemed willing to solve problems, others appeared not to be prepared to engage in constructive dialogue. Participants suggested that instead of just focusing on challenges, programmes should balance reporting by looking at successful policy initiatives so as to enable audiences and officials alike to learn together to improve service delivery.⁵⁹ This audience feedback again underscores the preference for local problem-solving discussed in the previous section.⁶⁰

3. It is not always clear whom to hold to account.

In all three countries, complex webs of patronage and allegiances underlie official power structures. This makes it very difficult to know who is ultimately responsible for demands placed on government – including service provision. At the same time, because positions are often awarded on the basis of personal connections, the work done when holding office is therefore mostly about nurturing such networks.⁶¹ In such instances, the actual responsibility and day-to-day management of portfolios can become secondary element of the role of public officials. Not surprisingly, programme teams found that elected officials were often poorly informed about areas for which they were nominally responsible so that even a leader who wished to provide factually accurate answers to the public’s questions would find it difficult to do so. As a listening group participant in Sierra Leone observed, “They actually do not answer the questions I was interested in. I was expecting statistical analysis on the number of people that have so far benefited from the free health care. None of them could give an answer to this.”⁶²

Political environment

The changing political contexts within the three countries over the five years shaped the enabling environment for the project and had a major impact on the appetite of the state – and audiences – to focus on accountability.

“This programme is good and we are thankful, but just being there doesn’t help, we need to also see changes.”



Left Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation was commended for its 2010 electoral coverage but government support for the broadcaster's independent stance quickly waned.

Electoral periods were the most sensitive in this regard. For six months prior to elections, the political environment virtually shut down in Tanzania and Angola, with much greater scrutiny and control of political and governance content in the media. In Sierra Leone, political debate increased around elections but the entire system of government effectively came to a halt, with no decisions being made and almost all projects ceasing because the environment had become so overtly politicised.

Angola

As mentioned earlier, increasing pressure was placed on Radio Ecclesia to take a more pro-government editorial line in the run-up to and aftermath of the August 2012 elections. All long-term agreements with international partners, including BBC Media Action, were cancelled. As a result, in March 2013, BBC Media Action took the decision to close its office in Angola ahead of the scheduled end of project. The external evaluator of the project noted that "insufficient attention was paid to conducting a nuanced and comprehensive analysis ... The use of a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) approach could have more explicitly addressed these risks in programme activities."⁶³

Sierra Leone

The project initially planned to produce a televised presidential debate programme during the 2012 elections. The team received commitment from the president and leaders of opposition parties to go ahead with this programme. However, each time the debate was due to be aired, the president would

cancel shortly beforehand. After three cancellations, the crew realised that there was no real commitment on the part of any party to go forward with a formal debate and the programme was quickly re-formatted to host a citizen debate instead. As Sierra Leone senior project manager Lynn Morris put it, "In retrospect, the government never had any intention of doing a debate ... We overestimated our prestige and power."⁶⁴

Tanzania

The project initially worked to strengthen the balance and fairness of the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation's (TBC) electoral coverage. The impartiality of TBC's election coverage in 2010 was impressive and the organisation considered BBC Media Action's contribution to be among its most effective media support initiatives. But in December of that year, just 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. In March 2011 the Memorandum of Understanding between TBC and BBC Media Action was nullified by the TBC board on a technicality that it had not been formally approved by the board at the time of signing. In April 2011 the director of information at the Ministry of Information, Youth, Culture and Sports was announced as the new TBC director-general. (See the case study of the TBC on the next page).

“In retrospect, the government never had any intention of doing a debate ... We overestimated our prestige and power.”



Above Election Day Sierra Leone – for BBC Media Action, the provision of safe public spaces for people to ask questions forms a core pillar of democracy.

Causal linkages between TBC's election coverage and the changes made to the governance of the TBC after the election have never been acknowledged by the government or the CCM. However, widespread popular opinion suggests that the TBC's electoral coverage led to a reaction from the government to change its earlier approach of making TBC politically independent. By most accounts, the Ministry of

Information, Youth and Sports effectively took control of TBC after Tido Mhando's departure.

These lessons point towards an ambivalent attitude within government to its commitment to TBC's public service remit. That commitment apparently changed after the election, whether because of a misunderstanding of what true public service broadcasting would mean or because players within different parts of government held different aspirations for TBC and competing power structures and incentives may have led to changing priorities for and control of TBC over time. But one thing is clear: TBC's coverage mattered enormously to those with power.

In many ways, the change that took place within TBC between 2009 and 2011 was one of the great successes of A National Conversation. For the first time, TBC audiences saw and understood the opportunities for genuine impartial political debate through the media at the national level. This experience set a precedent in Tanzania for what an independent media sector could look like and what audiences could expect from it. Equally, when TBC no longer played this role, those same audiences were reminded what the absence of such a sector means for democracy. The entire episode thus underscored a clear limit to the level of support that can be achieved for a powerful media institution determined to serve the public interest, especially if it is seen to be jeopardising political interests.

The Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation: a case study

At the request of the Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, Tido Mhando, previously head of the BBC Swahili Service, took up a new post as the Director General of the national broadcaster, Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation in 2006.

On 26 March 2008, President Kikwete was the guest of honour at a high-profile function at TBC Television Studios where he pledged that "the government would continue with our efforts to enhance the freedom of media houses and build them a better environment to work in".⁶⁵

During the 2010 elections, BBC Media Action supported the establishment of fair and balanced election reporting at TBC. One highlight of the coverage was the *Mchakato Majimboni* (Constituency Debate) programme. After the elections, the Media Council of Tanzania singled out TBC's TV broadcasting as commendable; special reference was made to *Mchakato Majimboni* for its creativity and impartiality. The European Union Election Observation Mission to Tanzania also stated in its final report that TBC's election coverage was the most balanced in the country.⁶⁶

But relations with government had soured. After the first couple of episodes of *Mchakato Majimboni*, the ruling party (CCM) headed by President Kikwete withdrew its participation in the programme. The programme continued with only non-CCM candidates. The 2010 elections then saw CCM receive its biggest drop in votes since the advent of multi-party politics. By January 2011, Mhando's contract had not been renewed and TBC's relationship with BBC Media Action (then the BBC World Service Trust) was reportedly under investigation. The investigation was the subject of a front-page news story in the leading Swahili-language daily, *Mwananchi*, which stated that the government of Tanzania was conducting an investigation.

"There were concerns within government that BBC WST was involved in helping TBC to broadcast activities which upset the government during the general election last year ... Similarly, there have been feelings amongst people that the election broadcasting by TBC is what caused the government to decide not to extend another contract for the then director-general, Tido Mhando."⁶⁷

PART 4

Media and accountability in emerging democracies

The previous section documents the learning process that characterised the implementation of A National Conversation. Early on, project teams included a focus on demand creation and holding governments directly to account. Within a year, however, most of these “watchdog” approaches had largely been subsumed, in all three countries into a focus on strengthening the capacity of radio stations to act as public forums instead. The emphasis was now on how people, their governments and service providers could come together to talk about issues that mattered locally.⁶⁸

We conclude that models of accountability rooted in citizen demand may be problematic in fragile democratic settings where the majority of donor assistance is traditionally targeted. Instead, approaches rooted in an understanding of political complexity and that enable people to problem-solve with governments in a more discursive space are more likely to be successful.

Accountability: answerability vs responsiveness

One useful way to disaggregate the concept of accountability is to break it down into its two component parts – answerability and responsiveness.

Answerability is one of the primary stages of accountability, defined as the obligation of government and other power holders to provide information on, and explanations of, their decisions and actions.⁶⁹ Responsiveness, in contrast, is a form of behaviour. It is the extent to which public policies and institutions respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights.⁷⁰ In the context of A National Conversation, answerability therefore refers literally to the requirement that leaders give answers to questions posed on the radio programmes, whereas responsiveness refers to whether anything actually happened as a result of the answer or programme.

There is no doubt that A National Conversation was very good at enabling people to ask questions of political leaders and at creating new conditions for the kind of public debate necessary for democratic politics to function. As we saw in Part 3, virtually no vertical accountability relationships existed within the three countries when the project began: by and large, people did not understand how government functioned or their own role in the political process. The project gave a voice

to those who had never been able to ask questions of their leaders before and created safe public spaces to do so. By the end of the project, it had exceeded its target in terms of the number of questions from members of the public to officials on the project’s programmes.⁷¹

Building on this notion of accountability as a two-part process, it is possible that improved questioning leads, ultimately, via answerability, to greater responsiveness. However, it is also possible that responsiveness is not improved by questioning because audiences feel disempowered by what they perceive as insufficient answers and simply tune out, as disillusionment sets in. We have good evidence from other BBC Media Action programmes that improving answerability is clearly associated with improved knowledge efficacy and political participation.⁷² It is the questioning–answerability nexus that bears further investigation.

Which brings us back to A National Conversation. The data on whether that questioning led to true “answerability” (as a form of accountability) is more ambiguous. Qualitative data suggests that audiences were often dissatisfied with the answers given by leaders. To take but one example, following a *Fo Rod* programme that scrutinised the mining industry in Northern Sierra Leone, one audience member observed: “After electing them [politicians], we will never see them again.”⁷³ But the quantitative data provides a more mixed picture. The surveys included questions about perceptions of the accuracy and transparency of government responses – which were generally strong – but the metric used to measure this was whether “government officials and/or service providers respond to questions clearly and concisely” – *not* whether the answers were considered satisfactory. Indeed, answers to questions posed on programmes were often vague and it was hard to get officials to participate in programmes.⁷⁴

For BBC Media Action, improving voice and creating safe spaces for contestation, debate, discussion and the provision of information are ends in themselves and core pillars of a functioning democracy. In this regard, the project was a success. However, through the audience feedback and multiple stories of change (only a few of which have been cited here), we have some compelling research and anecdotes to show that additional changes

“We conclude that models of accountability rooted in citizen demand may be problematic in fragile democratic settings where the majority of donor assistance is traditionally targeted.”

have taken place usually at a community level. This indicates that there were cases of responsiveness as a result of our programmes across the project lifetime, but we are not able to estimate the scale of this effect nor whether such responsiveness was achieved via a linear route – questioning – answerability – responsiveness.

BBC Media Action is not the only development organisation struggling with these challenges in measuring accountability. In a recent survey of development initiatives aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability, the authors concluded that many initiatives are focused on increasing transparency and amplifying voice, without examining their link with accountability and ultimately responsiveness. The overarching lesson seems to be, not surprisingly, that context – and particularly the historical and political context in which these reforms happen – matters. For the moment, though, as that study notes, “We still do not have a good framework for categorising political contexts in terms of their feasibility for particular transparency or accountability initiatives.”⁷⁵

Beyond demand: The power of conversation

A free and plural media rooted in a strong culture of independent journalism – one that holds politicians to account, even when they do not want to be – has long been regarded as a cornerstone of a functioning democratic system.⁷⁶ BBC Media Action continues to subscribe strongly to this principle. However, A National Conversation – and the stories of change that emerged from it – suggest that an exclusive focus on the “watchdog” role of the media at the expense

“Governance challenges are not fundamentally about one set of people getting another set of people to behave better. They are about ... collective problem-solving in fragmented societies hampered by low levels of trust.”

of the public forum role is not always the most conducive path to accountability.

Concerns about the potential limitations of a more assertive, oppositional role for the media in fragile countries are not new. Whitten-Woodring warned that such media might trigger repressive responses from an autocratic government in the short term.⁷⁷ More recently,

Gagliardone has argued that aspirational democratic models for the role of the media are unlikely to be successful in countries such as Ethiopia where the media sector is tightly controlled.⁷⁸

The lessons from A National Conversation are more optimistic. Almost all the positive lessons from the project of which there are many – including the qualitative feedback and stories of change – were based on instances where a range of responsible actors were brought

together either on or off air to work collectively through problems and propose solutions. This was not blame-game “accountability” programming in which citizens “demanded” accountability from their leaders. Rather, it was shared discussion, usually around local issues of common concern.

A recent policy briefing from the Overseas Development Institute reviewing five years of governance projects also found that efforts to improve the provision of public goods almost always included government and people working together at the local level. The paper’s overarching conclusion is that “governance challenges are not fundamentally about one set of people getting another set of people to behave better. They are about ... collective problem-solving in fragmented societies hampered by low levels of trust.”⁷⁹

In the context of A National Conversation, this collective action approach provides a potential explanation for why audiences responded so positively to programmes which focused on solutions to problems affecting their day-to-day lives. Local issues may give people more of a sense that they can make a change, whereas national topics tend to leave people feeling powerless. Focusing on local problems in politically charged environments is also arguably perceived as less threatening to national governments.

In this way, approaches that begin to build platforms for discourse, trust and shared problem-solving may present an opportunity to “go with the grain” while shifting agendas gradually. And by bringing together disparate political and social groups in that space, the project also suggests that it is perhaps media’s role in incorporating a diverse and balanced range of political perspectives which may sometimes prove to be the most salient in emerging democracies.

PART 5

Conclusions

This policy briefing offers an empirical contribution to evolving thinking on governance within the international development landscape. Using the example of media, we argue that interventions designed to foster demand-based accountability may not be as successful in some fragile settings as more discursive platforms that aim to tackle problem-solving collectively. The paper thus underscores the need for locally embedded approaches to governance support that are both adaptive and reflective.

With that in mind, here are some of the briefing’s main conclusions for policy-makers and practitioners alike:

Audiences like talking. In some ways, this project’s main finding was the overwhelmingly positive response of audiences to the novelty of platforms that brought ordinary people face to face with public officials, community leaders and service providers.

There is no substitute for political freedom. The role of media in ensuring accountability can, as this briefing demonstrates, take different forms, some of them oppositional and critical, and some more rooted in political dialogue. Those rooted in dialogue, however, have the greatest impact in a climate of open and political freedom. A lack of political freedom and constraints to freedom of expression will always undermine the capacity for citizens to hold government to account.

The “watchdog” model of the media is, if conceived in isolation from other approaches, overly simplistic. Privileging a guardian role for the media in countries with little or no tradition of vertical accountability may actually disempower and disengage audiences or provoke censorship or closures on the part of government. This role is a key function, but one that needs to be clearly understood within the context of the political economy of the country concerned.

An approach that focuses on creating opportunities for collective problem-solving between people and leaders – especially at local levels – may be more likely to engage audiences, and to lead to change happening on the ground. This is especially true where such discussion would have been previously impossible.

Audiences respond to issues which affect their day-to-day lives. This does not preclude the potential to develop truly “National Conversations”; however, often, localising national issues such as corruption allows for greater audience engagement because it resonates with people’s everyday lives. There may also be more opportunity to probe such local issues as they are perceived as less threatening to ruling elites.

Context matters. Projects to support the media sector to improve governance performance must be situated within a deep understanding of the power structures at play and how these might influence the potential for the media to be able to drive national or community-level change. This must include an understanding of the country’s overall institutional structure and how this, in turn, conditions audience expectations and government incentives for change.

Media matters. In many ways, the editorial strength of Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) during the 2010 elections and the productions and debates it produced were the biggest success of A National Conversation, as these broadcasts changed the way the nation talked about how it was governed. The speed and strength of the reaction by the government after the election in bringing TBC back under government influence underscores how important the accountability role of the media is to national governments, as well as the audiences they serve.

Development initiatives that aim to foster improved governance through the media must be flexible and responsive and have the intellectual humility to learn and change over time – reacting to both the changing political environment and evidence from the ground about what is working (and what is not). Creating opportunities for internal learning, flexibility and a non-linear approach to delivering intended impact can allow teams to learn and implement improvements throughout the project life cycle.

Below This briefing calls for governance approaches that take into account the realities of politics in fragile settings such as Sierra Leone (pictured).



Endnotes

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- ² World Bank definition and information on demand for good governance (DFGG) is available from: <http://go.worldbank.org/36UKIEBEKO> [Accessed 4 August 2014].
- ³ DFID (2006) *Eliminating world poverty: making governance work for the poor*. White Paper from the UK Department for International Development [online] Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272330/6876.pdf [Accessed 9 September 2014].
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. ix.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- ⁶ Governance and Transparency Fund (December 2013) Overview [online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/governance-and-transparency-fund-gtf> [Accessed 4 August 2014].
- ⁷ See, for example, World Bank (August 2013) *Social Accountability and Demand for Good Governance* [online] Available from: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialdevelopment/brief/social-accountability> [Accessed 4 August 2014].
- ⁸ World Bank (March 2013) *Citizen Voices: Global Conference On Citizen Engagement For Enhanced Development Results* (transcript) [online] Available from: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2013/03/18/citizen-voices-global-conference-on-citizen-engagement-enhanced-development-results> [Accessed 4 August 2014].
- ⁹ World Bank (2004) *Social Accountability: Strengthening the Demand Side of Governance and Service Delivery*, Ch. 2, p. 6 [online] Available from: http://www.worldbank.org/socialaccountability_sourcebook/PrintVersions/Conceptual%2006.22.07.pdf
- ¹⁰ Indeed, while a useful survey of the Transparency and Accountability literature by McGee and Gaventa highlights a series of case studies concerned with access to information, it is striking how few case studies there are on the role of the media in its own right within demand-side governance. See McGee, R. and Gaventa, J. et al. (2010) *Review of Impact and Effectiveness of Accountability and Transparency Initiatives: Synthesis Report*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. [online] Available from: <http://www.transparency-initiative.org/reports/synthesis-report-impact-and-effectiveness-of-transparency-and-accountability-initiatives>
- ¹¹ SDC (2007) *Media Assistance in the Swiss Development Cooperation: Media – A Key Player for Realizing Social Accountability*. Berne: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.
- ¹² DFID (2006), p. 27.
- ¹³ Norris, P. and Odugbemi, S. (2009) Evaluating media performance. In Norris, P. (Ed.) *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform* (pp. 3–29). Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- ¹⁴ O'Meally, S. C. (2013) *Mapping context for social accountability: resource paper*, p. ix. Washington D.C.: World Bank. See also OECD (2014) *Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development*. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series: OECD Publishing.
- ¹⁵ BBC Media Action (2007) *A National Conversation: DFID Governance and Transparency Fund Proposal* [internal document], p. 4.
- ¹⁶ Interview with reporter from *100 Duvidas* by BBC Media Action Angola country office research staff, August 2011.
- ¹⁷ Freedom House (2013) *Freedom of the Press 2013* [online] Available from: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTP%202013%20Full%20Report.pdf> [Accessed 12 September 2014]
- ¹⁸ Djankov, S., McLeish, C., Nenova, T. and Shleifer, A. (2001) *Who Owns the Media?* Policy Research Working Paper No. 2620 for World Bank.
- ¹⁹ Reith, S. (2011) Tanzania after the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections 2010, pp. 104–19. *KAS International Reports*, 1:2011.
- ²⁰ Radio Mankneh in Sierra Leone, for example – the country's first post-war community radio station – had been broadcasting public programmes that brought politicians face to face with communities since the 2004 local council elections. Many of these new local radio stations subsequently became partners for the GTF project.
- ²¹ BBC Media Action (2012a) *A National Conversation: Governance and Media in Sierra Leone*, working paper from BBC Media Action [online] Available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publicationsandpress/research_governance_three_african_countries_page.html [Accessed 10 September 2014].
- ²² BBC World Service Trust (2011a) *A National Conversation: Year 3 Annual Report*, section 4.3. London: BBC World Service Trust [online] Available from: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/GTF_Annual_Report_3.pdf [Accessed 11 September 2014].
- ²³ Interview with John Kidasi, station manager, Radio Ukweli in Morogoro (BBC Media Action partner), 25 November 2013, Morogoro, Tanzania.
- ²⁴ BBC Media Action (2013a) *A National Conversation: Year 5 Annual Report*, p. 43. London: BBC Media Action [online] Available from: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/GTF_Annual_Report_5.pdf [Accessed 11 September 2014].
- ²⁵ BBC World Service Trust (2011a), section 3.2.
- ²⁶ BBC Media Action (2013b) *Endline Research Results: GTF* [internal document].
- ²⁷ Email correspondence with former BBC Media Action country director for Angola, Soeren Johannsen, 17 July 2014.
- ²⁸ Interview with Lynn Morris, BBC Media Action Sierra Leone senior project manager, 29 November 2013, Freetown.
- ²⁹ BBC Media Action (June 2013) *Open Day Report, Tanzania* [internal document].
- ³⁰ BBC Media Action (2013b).
- ³¹ BBC Media Action (2012b) *A National Conversation: Year 4 Annual Report*, p. 18. London: BBC Media Action [online] Available from: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/GTF_Annual_Report_4.pdf [Accessed 11 September 2014].
- ³² Female participant of focus group, Iringa, Tanzania, April 2012.
- ³³ A total of eight quantitative national surveys took place in the three countries over the lifetime of the project. These were combined with quarterly/bi-annual focus group discussions with project audiences and in-depth interviews with trainees and project stakeholders. The qualitative research, including listening groups established across the countries, focus group discussions with audiences and in-depth interviews, supported programme outreach and also allowed audience data to be continually collected.
- ³⁴ BBC Media Action (October 2011b) *Midline Survey: Sierra Leone*. Sample size 2,033 [internal document].
- ³⁵ Telephone interview with Soeren Johannsen, former BBC Media Action country director for Angola, 18 March 2014.

- ³⁶ BBC Media Action (2012b), Annex 10, p. 51, section 5.3.
- ³⁷ BBC World Service Trust (2011a), section 3.1.
- ³⁸ BBC Media Action (2012b), Annex 10, p. 51, section 5.3.
- ³⁹ Telephone interview with Soeren Johannsen, former BBC Media Action country director for Angola, 18 March 2014.
- ⁴⁰ BBC Media Action (2013b).
- ⁴¹ Female participant of focus group, Bagamoyo, Tanzania, December 2012.
- ⁴² BBC World Service Trust (2011a), section 3.1.
- ⁴³ Participant, Ismaia Audience Panel, Koinadugu, Sierra Leone, October 2011.
- ⁴⁴ Audience research conducted in Sierra Leone during August and September 2012.
- ⁴⁵ BBC Media Action (2013c) Most Significant Results Analysis: GTF Angola [internal document].
- ⁴⁶ BBC World Service Trust (2011a), section 4.2.
- ⁴⁷ BBC Media Action/WST (2012) Case Study on Cholera – Radio Kolenten [internal document].
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ BBC Media Action (2012b), p. 18.
- ⁵¹ For example, the UK’s BBC Radio 4 Today programme rarely faces issues with leaders refusing to participate, presumably because leaders feel it is usually more desirable to defend their position publicly than be seen not to participate.
- ⁵² BBC Media Action (2012b), Annex 10, p. 43.
- ⁵³ Ibid., Annex 10, p. 43, section 4.3.2.
- ⁵⁴ On a related point, in Sierra Leone, production teams found that audiences repeatedly sought to make opinion statements, not ask questions, and that these statements were often divisive and discriminatory – the focus of audiences wasn’t to demand answers from leaders but rather to have their (often controversial) opinions heard. Comment made by Sierra Leone country director George Ferguson in an email correspondence, 23 July 2014.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Lynn Morris, BBC Media Action senior project manager Sierra Leone, 29 November 2013, Freetown.
- ⁵⁶ Comment made to author by *Fo Rod* audience member in Pujehun, Sierra Leone, 2009.
- ⁵⁷ BBC Media Action (2012b), Annex 10, p. 29, section 4.2.3.
- ⁵⁸ BBC Media Action (2013d) Audience Panel Report [internal document], p. 21.
- ⁵⁹ BBC Media Action (2012c) *Haba na Haba*: Audience Panel Study Report [internal document], pp. 15–16.
- ⁶⁰ Interestingly, this preference for problem-solving over contentious debate was also found in audience research conducted by BBC Media Action in Libya and Tunisia. BBC Media Action (forthcoming).
- ⁶¹ Brown, T., Fanthorpe, R., et al. (2006) *Sierra Leone: Drivers of Change*. London: IDL Group.
- ⁶² BBC Media Action (2013a), p. 26.
- ⁶³ iMedia Associates (2013) A National Conversation in Angola: External Evaluation Report, Angola [internal document], p. 26.
- ⁶⁴ Interview with Lynn Morris, BBC Media Action senior project manager Sierra Leone, 29 November 2013, Freetown.
- ⁶⁵ Extracts from speech by President Jakaya Kikwete taken from BBC World Service Trust (2011c) TBC at the Crossroads: TBC’s Coverage of the 2010 Elections and the Future of Public Service Broadcasting in Tanzania [internal document].
- ⁶⁶ European Union (October 2010) *Election Observation Mission to Tanzania. General Elections. Final Report* [online] Available from: http://www.euom.eu/files/dmfile/tanzania-final-report_en1.pdf [Accessed 18 August 2014].
- ⁶⁷ Government Investigates BBC & RFI. *Mwananchi*, 19 January 2011 (translated from the original Swahili).
- ⁶⁸ This role is commonly referred to as the media’s “gatekeeper” role, defined as the news media having “a responsibility to reflect and incorporate the plurality of viewpoints and political persuasions in reporting, to maximize the diversity of perspectives and arguments heard in rational public deliberations, and to enrich the public sphere” (Norris and Odugbemi (2009), p. 15).
- ⁶⁹ BBC Media Action (2012d) *Conceptualising Accountability: An Approach to Measurement*. London: BBC Media Action [online] Available from: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/mediaaction/pdf/Conceptualising_accountability.pdf [Accessed 11 September 2014].
- ⁷⁰ DFID (2006), p. 20.
- ⁷¹ Angola: *100 Duvidas* continued to host several questions from citizens to leaders per episode. Sierra Leone: Every episode of *Fo Rod* features a minimum of one question asked by the audience and answered by a government official or service provider guest. Tanzania: Local partner programmes include at least one question from the public. The national programme includes several direct questions and *Haba na Haba* specials, recorded in front of an audience, achieve over 10 direct questions.
- ⁷² Larkin, C. and Were, R. (2013) How do political debate programmes influence political participation? A case study from Nepal Research report from BBC Media Action [online] Available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publicationsandpress/research_nepal_debate_political_participation.html [Accessed 10 September 2014].
- ⁷³ As recounted in an email from George Ferguson, BBC Media Action Sierra Leone country director, 23 July 2014.
- ⁷⁴ This data was collected by local production staff through programme databases.
- ⁷⁵ Joshi, A. (2013) Do they work? Assessing the impact of transparency and accountability initiatives in service delivery. *Development Policy Review*, 31:51, 29–48.
- ⁷⁶ The lack of a media capable of holding politicians to account has been closely associated with poor systems of government responsiveness in many countries. See Nelson, M. and Susman-Peña, T. (2012) *Rethinking Media Development: A Report on the Media Map Project*. Arcata, CA: Internews/World Bank Institute.
- ⁷⁷ Whitten-Woodring, J. (2009) Watchdog or lapdog? Media freedom, regime type, and government respect for human rights. *International Studies Quarterly*, 53:3, 595–625.
- ⁷⁸ Gagliardone, I. (2014) New Media and the developmental state in Ethiopia. *African Affairs*, 113 (451): 279–299.
- ⁷⁹ Booth, D. (2012) *Development as a collective action problem: Addressing the real challenges of African governance*. Africa Power and Politics Policy Brief 9. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- ⁸⁰ Eliasoph, N. S. (1998) *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

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Author: Rebecca Stringer

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Copy editors: Sarah Chatwin, Anna Egan

Designer: Lance Bellers



BBC Media Action is registered in England & Wales under Charity Commission number 1076235 and Company number 3521587.

Registered office: Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA.

Tel +44 (0) 20 8008 0001

Fax +44 (0) 20 8008 5970

Email media.action@bbc.co.uk

Web bbcmEDIAaction.org

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