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The case for communication

in sustainable development

Contents

Introduction

With only eight years to go until 2015 – the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[1] – it is clear that current development efforts are not delivering the results the world's poor need and the global community promised in the Millennium Declaration signed by the leaders of 189 countries in September 2000. At present, two out of every five people are living on less than US$2 a day. Fifty countries, 24 of them in sub-Saharan Africa, with a combined population of almost 900 million people, are falling behind on at least one of the MDGs.[2] The latest World Bank forecasts predict that by 2015 more than 600 million people will still be living on US$1 a day, and as it noted in its 2006 report on the MDGs: 'without measures that accelerate change, many countries may fall short of the targets… By 2010 we will know whether the goals can be achieved. If by then we have not committed the necessary resources, adopted reforms, and implemented effective new programs, it will be difficult to make further course corrections.'[3]

Why are 'measures that accelerate change' to lift hundreds of millions of people out of absolute poverty proving so hard to achieve in developing countries? This is the single most important question facing the world, and there is broad agreement on the explanatory factors that drive political, economic and social development. They include a country's climate, geography and access to natural resources,[4] its institutions and leadership,[5] history and culture,[6] and prevalence of conflict within its borders and with its neighbours.[7] These factors are, in turn, affected by broader international issues, such as political alliances and blocs, trade policies, and levels and patterns of international debt forgiveness and aid relief.[8]

There is, however, considerable disagreement between politicians, economists, development experts, academics and practitioners on the relative importance of these factors and their precise relationships to one another.

■ The international donor community is increasingly concentrating its attention on the concept of 'good governance' – the notion that a state's *capability* to perform its key functions, *responsiveness* to its citizens' aspirations and needs, and *accountability* to them for what it does are central to establishing sustainable and far-reaching development.

■ Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) warn against taking too 'statist' an approach, stressing instead the importance to successful development of building more empowered and engaged citizens in a 'civil society' that reflects the competitive and collaborative dynamics of people living in the country.

■ Economists continue to argue over the right balance of free and regulated markets, acceptable levels of equity and efficiency, and the impact of 'free' and 'protectionist' trade rules on economic development. But they all stress the need for legal protection of assets and capital; an educated labour force; and the building of a strong scientific and technological base if a country is to generate consistent economic growth.[9]

1
The eight MDGs are the international development targets agreed by every country's leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000 and reaffirmed at the World Summit in New York in September 2005. See www.un.org/millenniumgoals for details

2
UNDP (2005) *Human Development Report 2005*

3
World Bank (2006) *World Development Indicators 2006* http://devdata.worldbank.org/wdi2006/contents/Section1_1.htm

4
See, for example, Jared Diamond (1998) *Guns, germs and steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years*, London: Vintage

5
See, for example, Douglass C North (2005) *Understanding the process of economic change*, (Revised edition) Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; and Paul Collier (2007) *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*, New York: Oxford University Press

6
See, for example, David Landes (1998) *The wealth and poverty of nations: Why are some rich and others so poor?* New York: W.W. Norton; and Lawrence E Harrison (2006) *The central liberal truth: How politics can change a culture and save it from itself*, New York: Oxford University Press

7
See, for example, Azar Gat (2006) *War in human civilization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

8
See, for example, Jeffrey Sachs (2005) *The End of Poverty;* Martin Wolf (2005) *Why Globalization Works*, New Haven, Yale Nota Bene; and for a different view, Erik Reinert (2006) *How rich countries got rich, and why poor countries stay poor,* London: Constable & Robinson

9
On the need for a strong scientific/technological base, see The Economist, 3 February 2007, p11

This paper does not address itself directly to these debates, which are extensively covered elsewhere. Instead it focuses on a vital element essential to each of them, but which is consistently ignored or marginalised in development analyses, debates and interventions: all of these human and developmental processes rely on the flow of information and communication between individuals and groups. Effective communication builds relationships, engenders debate, facilitates choices, enables informed decisions, helps build coalitions and alliances, and accelerates and generates change.

The case for communication[10] shows that effective information and communication processes are prerequisites for successful development. They are the lifeblood of good governance (central to political discourse and power, and lying at the heart of capable, responsive and accountable states); an integral part of empowering and enabling a healthy, vibrant civil society; essential for the creation of efficient and effective economies; and a critical component of social adaptation and of societies dealing successfully with a changing world.

At its heart, development – if it is to be sustainable – must be a process that allows people to be their own agents of change: to act individually and collectively using their own ingenuity and accessing ideas, practices and knowledge in the search for ways to fulfil their potential. It requires what economist Amartya Sen calls 'real freedoms',[11] the capacity for people to participate in a diverse range of decisions that affect them, and to enjoy specific 'functional'[12] aspects that constitute a healthy life. Investing resources in processes that enable people to take a more meaningful part in debates and decision-making processes and make more informed choices, is central to realising these 'freedoms' and to effective development and poverty reduction. Enabling greater numbers of people to speak, engage and respond to one another is ultimately equipping them to take political responsibility, which is a key ingredient to establishing deep and sustainable change.[13]

Indeed, an increased power and ability to communicate is what poor people wish for themselves as much as the more tangible development benefits targeted by the MDGs. When the World Bank asked 40,000 poor people in 1999 what they desired most, having 'a voice' was one of the most frequent replies, second only to improved income and basic necessities. Not being able to have a say in decisions that affected their lives was identified as a key element of poverty in itself.[14]

This paper therefore addresses the challenge of using communication more powerfully as an agent of change to establish faster, more sustainable development. After a short chapter setting out the context, *The case for communication* explores the roles information and communication processes play in all of the key elements that foster development:

- first, in equitable and inclusive political processes

- second, in national and international governance processes that are effective, responsive and accountable

- third, in supporting engaged citizens and dynamic civil society

- fourth, in generating inclusive economic growth, sustainable livelihoods and transparent, efficient and equitable markets

- fifth, in establishing and protecting a free, pluralistic media environment in which media outputs are many and diverse but also of high *quality*.

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This paper is a longer, more detailed exposition of the arguments set out in *At the heart of change: The role of communication in sustainable development*. Both documents are available at: www.panos.org.uk/ heartofchange

11
The 'capability approach' is a conceptual framework that was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum for understanding social states in terms of human welfare. It emphasises the functional capabilities ('substantial freedoms', such as the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or participate in political activities). See M C Nussbaum and A K Sen (1993) *The quality of life,* Oxford: Clarendon Press

12
Functionings are what Sen terms 'valuable beings and doings'. They can be *elementary* (escaping morbidity and mortality, nourishment, mobility); *complex* (self-respect, participation in community life, ability to appear in public without shame); *general* (capability to be nourished); or *specific* (capability to make particular choices). The notion of functionings influenced the empirical measurements that underpin the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index*, which goes beyond economic measurements to include health and education data. For more on functionings, see A K Sen (1985) *Commodities and capabilities*, Amsterdam: North-Holland; and Nussbaum and Sen (1993)

13
As the British diplomat Robert Cooper has noted: 'It is strange that we do not think more of our own history when we think of development. The gradual increase in growth rates in the last two centuries in Europe mirrors the growth of the state. The gradual elimination of poverty reflects the growth of political power among the poor… People develop themselves: outsiders cannot do it for them. Robert Cooper, 'The mystery of development', *Prospect*, Number 120, February 2006, p37

14
World Bank (1999) *Voices of the Poor*, Washington DC: World Bank

Its importance and ubiquity demand that a holistic view be taken of information and communication processes in a society, instead of the *ad hoc* or fragmentary approach policymakers often take at the moment. Open, inclusive, participatory information and media channels also need to be recognised as one of the most important *res publica* (public goods) that benefit all citizens and maximise development impacts.[15] One characteristic of public goods is that the more people use them, the greater the common benefit. Communication processes should be regarded as public goods because – as this paper shows – they contribute to a society's development, governance, peace and prosperity. Like other public goods, communication processes cost money to produce but the producer does not always profit from them, and many kinds of knowledge and information become more valuable the more they are used (as do the networking systems linking them together).

Most politicians, business people and everyone working in any kind of collective enterprise intuitively recognise that effective communication is fundamental to their success. Yet it is frequently overlooked in developmental analyses, development projects and policymaking. Policymakers often lack sufficient knowledge of what specific steps they can take to strengthen communication processes; and even when they know, sometimes the political will to take them is absent. After all, enabling more people to be better informed and to engage and participate directly challenges existing power structures. In addition, despite plentiful anecdotal evidence and a strong empirical base showing the importance of communication in enabling and creating the conditions for successful development, arguments have not always been marshalled cogently enough and in an accessible way.
This is what this paper seeks to accomplish. It is specifically aimed at those policymakers, advisors, academics and development practitioners who can make the link between theory and practice and take a leadership role by placing communication at the heart of high-level policy discourse, programme planning and project implementation.

Reaching the MDGs in 2015 will require huge investments of political will and financial resources by governments in both the developed and the developing world; but it will also require a belated recognition that communication is central to all aspects of sustainable development. *The case for communication* concludes, therefore, with a call to action by national and international policymakers and leaders. In order to realise the potential of communication in maximising development outcomes, we ask them to:

■ **Build more open, transparent information and communication systems and political cultures**

Governments and institutions must accept the reality of a networked world, that will shape politics and civil society in ways that are only just starting to emerge, and adapt to citizens' expectations of transparency and accountability by establishing and realising legal rights to freedom of speech and access to information.

■ **Treat information, communication and the media as public goods and invest accordingly**

Governments should recognise that media and communication are public goods. They should take measures to enable the greater participation of poor and marginalised people in social, economic and political processes; and invest in strengthening those areas that the market alone may not provide, such as telephone access for poor people or high-quality public interest journalism.

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'Public goods' is an economic term referring to goods which, once produced (or existing), benefit all members of a society – for instance, education or judicial systems

■ **Take a holistic view of communication processes and integrate communication into development planning and implementation**

Governments and development planners must recognise that communication is at the heart of successful development: its role should be specified in all development analysis and planning, and adequate resources of funding, expertise and planning must be invested to make it happen, including exploitation of the revolutionary new opportunities offered by information and communication technologies (ICTs).

■ **Invest in media development**

A diverse, dynamic and free media is vital to development. This can be accomplished by establishing media freedom and a supportive regulatory environment; strengthening media infrastructure, capacity and professionalism; and supporting improvements in the quality and diversity of media content.

Communication: what, why – and why now?

Development

What is development? Most experts would agree that – regardless of the particular economic or political system used to produce it – the goals of development include improved material conditions for everyone; greater equity in access to the world's natural resources and wealth; improved realisation of human rights, freedom and security; improved choices, self-determination and power to influence one's own life and conditions; and sustainability. Achievement of these goals entails changes at every level: within households and communities, in societies, states and businesses, and in international relations. They are not goals that can ever be achieved absolutely and for all time: they involve continuing processes of dialogue, competition, negotiation, exchange, adaptation and decision-making – in which all sectors of society, including poor and marginalised people, need to participate. These processes are largely processes of communication.

Much development planning today is focused on reducing poverty. There is debate about the relative importance of low incomes, other elements contributing to the quality of life, and inequality in defining poverty. But most analysts would agree that for any improvement in the lives of the poor to be lasting and sustainable, it must include strengthening the powers of poor people to participate in the processes of development – and this means strengthening their capacity to communicate.

Poor people, and people who are marginalised and powerless within their own communities, are by definition excluded from many things, including many kinds of communication. One side of communication is *receiving* information. Constraints on poor people's capacity to receive information can include non-literacy, distance from sources of information, not speaking the majority or official languages, and lack of electricity that limits the availability of radios and televisions. The other side of communication is the ability to *give* information, to make one's voice heard and to participate in discussion and debate. Poor people's capacities to make their voices heard are also limited: they lack access to powerful people; until the very recent spread of mobile phones, most poor people had no telephone within reach. Using computers and the Internet is expensive and needs skills. And within communities, social customs and power structures often keep some groups, especially women, silent. Strengthening poor people's power to share information and engage in dialogue would lead to major changes in the lives of most nations, not only developing ones.

Communication

Digital and electronic, print and interpersonal communication are all part of the 'communication ecology' of societies, states and institutions, and are included in the concept of communication in this paper. We include all types of communication: from planned communication campaigns (for instance in health, politics or education) to unplanned flows of communication (such as personal interactions, informal gatherings and the growing global web of virtual relationships); art and entertainment as well as factual information. Processes of gathering and ordering knowledge and information are part of communication, as well as the processes of sending and sharing information.

The Latin root of the word 'communication' is *communicare*, 'to share'.
We communicate to share our point of view. This is a core human trait within
and between families, friends, colleagues and strangers at every level in
society. Those we speak to may, or may not, be persuadable. If both sides are
listening to each other – that is, 'sharing' the discussion – a dialogue ensues
which may result in agreement, or an agreement to differ, or unresolved
opposition or conflict. In this paper, 'communication' means two-way
exchange, not the one-way passing of information from a giver to a receiver.
It means giving information, and also receiving information and listening with
a real possibility of responding.

What is communication for development?

Recognising the importance of communication in bringing about
development change is not new. Over the past 50 years many analyses
of how communication works in development have seen the targets of
communication principally as *receivers* of information and ideas.
The aim has been to transmit information to persuade people to change
their behaviour in respect of a specific area of their lives – family planning,
for example, or agricultural practices. At first, communication was seen as
a simple matter of a sender giving a message to a receiver. Partly influenced
by the experience of the advertising industry, the idea grew that the message
and the medium had to be carefully matched to the receiver's ideas and
social context. Information campaigns began to be more carefully designed,
with representatives of the target audience often helping to identify what
needed to be said and how to say it. For many, this is what development
communication is: planned communication campaigns, often using a variety
of media, to achieve specific changes.[16] Within this approach, the idea is now
well established that people's behaviour is more likely to change if they are
not just passive recipients of messages but are more actively involved in
the process: discussion is better than listening.

Another fundamental idea gaining ground is that many development changes
require change in whole communities, not just in individuals.[17] For instance,
a woman cannot insist her partner use a condom if he does not accept the
need or obligation to do so; and he is more likely to do this if it has become
the norm in his society. Power relations and the attitudes of the community
are more significant elements in the decision than the woman's factual
knowledge of the dangers of unprotected sex. Related to this concept that
change is a social process, there is increasing interest by development
communication experts in analysing how ideas are spread within societies
and communities – who are the opinion leaders within a community, which
sources of information are most trusted, and what are the paths along which
new ideas and behaviours spread through communities. New ideas are
more likely to be adopted if they are introduced to the community by trusted
'change agents' or 'communication intermediaries'.[18]

In this paper we are arguing particularly for greater support for the other side
of communication – for 'voice'. If development is understood as *processes*
in which everyone in a society must be able to participate, this aspect of
communication is fundamental. Support for communication in development
does not just mean providing more information to poor people. It means
enabling them to participate, to engage actively in their development through
particular communication processes: articulating views, participating in
decision-making, acting on information, speaking and getting a response,
using whatever channels of communication are available. Of course not all
forms of communication include participatory processes – many simply aim
to persuade or pass information. But all forms of participation are essentially
communication processes.[19]

16
For a concise overview of changing
approaches to communication in
development, see Silvio Waisbord (2001)
*Family tree of theories, methodologies
and strategies in development
communication: Convergences and
differences*. Prepared for the Rockefeller
Foundation: see www.comminit.com/
stsilviocomm/sld-2881.html

17
See for example:
www.communicationforsocialchange.
org/strategy.php

18
Two other threads in the cluster of
ideas that make up the broad field
of 'communication for development'
are worth mentioning because they
are distinct, and can cause
misunderstanding. Firstly, 'strategic
communication' is a term sometimes
used to refer to a planned campaign
initiated by an outside body (for instance,
a government or an international NGO)
using different types of communication
to bring about voluntary change in the
attitudes and behaviour of an audience.
Strategic communication treats the
audience with respect – which
differentiates it from 'spin'. This is
important: 'communication' in the public
mind has become tainted by 'spin' and
by fears that communication from
governments and major corporations
may be deceitful and manipulative.
Secondly, the term 'communication for
development' is sometimes used to refer
to public relations/public affairs efforts
by governments or aid programmes

19
W Quarry and R Ramirez (2004)
*Communication for development:
A medium for innovation in natural
resource management*, IDRC & FAO,
p23. Quarry and Ramirez note
that 'Communication and participation
are essentially two sides of the same
coin', and identify three functions of
communication: 1. communication to
inform (policies etc), 2. communication
to educate (health, social marketing,
etc), 3. participatory communication
(use of communication tools to enable
participation)

This emphasis on 'voice' is not entirely new. For instance, at the World Congress on Communication for Development in October 2006, a number of development organisations with a distinguished history of providing information, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, agreed that development organisations should prioritise 'the right and possibility for people to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives'.[20]

The different channels of communication straddle both information and voice aspects. Media (traditional mass media – print and broadcasting) give information but also express voices and enable participation by explaining government and political processes and providing a platform for debate. Community media in particular enable debate and voice. ICTs (information and communication technologies – such as telephones, computer and Internet) can also be used to receive information, but the great potential they offer for active engagement is only starting to be exploited. With new ICTs, every user is potentially an active creator of information, a voice as well as a pair of ears.

In supporting either aspect of communication – receiving information or giving voice – it is not enough to provide the communication technologies such as phones, radios or satellites. Technologies make no difference until they are *used*. So development support should also include making sure the technologies are really accessible (in terms of location, cost or social customs), building skills to use them, creating content, and developing systems and cultures of using them. In the 1990s, ICT enthusiasts were over-optimistic that technologies themselves would transform societies. Many projects such as rural telecentres were established, with often disappointing results. Experience showed that there are many barriers to using a technology: cost and reliability, skills and management, lack of useful content, or a lack of fit between the new technologies and the existing communication needs and flows of the target community. The starting point for any initiative to strengthen communication flows must be the existing communication capacities and habits of the intended beneficiaries.

We recognise that not all communication is benign from the point of view of development. Opinion can be manipulated, truth can be hidden or distorted, media can be used to promote the interests of powerful elites, people can be exploited. The benefits of more communication bring with them the dangers of worse communication. Judicious, transparent and publicly accepted regulation and control should be part of the response. But in a free society much of the responsibility must lie with the audience for distinguishing the good from the bad, the empowering from the manipulative. Audiences must learn to recognise their own interests, and to be proactive in challenging, in seeking information themselves and in producing media of their own. Groups who are generally under-represented, including women, need to be active to make their voices heard and contribute to public discourse.

Why now?

The introduction of the printing press with movable type in Europe over 500 years ago led to revolutionary changes, as knowledge and information became increasingly accessible and affordable. The explosive growth of ICTs in the last two decades is bringing a second Gutenberg revolution: transforming the ways that people communicate and share knowledge with one another, and profoundly changing the dynamics of social, political and economic life. This communications revolution – including the Internet, mobile telephones and new media channels – offers immense opportunities for people to access more information and knowledge, which they can use to improve their lives. But it also risks expanding the chasm between rich and poor, between those who enjoy the access and skills to utilise these new information and communication channels and those who do not.

20
www.devcomm.org/worldbank/admin/
uploads/New%20documents/
Rome%20Consensus.doc

With the MDGs as a widely shared goal, unprecedented international attention is being given to the moral, political, economic, social and security challenges of global under-development. In June 2007 the G8 meeting of the richest countries in the world concentrated, for a second time in two years, on supporting development in Africa by addressing the issues of good governance, sustainable investment, peace and security. Global aid volumes are promised to rise to US$125 billion a year by 2010 (up from US$106.8 billion in 2005).[21] Donor and developing country governments are trying to shake off years of development failure and commit themselves to making development aid more effective. Both pledged in March 2005 to act together to ensure this scaled-up aid is increasingly coordinated, better managed and more effective.[22] In the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness the signatories committed themselves to their 'respective accountability to their citizens and parliaments for their development policies, strategies and performance'.

Communication processes of the kind we describe in this paper must form an essential part of achieving these general commitments, and the MDGs themselves. Accountability is realised through the active engagement of citizens, as we argue in the following section. Achieving the MDGs needs social change within communities as well as effective delivery of services by governments, both of which, to be sustainable, need processes of debate and negotiation. But there is little or no mention of communication in either the general commitments or the MDGs, because they do not state in detail *how* the desired goals are to be achieved.

We believe that unless communication is clearly identified from the start as one of the essential elements of achieving the agreed goals, it is likely to be neglected and under-resourced – and so the commitments may come to nothing.

Development organisations and governments have already recognised the role of information and communication in development in a number of recent initiatives.[23] But despite this swell of opinion, communication is still not recognised where it needs to be, at the heart of development plans and commitments at every level. So in the gathering effort of the development community to achieve the MDGs, it is timely to call for turning the spotlight on communication now.

Communication is also becoming more urgent for other reasons. The pace of technological change in the communication field leaves governments, institutions and analysts struggling to keep up. There is a lack of skills at every level relating to new technological demands and possibilities, from community-level journalism to government ministries and telecommunications regulatory authorities; and there is insufficient investment in infrastructure, training, legal and regulatory processes and the systemic changes needed in all institutions to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of communication.

Finally, the impact of communication and information processes on societies of every kind is going to increase rapidly in the coming decades. The volume and speed of information flows, and the number of people who have access to them, is rising fast, while costs decline.[24] As the take-up, reach and impact of mobile phones, citizen journalism and blogs, local and regional broadcasting, and international 'net' coalitions around issues expand, governments and mainstream media institutions are being left behind. However hard they try, they cannot control their citizens' or consumers' access to information, or resist the demand for more accessible communications among people and between people and their governments. They need to find ways of embracing these changes that they cannot resist.

21
Many doubt whether this promise will be fulfilled. A report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in April 2007 found that overall development aid had fallen in 2006 for the first time since 1997. www.oecd.org/document/17/0,2340,en_2649_37413_38341265_1_1_1_37413,00.html

22
The OECD Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability, see www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html

23
For example, the UNICT Taskforce; the G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force; UNDP work on Access to Information; the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 and 2005; the World Congress on Communication for Development 2006; the Commission for Africa; DFID's 2006 Development White Paper; World Bank World Development Reports on Knowledge and Poverty. A compilation of the recommendations set out in these and other documents has been compiled by Panos London and can be found on the Panos London website, www.panos.org.uk/heartofchange

24
For instance, between 2000 and 2004, the number of mobile phone subscribers in sub-Saharan Africa quadrupled, raising the total number of phone subscribers from 31 per 1,000 to 84 per 1,000. (2006 World Development Indicators database, World Bank, 16 April 2006). Even more startling is the current increase of new mobile phone users in India, where seven million new subscribers are being added to the mobile networks every month. See Financial Times, 'India & Globalisation Special Report', 26 January 2007, p6

Politics and governance

The political nature of development

Development involves not just the expansion of resources, skills and power in any given state but also the political processes of 'state/society bargaining' over their distribution that occur within it.[25] This is true on a global scale as well as within nations and communities. So development is fundamentally political. It involves enabling those who are excluded to gain a greater and more just share of power and resources, through participation in political, policy and decision-making processes at every level.

A new willingness to deal with politics in development discourse is emerging, in both rich and poor countries and in some major development institutions. The need to address political processes as well as technical aspects of governance interventions has been highlighted in donor initiatives such as the 'Drivers of Change' analysis, 'Power Analysis' and some World Bank political and institutional analyses.[26] In 2006 Hilary Benn, then the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, stated that: 'Development has to be about getting the politics right because development and progress cannot be achieved if the political system excludes the majority.'[27]

Communication is central to the political process and the exercise of power. In fact, the entire political process, the exchange between civil society and political institutions, is at heart a communicative act. People have to be able to express their needs and demand fulfilment of government promises and a proper share of a country's resources. People and their government have to debate policy options, priorities and strategies.

Progress towards the MDGs needs pro-poor, people-centred political processes that put voice and accountability at the heart of the relationship between the citizen and the state. Healthy political processes need healthy, open communication environments – communication processes that support participation, inclusiveness, responsiveness and equity. This is all the more significant as the massive growth in democracies[28] combined with the ongoing revolution in communication technologies increases citizens' rights and opportunities to communicate and engage in political debate and activities.

Politicians and other policymakers in the developed world are intuitively aware of the importance of communication, yet development initiatives often appear to ignore communication in the developing world. A commitment by key stakeholders to support open information and communication channels of all kinds in a country, including promoting the voices of poor and marginalised people, would have profound consequences for its political, economic and social life. The aim of such a commitment would be to create an 'open society' in which the citizens, politicians and state officials can discuss, know and fulfil their duties and responsibilities to one another in a way that offers the best chance to 'get the politics right' and generate the most conducive environment for development.

25
'Signposts to more effective states: Responding to governance challenges in developing countries', Institute of Development Studies (IDS) report, June 2005

26
Drivers of Change studies are part of DFID's effort to understand process and opportunities for change; SIDA's power analysis contributes to understanding the role of power dynamics in development; the World Bank's Tools for Institutional, Political & Social Analysis (TIPS) are part of the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) approach

27
Hilary Benn, speech to the Demos think tank, 23 October 2006, see: www.demos.co.uk/files/File/HB_speech_-_final.pdf

28
See the latest figures from the *Human security report 2005: War and peace in the 21st Century,* Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia, New York: Oxford University Press, p151

29
The World Bank defines governance as: 'The traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good' in D Kaufmann, 'Back to basics' in *Finance and development*, September 2005, Volume 42, Number 3; DFID defines it as: '… how citizens, leaders and public institutions relate to each other in order to make change happen' in *Eliminating world poverty: Making governance work for the poor*, UK White Paper on International Development, 2006; the UNDP as: 'The exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels' in UNDP, Oslo Governance Centre. The Concord Cotonou Working Group (June 2006) which includes input from ActionAid, Aprodev, Bond, CNCD, Eurodad, Eurostep, FERN, Pollen and VENRO defines governance as: 'the management of relationships between human beings, between societies, between mankind and the biosphere'

30
DFID (2006) *Eliminating world poverty*, p 20 (see note 29)

31
Democracy itself is a contentious term, in part because there are so many differing conceptions (direct, representative, liberal), each of which has different forms. However, the principles of democracy – as outlined by Western political philosophers from Locke, Madison and John Stuart Mill through to contemporary theorists such as Jürgen Habermas – centre on ideas of participation, dialogue and public deliberation. Amartya Sen ('The diverse ancestry of democracy', Financial Times, 13 June 2005) notes that the underlying principles – 'the opportunity of participatory reasoning and public decision making' – have very wide historical roots that include the Buddhist Councils of the sixth century, legal codes for minority rights under Mughal Emperor Akbar in India, and the high position given to the Jewish philosopher Maimonides in Emperor Saladin's court in Cairo. While democracy may be a Western concept, the principles of participation and public debate underpinning it are far broader

32
'Signposts to more effective states', IDS 2005, see note 25

33
See also L Harrison (2006), *The central liberal truth: How politics can change a culture and save it from itself* (see note 6)

Supporting good governance

'Getting the politics right' may be one of the keys to development, but bilateral and multilateral aid organisations are not able to intervene formally and directly in a recipient country's politics: this would violate the norms of international relations, as well as being incompatible with their commitment to partnership with governments. The concept of 'good governance' offers a way round this dilemma by focusing on the technical aspects of government.

Governance can be defined in many ways. Some concentrate on the relationship of government with civil society; others focus on the relationship between individuals, communities, societies and the natural environment.[29] Some focus on the role and performance of government itself: indeed, the stress on governance has arisen partly because as higher levels of official aid are granted directly to support the overall operations of developing country governments ('budget support'), donors have an obligation to try to ensure that their money is well spent. Governance of other social and economic institutions, including large corporations, and their relations with society, is also important. However, this chapter focuses on government.

The UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) White Paper in 2006 defined governance as the state's:

■ capability to perform its key functions

■ responsiveness to its citizens' aspirations and needs

■ accountability to its citizens.[30]

Good governance in any state is rooted in the creation of a political system in which the aggregation of public demand leads to consensus-based policy formation. This aggregation of public wants into policy is licensed by public opinion, which grants political authority to its government at elections.

Discussions of good governance can be contentious because people sometimes use the term as if it was synonymous with democracy. But it is not.[31] External interventions to replicate Northern democratic models of state institutions and political processes in developing countries have enjoyed limited success, in part because they have replicated the forms but not the content. Without deep-rooted processes of 'state/society negotiation',[32] democratic institutions have little meaning.[33]

Any conception of 'good governance' must include an active public sphere in which societal issues can be openly debated, consensus reached or disagreements managed, and a national sense of community established. Approaches to political processes that predominantly focus on elections, representation and the rule of law – and conceive of citizens simply as voters who express their consent from time to time but leave governance to elected rulers and elites – are inadequate. Technically 'democratic' election processes, for instance, can coexist with high levels of corruption and with weak civil society. This conception of citizenship misses the broader roles and activities that citizens fulfil; and is increasingly challenged by the growth in access to information and media, which means that people are ever more informed and able to participate in local and global associations.

Good governance is not universally accepted as a useful focus for development planning. Critics feel that it often places too much focus on the powers of government, with too little on the capabilities of people. A more fundamental criticism is that by focusing on corruption and on technical changes in developing country governments, the 'good governance agenda' distracts attention from major issues of international power imbalances. In other words, critics see the good governance approach as a way for the governments of rich countries to blame the poor, instead of fully recognising their own role in overcoming under-development.[34]

It is certainly true that the concept of good governance, which includes technical aspects as well as power relations, is less directly challenging – both to developing and developed country governments – than the concept of political change.

However, few would dispute that 'good governance' matters – as a development goal in itself and as a critical enabler for improved human welfare. In its broad sense of the machinery of state providing accountable government that enables development in partnership with empowered citizenry, good governance provides security, stability and an environment in which people can make the most of their lives. It enables a political system that builds citizens' sense of inclusion, fairness, voice and participation in decision-making. It promotes the rule of law. It is good for economic growth and the pursuit of livelihoods, encouraging investment and enabling production and trade. There is a growing body of research demonstrating its importance. The *2006 Global Monitoring Report* on progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) suggests that good governance can increase the growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita by 1.2 percentage points[35] and per capita incomes up to fourfold.[36] The World Bank estimates that in the long run, improvements in the quality of governance may lead to a threefold increase in economic growth and development outcomes.[37]

It is equally clear that 'good governance' is hard to create, even where political will is present. At the heart of the relationships between and among different state and non-state actors are flows of information and communication. Good governance cannot be achieved without concentrating more attention and investment on these multiple flows of communication and the technologies through which they are facilitated. Yet this is becoming more complicated and challenging.

In the past, communication was limited and the 'public sphere' within which most people lived was relatively small. Local and traditional community decision-making structures dominated this 'public sphere', which was informed by limited external information and often government-controlled mass media. These were the spaces in which debate was conducted, consensus formed and coalitions built. Now there are many more sources of information available to many more people, and much greater levels and scope of communication flows, globally as well as within countries. This means that building consensus is harder, and the possibility of influence by a single actor is reduced. Yet consensus is arguably ever more important. The spread of rule by democracy rather than diktat, rising expectations and greater individual freedom, the need to share dwindling resources – all these point to a need for increased negotiation in different spheres of life, and more acceptance of negotiated solutions. Governments need to win the consent and support of their citizens – not these days by propaganda through state-controlled media, but through information and persuasion to build understanding, acceptance and ownership. The boundary between the inevitable task of a democratic government to build consensus, and 'spin' – the management of public opinion, including of media, seen as deceitful and suppressing debate – is blurry, but it is just as important in developing as in developed countries.

34
This is a legitimate critique when those same countries simultaneously restrict or stymie discussions on the management of global resources and other global goods (such as CO_2 emissions and public health issues), and reforms in the governance of international systems (such as trading rules) and multilateral organisations (the World Bank and IMF). Critics also charge donors with using the absence of good governance as an excuse for the failure of recent development strategies such as structural adjustment. The charge of hypocrisy is also sometimes valid: rich countries do not always insist on the same anti-corruption measures for themselves that they demand of developing countries

35
Rivera-Batiz's 2002 study found that a one-standard deviation (or 0.26) of his quality of governance index increases the growth rate of GDP per capita by 1.2 percentage points per year. See F L Rivera-Batiz (2002) 'Democracy, governance and economic growth: Theory and evidence' in *Review of Development Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp 225–247

36
World Bank tracking of governance indicators shows a one-standard deviation in one of the six governance indicators (Voice and Accountability, Political Instability and Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Burden, Rule of Law, Graft) leads to 2.4–4-fold increase in per capita incomes. See World Bank Governance Indicators 2006

37
World Bank Governance Indicators. The World Bank's *Global Monitoring Report 2006* stressed the vital role of good governance in reducing poverty. A concentration on corruption in the developing world mixes cause and effect: corruption is the symptom, not the cause, of bad governance

New technologies provide a platform that neither the state nor traditional public spheres can control. Governments such as China's that are still trying to impose control over their citizens' access to communication may not be able to hold back the flood much longer. Governments have a choice: embrace the new technologies and forge new relationships with their people or, like Joseph Estrada, the former president of the Philippines (toppled in 2001 by 'smart mobs' coordinating through mobile phones[38]), face the power of newly enabled civil societies.

For governments to engage effectively in dialogue with their citizens (and external stakeholders), they will require more varied, nimble, open and actively engaged strategies of listening, responding and being accountable to the needs of the people. This is true for all political systems. In Vietnam, at a press conference in January 2007 to announce the prime minister's first ever online chat with members of the public, Pham Viet Dung, editor of the Vietnam Government's website, said 'the online forums highlight the responsibility political leaders have in listening and discussing issues of public concern'.[39]

Below we outline the centrality of communication and information in helping governments to meet these challenges: their role in promoting a state's *responsiveness* and *accountability*, and in boosting its *capacities and capabilities*. The importance of communication to the role of civil society – both as the partner for government (holding it accountable), and in its own right in the development of a healthy public sphere – is the subject of the next chapter.

State responsiveness and accountability

Responsiveness

State responsiveness is the way governments take account of their citizens' aspirations, expectations and needs, and respond to them. Responsive states require governments that can communicate with civil society and base the formation and implementation of policy on the needs and concerns of their citizens. Greater consultation and responsiveness increase public ownership and trust in government, and tend to increase the effectiveness of policies. But the means by which this interaction can take place are frequently ignored or under-resourced by governments, and too often the voices of the wealthy and powerful are those which are 'heard' by governments and the wider public, and become more influential than those of the poor. Governments have obligations to all citizens, and should make special efforts to provide channels and mechanisms to ensure poor and marginalised people can make their voices heard.

Assessments of poverty and the design of poverty reduction strategies that are based on the participation of the poor themselves – such as Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) and the emphasis on consultation in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) – have potential, when they are well implemented, as models of communication processes that can support responsive policymaking and good governance.[40]

Accountability

Accountability is a crucial element of good governance. A government must be answerable to its citizens for what it does. Accountability is realised through periodic *political* processes, but also through ongoing *transparency*, and *monitoring* of a government's performance. All of these are communication processes.

38
'Smart mobs' is a term coined by Howard Rheingold to describe social groups newly empowered through evolving communication technologies such as the Internet, online chat tools, mobiles and the new opportunities presented by networks. Howard Rheingold (2002) *Smart mobs: The next social revolution,* Cambridge Mass: Perseus Books Group

39
http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01POL250107

40
See the forthcoming paper from Panos London, *Making poverty the story: Time to involve the media in poverty reduction* Available at www.panos.org.uk

41

P Newell and J Wheeler (2006) *Rights, resources and the politics of accountability: Claiming citizenship – rights, participation and accountability*, London: Zed Books, p3

42

M Moore and G Teskey (2006) *The CAR Framework: Capability, accountability, responsiveness. A discussion note for DFID Governance and Conflict Advisors, Brighton:* IDS

43

R Islam (2003) *Do more transparent governments govern better?* Policy Research Working Paper 3077, World Bank, cited in: A Bellver and D Kaufmann (2006) *'Transparenting transparency: Initial empirics and policy applications'*, The World Bank Institute

44

In Mexico, the passing of access to information legislation empowered information intermediaries. Most of those accessing information under the new legislation are businesses, academics and journalists. Of the 150,000 requests received up to 2006, over 50 per cent are from business people and academics, journalists and other bureaucrats (Juan Pablo Guerrero, Access to Information Commissioner, Mexico, presentation at World Congress on Communication for Development, Rome, October 2006)

45

D Banisar (2006) *Freedom of information around the world 2006: A global survey of access to government information laws,* Privacy International

46

African Media Development Initiative: Research summary report, BBC World Service Trust, 2006

47

The Economist, 23 December 2006, p46

48

www.article19.org The name of the organisation, Article 19, is taken from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19, which refers to freedom of expression

49

Indeed, some development agencies use the term almost exclusively within the context of corruption, leading to criticisms that they are only blaming developing world governments for failures to reach development goals

50

L Brandeis (1914) *Other People's Money, and How the Bankers Use It,* New York: F A Stokes

51

D Kaufmann, 'Back to basics – 10 myths about governance and corruption' in *Finance and Development – a quarterly magazine of the IMF*, September 2005, Vol 42, No 3

52

Utstein Anti-Corruption Resource Centre: www.u4.no/helpdesk/faq/faqs2c.cfm

Accountability is often seen as a matter mainly of financial reporting to show that funds have been used properly, but it is much more than that. People should be able to judge whether policy decisions are being properly implemented, and hold their governments accountable for fulfilling the promises on which they were elected. Poor people can be involved in this, through different types of communication process. For instance, NGOs in rural India are creating new platforms and arenas for the articulation of accountability claims through informal public hearings and the construction of 'People's Development Plans'.[41]

Transparency is an essential component in making systems and processes of all kinds accountable to their users, stakeholders and consumers – not only for national governments but also for international bodies and the private sector.[42] Countries that are more transparent, for example in the provision of economic information, have better governance indicators for government effectiveness, regulatory burden, voice and accountability, the rule of law, bureaucratic efficiency and contract repudiation, and risk of expropriation.[43]

Transparency demands clear, predictable and documented processes of decision-making and implementation; with information about these processes being made available to citizens and the right of access to this information being accorded to them.

Access for all citizens to information – held by governments but also by the private sector – is an essential component of accountability. It enables citizens to understand policies and processes so that they can question them and enter into informed dialogue.[44] In 2006 nearly 70 countries around the world had adopted comprehensive freedom of information legislation to facilitate access to records held by government bodies, and another 50 were in the process of doing so,[45] though frequently this process is very prolonged. Freedom of information legislation has been pending in Ghana and Nigeria for six years, and the Zambian Government has been running 'consultations' on potential legislation since 2001.[46] Meanwhile in some developed countries, governments are actually trying to claw back citizens' rights: in 2006 the UK Government considered restricting its existing freedom of information practices, apparently as a cost-cutting measure,[47] making it harder for campaigners and journalists to access information potentially embarrassing to ministers. Access to information legislation is needed, therefore – but civil society and the media also have to see its value and use it. The organisation Article 19 works not only to get freedom of information legislation introduced, but also to help people to see how it can benefit them, and to strengthen the capacity of governments to implement it.[48]

Transparency reduces opportunities for corruption.[49] 'Sunlight is the best disinfectant,[50] US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously observed, and the evidence bears this out.[51] Lowering levels of corruption limits the diversion of investment and aid flows; promotes equity in access to decision-making and services; and builds trust in government and institutions. It is a necessary, though not a sufficient, measure for achieving good governance. Key areas where transparency can be focused to reduce corruption include appointments and other human resources practices (through the introduction of open and meritocratic recruitment methods, electronic selection processes, and clear criteria-based career paths); and budgetary control (through ensuring no 'off-budget' accounts, clear budget projections, income and expenditure assumptions, regular progress reports, wide participation and sharing of draft budgets, and transparent accounting standards).[52]

Transparency International (TI) has found that laws and sanctions seem to be less successful in reducing levels of corruption than public voluntary agreements to refrain from corrupt practices. TI has developed what it calls 'integrity pacts',[53] in which agreements to maintain certain standards are made between public officials and the private sector, for instance, or multinational companies and their partners. Their success depends on the broad public communication of their content: citizens have to know what the signatories of the pact have committed to.

Citizen participation can also contribute to reducing corruption.[54] In Bolivia, for example, citizen participation in annual planning, budgeting and oversight on municipal hospital health boards had a stronger correlation to reduced corruption than other anti-corruption interventions that focused on public sector management variables (such as relative wages, internal enforcement of rules, and the autonomy of agency by fiat).[55]

Box 1
Transparent procurement reduces corruption

In Pakistan, the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board instituted an open and transparent bidding process that was monitored by Transparency International. Making publicly available the procurement documents and process demonstrated how the application of a no-bribes integrity pact could be rolled out across other contracts for consultancy services and all service provision. The introduction of transparency initiatives resulted in a net saving estimated at nearly 20 per cent of the previously estimated cost of the contract.[56]

Statistical analysis shows that increased penetration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and mass media is associated with lower levels of corruption.[57] In a study that analysed a comprehensive dataset of quality of governance and media indicators,[58] researchers found that where media and ICT penetration was greater, corruption levels were lower – with the most significant indicator being newspaper circulation.

Governments may be reluctant to improve transparency and the power of people to monitor their performance; and, of course, the most sophisticated IT system will not increase real transparency much if the political will for transparency is absent – at senior levels of government or lower down in bureaucracies and implementing agencies. External development agencies cannot create political will – but they may be able to influence governments by demonstrating how new technological opportunities and a culture of openness will benefit rather than threaten them. Communication can inspire greater public support and contribute to political gains such as longer tenure.[59]

The *monitoring* of government performance, particularly by civil society, is an important accountability mechanism. Monitoring can cover a variety of issues, such as financial management and quality of services provided. Ideally, governments should set themselves clear targets and make transparent plans for achieving them, and make these known to citizens – so that citizens can follow progress and understand constraints. This is an enormous challenge for governments and does not often happen either in rich or developing countries, but small examples show its power. Monitoring also requires an increased capacity of citizens to follow, assess and respond to government performance, and it can be carried out through a variety of mechanisms – for instance, citizen report cards and social audits.

53
Developed by Transparency International, the Integrity Pact (IP) is a tool aimed at preventing corruption in public contracting. It consists of a process that includes an agreement between a government or a government department (at the federal, national or local level) and all bidders for a public contract. It contains rights and obligations to the effect that neither side will: pay, offer, demand or accept bribes; collude with competitors to obtain the contract; or engage in such abuses while carrying out the contract. The IP also introduces a monitoring system that provides for independent oversight and accountability

54
G Gray-Molina, E Pérez de Rada, E Yañez, 'Transparency and Accountability in Bolivia: Does Voice Matter?' Inter-American Development Bank, Latin American Research Network, Office of the Chief Economist, Working paper #R-381 December 1999, p29

55
D Kaufmann, G Mehrez and T Gurgur (2002) 'Voice or public sector management? An empirical investigation of determinants of public sector performance based on a survey of public officials,' World Bank Research Working Paper, June 2002, p29

56
Transparency International Pakistan and Greater Karachi Water Supply Scheme (2003) *Integrity Pact: A Pakistan Success Story*, Karachi, p5

57
S Bandyopadhyay (2006) *Knowledge-driven economic development,* Economics Series Working Papers No 267, Department of Economics, University of Oxford

58
The dataset consisted of: World Bank Quality of Governance Indicators 2004, country assessments from the International Country Risk Guide, Freedom House country rankings, Reporters without Borders assessments of media freedom

59
L Neuman (2006) *Making public institutions transparent: The cornerstones of an open society,* paper prepared for the World Congress on Communication for Development

Box 2
Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) improve public services in Bangalore, India

The Public Affairs Centre (PAC), an NGO in Bangalore, India, has pioneered the use of Citizen Report Cards (CRCs). The first report card on Bangalore's public agencies in 1994 covered municipal services, water supply, electricity, telecoms and transport. Service users gave their rating of the services, the findings were widely publicised through the media, and public officials and civic groups were brought together through workshops and seminars. The increased public awareness of government inefficiencies reportedly triggered the formation of more than 100 civic groups in different parts of India.

Agencies were rated and compared in terms of public satisfaction, corruption and responsiveness. Almost all the public service providers received low ratings from the people. The third CRC on Bangalore in 2003 showed a surprising turnaround in the city's services. It noted a remarkable rise in the citizen ratings. Not only did public satisfaction improve across the board, but problem incidence and corruption seemed to have declined perceptibly in the routine transactions between the public and the agencies. Decisive steps had been taken by the agencies to improve services since the first CRC.[60]

Key to the success of monitoring tools such as CRCs is an open and democratic environment – without space for participation, CRCs have little impact. In addition, political will from government, civil society and the media is important.

Political processes are at the heart of how accountability is realised; and elections are the most visible of the mechanisms through which civil society can reward or sanction its representatives. Clearly, technology and improved levels of communication already play important roles in ensuring electoral registration and accurate and timely results.[61] New communication technologies are being used in many ways to improve the quality of elections and public confidence in them – essential factors in new or highly contested democratic processes. For example, journalists, NGOs and ordinary citizens are using mobile phones to report from remote polling stations and increase levels of scrutiny. Electronic voting has been shown in some cases to increase confidence, by giving instantaneous results and fewer opportunities for meddling with results.

Communications and media also support elections by helping political parties campaign and 'get out the vote', informing voters of the location of their polling stations and how to vote at them. Broadcast media, radio and interpersonal communication ('working the phones') are all well-established tools in the political activist's toolkit, and mobile phones and text messaging are increasingly used for campaigning.

But before elections are held, politicians and people have to engage in other communication processes. Meaningful choice by citizens depends, among other things, on their having knowledge of candidates' and parties' programmes, promises and performance; and the opportunity to debate these and relate them to their own concerns. Political parties have to be formed, agendas developed and support sought from the public. People need to develop the habit of political debate around content and issues rather than just personalities. All rely on effective communication channels, and opinion polls, assemblies and public debates, face-to-face canvassing and many other types of communication are critical to the quality of the political process.[62]

60
The third Citizen Report Card on public services in Bangalore, Public Affairs Committee India, 2003

61
H Deegan (2003) 'Elections in Africa – The past ten years: An assessment,' Elections In Africa Series Briefing Paper No 2, The Royal Institute Of International Affairs

62
See note 41

The media also play a particularly important role. The media reveal context and frame coverage to allow judgements to be made by citizens based on the issues rather than the performance of the subjects.[63] Debate around topical issues is shared widely through the media in open editorials, discussion programmes, phone-in radio shows, and 'question times' with political candidates.

Box 3
Mobile phones and elections in Africa

The availability of mobile phones was found to militate against corrupt practices in Ghana and Senegal, with European Union (EU) observers witnessing a greater depth of involvement because of the ease of telephone communication. Political organisations were greatly assisted in their monitoring activities by being constantly and immediately in contact as events occurred. Equally, observers could promptly publish on the Internet any electoral irregularities or incidences of coercion as they were reported by phone from the field.

In Kenya, the massive use of text messaging crashed the mobile phone network during the final stages of the election in 2002 as people used telephones to mobilise each other and monitor the polling booths. Political groups developed cell-phone number databases allowing people to contact each other and those at the polling stations to call for support when needed. Campaigns made use of short messaging services and election results were disseminated as soon as they were counted, even in the most remote areas. This use of mobile phones contributed to more effective campaigning, greater transparency and less ballot rigging.[64]

63
John Lloyd (2004) *What the Media are Doing to Our Politics*, Constable: London, p143

64
'Mobile Phone Plays Role in Free Kenyan Elections' 6 January 2003, source: Bill Kagai to Democracies Online, posted on the Communication Initiative website: www.comminit.com

65
A Sen, *Development as Freedom* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press

66
Timothy Besley and Robin Burgess (2002) 'Political economy of government responsiveness – theory and evidence from India' in *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* November 2002

67
International News Safety Institute (2007) *Killing the Messenger: Report of the global inquiry by the International News Safety Institute into the protection of journalists,* Brussels

68
In December 2006 the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1738 condemning attacks on journalists and other media professionals and emphasising the responsibility of states to end impunity and prosecute those responsible for serious violations

69
Djankov et al (2003) 'Who owns the media?' *Journal of Law and Economics,* XLVI: 341–381

Governance and the media

Media are an essential component of accountability. They can report on and investigate the decisions and behaviour of the powerful, exposing corruption and providing spaces for issues to be debated and agendas developed. In *Development as Freedom*,[65] Amartya Sen famously argued that no famine has ever taken place in a country which has multi-party politics and free media. Further research by the London School of Economics found that a 1 per cent increase in newspaper circulation is associated with a 2.4 per cent increase in public food distribution and a 5.5 per cent increase in disaster relief expenditures.[66]

The relationship between a national government and its media is inevitably antagonistic at times, in democracies as well as in authoritarian states. Journalism is a dangerous profession: in the 10 years from 1996 to 2006, at least 657 journalists have been murdered, the majority in peacetime, and only one in eight of their killers has been prosecuted.[67]

However, most governments are committed in principle to establishing the regulatory and enabling environment which allows media the 'space' to speak and act freely.[68] It is when such political will and protected space are absent that the media cannot, or fail, to hold governments to account. Recent academic findings have supported the intuitive and widely-accepted argument that free media promote political freedom. Research across 97 countries around the world found that 'government ownership of the press is associated with… lower levels of political rights and civil liberties'.[69] States with little political freedom are those where attacks on the freedom of the press are frequent – for instance, North Korea, Eritrea, Cuba, Myanmar, China and Turkmenistan are all described as 'major culprits' of media repression in the 2007 'Reporters without Borders' Press Freedom survey.

In order to hold the powerful to account the media need to be free, inclusive and plural. 'Free' means legally and in practice free to make their own editorial decisions and publish information and opinions critical of those in power. It also means free financially – that is, a media house should not be dependent on government or any single source for its income. 'Inclusive' means media should reflect the voices, concerns and language of different elements of society, including the poor and marginalised. 'Plural' means diverse in scope, scale and audience – including national mass media as well as local, community and citizen media – and also diverse in their ownership. An apparent plurality of media can be deceptive: the increasing concentration of media ownership in many markets means that despite a plethora of titles and outlets the actual 'voices', interests and views reflected may be extremely limited.

Plurality of ownership is important because no single media outlet could be expected to reflect all the voices within its society. Media organisations and entities operate according to their own agendas and priorities, business opportunities and constraints. They are not neutral in themselves, but partial, and must attract and keep their audience and consumers, as well as satisfying the expectations and demands of owners and staff. Only when media are diverse and pluralistic in both form and content can the competition of voices, opinions, facts and interests be fully engaged; and when this takes place, governments and the powerful in all sectors of society are far more likely to be held accountable.

What is too often overlooked is that for truly independent and pluralistic media to exist, there also needs to be pluralism of media content. The quality as well as quantity of media content matters. Achieving high-quality and engaged, informed and respected media is first and foremost a responsibility of the media themselves. Simply through their determination to scrutinise and ask difficult questions, journalists and media owners stimulate citizens to demand and provide accountability more effectively in turn. Of course, citizens have the right to choose the kind of media they want, but the media have a real interest in helping to establish a public of educated consumers who are media literate, and know what they want and need.

The kind of media necessary to support good governance, accountability and empowered citizens is media with *quality* content that serves the public interest. Governments need to be persuaded of and committed to the media as a 'public good' and to support them through public service legislation and open, independent regulation promoting high journalistic and media standards. The challenge of enabling such public interest media is discussed in more depth in the section – Why communication needs support (on page 43).

Box 4
Media, power and accountability

There are numerous examples of the ability and importance of the media in holding power-holders to account. In 2001 an Indian online newspaper, Tehelka.com, taped secret video footage of senior politicians, bureaucrats and army officers apparently receiving money in connection with a defence deal. The subsequent public outrage led to the resignation of the president of the ruling Bharat Janata Party (BJP). Public opinion and Tehelka's campaign for integrity appeared to reflect each other, but the state responded by attempting to gag broader media coverage and detaining Tehelka's staff.[70] In Peru in the 1990s, the head of the secret service, Vladimir Montesinos Torres, paid up to US$1,500,000 to buy media houses' silence over widespread corruption and maintain his control over the state. Interestingly, this was much more than the US$5,000–10,000 he paid to bribe individual judges, apparently demonstrating the importance he attributed to the media as opposed to the judiciary in holding power to account.

70
Reporters without Borders (2003)
Annual Press Freedom Report

State capacity and public service delivery

A great deal of development attention is paid today to making states more effective and efficient – whether the ideological context is of 'big' or 'small' government. The concept of an effective state does not necessarily imply a top-down 'statist' or dominant government, but one that performs the 'supply side' of good governance well. This includes:

- setting, disseminating, monitoring and enforcing laws, rules and regulations

- ensuring government policies are put into practice effectively, transparently and honestly

- delivering public services efficiently in ways that meet people's needs

- creating the conditions for investment and trade, and promoting growth in jobs and incomes

- allocating resources and distributing wealth.

Information and communication processes and technologies lie at the heart of every state's capacity to perform these vital functions. ICTs offer huge potential in improving the capabilities and performance of state bodies as they serve their citizens, making their use of information more effective, and leading to better availability of public information, a more responsive civil service and increased quality of service delivery.[71]

However, technologies in themselves are not a 'golden key' to change – they only augment the political will of the institutions behind them. As a senior manager of computer company, Adobe Systems, pointed out, 'ICT is an important and powerful tool for change and the key to its success lies in empowering people – both citizens and public sector staff.'[72] Change management programmes are essential to enable the culture of bureaucracies to adapt for the effective and efficient delivery of services. These need strong leadership which listens and responds to practitioners and citizens. The increased use of ICTs in government is of no use if the governance systems do not acknowledge public needs and the communication needs and capacities of the people, or if the information being used is wrong.

A useful distinction is sometimes made between 'e-government' (the use of ICTs to increase the internal efficiency of government) and 'e-governance' (the use of ICTs to strengthen dealings between government and citizens). Obviously the benefits of 'e-governance' extend only to those who have the necessary skills and access to the technology, but with this caveat ICTs can help government be both more efficient and more open in many ways, such as:

- *gathering and using statistical information*, on the basis of which plans can be made for best use of limited resources for service delivery

- *documents, record-keeping, and archiving online* can increase external access and efficient sharing of information internally and externally, helping government bureaucracies communicate among themselves and with businesses and citizens

- *administrative efficiency gains* can be made through the increased use of computers (accompanied by training and capacity building), and the networking of different government departments

71
There are also many examples of waste and failure in large-scale government ICT projects (for example, see Private Eye, 27 February 2007, issue 1179); as well as fears that too much government-held information might threaten citizens' freedom

72
A Jones and L Williams (2005) *How ICT? Managing at the front line,* Work Foundation & Adobe Systems

■ *transparency of processes* such as *staff recruitment.* Making civil service appointment processes transparent through advertisements, independent selection boards, and selection processes taking place online and being documented in the media helps to ensure appointments and promotion are on merit, thereby increasing the quality of service and legitimacy in the eyes of the public

■ *greater public knowledge* of the legal system, enabled through access to legislation, education and publicly available information, is important in helping to prevent arbitrary applications of the law. Widespread reporting on legal procedures and the easy availability of court rulings ensures that justice is not only done but seen to be done, building confidence in the law and the state.

Box 5
E-governance in India

In Bhoomi, Karnataka, India, prior to the introduction of ICTs, records on ownership of each parcel of land were maintained by 9,000 village accountants. There were 20 million records of land ownership involving 6.7 million farmers in the state. Requests for the alteration of land records, for instance in the event of sale or inheritance, could take up to two years to process. Requests for copies of ownership title, for instance to secure a bank loan, could take up to 30 days. Both involved payment of bribes. Now that the documents have been computerised, they can be obtained on the spot through one of the 187 kiosks in local offices for a small fee of 15 rupees.[73]

Public service delivery

The more effective and equitable delivery of public services such as health, education and security in developing countries is a fundamental requirement if the MDGs are to be achieved. Public service delivery needs to be efficient in terms of management of resources and inputs; transparent for accountability/anti-corruption purposes; and is often collaborative (between government, the private sector and NGOs) for maximum mobilisation of potential providers and resources. Strategies and priorities need to have people's broad understanding and consent; and delivery has to be designed in response to users' needs and cultures, otherwise people will not take up the services offered. Service provision also has to be responsive to feedback, for monitoring and strengthening impact. All of these requirements involve different types of communication processes.

Communication at the policy level

In developed as well as developing countries, the provision of services involves choices on how to allocate resources and deliver services most efficiently and equitably. These choices and 'reforms' are often controversial: for instance, whether to use public or private providers to deliver basic services; or whether service users should pay, or provision should be free at the point of use. Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of different approaches, consultation with and participation of the public in the decision-making process is essential to ensure that the needs of all are addressed and to help gain consent to and ownership of whatever policies are chosen. In addition, transparency in contracts, plans, targets and budgets will help build trust and ensure that poor and marginalised people gain their fair share of the services as well as richer ones.

73
World Public Sector Report 2003
E-Government at the Crossroads,
UN-ECOSOC, 2003

Communication assists delivery of services

The delivery of public services is more efficient when users have the opportunity to provide feedback and input on the design of service delivery. Examples include the use of mobile phones to provide public service information in India, e-complaint centres to track service-user satisfaction in Pakistan, and online waiting lists in Croatia.[74]

Whether provided by the state or private sector, or partnerships of the two, service delivery must be accountable to the public, including the poor. Basic elements of this accountability include transparency of procurement processes, contracts, sources of finance and budgets. User participation in the design of services has also been shown to produce delivery mechanisms that match people's habits and priorities and gain their trust; while many experiments have shown how citizen and user participation in the management of services and resources can contribute to accountability while also increasing efficiency (although, as noted earlier, such transparency is not common either in developed or developing countries). For example, enabling users to participate in water management through user forums can help ensure service delivery is targeted and efficient. One water resources management project in the Gulf of Mexico that used video to facilitate the participation of water users resulted in a rate of return 7 per cent higher than originally planned.[75]

Enabling participation requires the education and mobilisation of service users through different communication, monitoring and feedback processes. Publication of statistical research and independent impact assessments, Citizen Report Cards, telephone 'hotlines' and independent ombudsmen can give service users the capacity and tools they need.

ICTs can support more efficient management of inputs and staff of service delivery organisations, from simple tasks such as managing records or organising meetings, to more complex ones such as analysing statistics and decision-making. The use of ICTs can enable supply chains to function more effectively in service provision, just as it does in production and retailing. Monitoring mechanisms such as Public Expenditure Tracking Systems can play a key role in the management of a stronger civil service and more efficient service delivery – but it is the widespread communication of the data which makes them effective.

74
For more details, see G Sharma, N Raj and B Shadrach (2005) *Knowledge and research programme on improving efficiency of pro-poor public services*, Oneworld South Asia/DFID

75
See note 19

76
R Reinikka and N Smith (2004) *Public expenditure tracking surveys in education in Peru, Uganda and Zambia*, International Institute for Educational Planning, Ethics and corruption in education series, UNESCO; R Reinikka and J Svensson (2004) *The Power of Information: Evidence from a newspaper campaign to reduce capture,* Policy Research Working Paper 3239, World Bank

Box 6
Making education more effective in Uganda

In 1996 the Government of Uganda increased spending on primary education, but saw little impact on school enrolment levels. Public Expenditure Tracking Systems (PETS) collected data from 250 schools and found that only 13 per cent of intended grants actually reached schools. The government responded by publishing the monthly transfers of public funds to the districts in newspapers, broadcasting information on the transfers on radio, and requiring primary schools to post information on inflows of funds. The objective of this 'information campaign' was to promote transparency and increase public sector accountability by giving citizens access to the information they needed to be able to understand and examine the workings of the grant programme for primary schools. This empowered citizens to hold all the stakeholders to account and drew attention to where money was being mis-spent. As a result, instead of 13 per cent, around 80 per cent of education funds began reaching schools.[76]

Politics and governance: conclusion

In this section we have shown how the political process and good governance depend on and are characterised by effective communication processes. Transparency, accountability and participation are realised through communication.[77] Information and communication processes of many kinds, including the growing possibilities of ICTs and the essential role of free, independent and pluralistic media, are central to the formation of open, healthy political activity and to an increased level of responsiveness, accountability and capability of a state to perform its key functions.

Responsive policymaking, effective governmental accountability and efficient service delivery also depend on the existence of a civil society that can formulate and assert (ie, is able to communicate) an agenda and opinion of its own. It is to the role of the media, information and communication in the development of a vibrant, powerful civil society that we now turn.

A diverse, engaged and empowered civil society

The focus of development is people – they are at the heart of change. Sometimes development planners tend to see people mainly as *beneficiaries* of development – of improved healthcare, for instance. But of course people are also the main actors in achieving development: choices of agricultural techniques made by thousands of farmers add up to more or less sustainable food production; efforts by millions of poor families to put their daughters through school add up to greater equality for women and healthier families.

The previous chapter showed the importance of civil society as an essential partner of governments in establishing good governance. 'Competent citizens' – individuals who can participate in political processes and policy debate, and hold government accountable – form the 'demand side' of good governance. Research into citizenship has found that development interventions aiming to establish effective relationships between states and citizens need to work on both sides of this supply and demand equation. Focusing only on strengthening the state and its capacity to provide rights does little to facilitate processes of change. Rather, it is more likely to strengthen the status quo.[78]

In the modern world very few, if any, people live independently of governments. Governments shape many aspects of people's lives more or less directly – but there are other aspects of life, and thus of development, in which people do operate largely outside the reach of government.

Different development theories and approaches focus on social groupings at different levels. Some focus on individuals, for instance as consumers. Some look at families, for instance at the power of women to make decisions within their households. The influence of communities, for instance in managing natural resources, or of societies, for instance in shaping attitudes to HIV, can be the focus. People as citizens, in their relationships to government, are important, as we have already seen, while global consumers and global networks are becoming increasingly important. (Of course all these levels are overlapping and interrelated.) This chapter focuses on the roles people and social institutions play in development apart from government – and the roles communication plays in these.

Individuals and individual rights

Individuals

The welfare of individuals is the ultimate measure of successful development, and progress in development consists of individuals gaining increased capacities to do things – to manage their livelihoods, to protect their own health, to bring up their own children, to respect their neighbours and contribute to civic life. The centrality of individuals has been articulated by economist Amartya Sen, who describes the goal of development as the achievement by individuals of 'real freedoms'. Freedoms, according to Sen, are achieved through individuals having 'functional capabilities' – such as the ability to live to old age, or the ability to engage in economic transactions.[79] Communication must be part of achieving these capabilities: individuals must have the capacity to receive information, to communicate their own voices, and to negotiate with others.

78
J Gaventa (2005) 'Seeing like a citizen: Reclaiming citizenship in a neoliberal world', IDS, November 2005, p17

79
See footnotes 11 and 12

For many development organisations today, the goal of development is the realisation of human rights for everyone. In a rights-based approach, as for Sen, individuals are the focus and the measure of development interventions. But although rights are enjoyed by individuals, they are realised in relation to communities or societies. For instance, a woman's right to equality has to be won initially from the men in her family; a minority's right not to be the subject of discrimination has to be won from the society of which it is a part. In addition, many rights have to be granted, guaranteed or protected by governments – for instance, many governments have taken on the obligation to provide shelter and healthcare for everyone. Communication is thus an essential part of a rights-based approach to development. First, people have to know what their rights are. Then the actions they take to claim their rights are likely to include negotiation, argument, complaint, lobbying, networking and mobilising other claimants, and political discourse. Some rights, such as women's right to equality, are hindered by the attitudes and cultures of whole societies. Efforts to achieve such rights as these have to involve long-term communication efforts through mass media and cultural products, education systems, and social and government institutions. In addition, governments are often the principal violators of individuals' rights, so protecting rights involves a range of communication activities at national and international level to influence governments.

Citizenship rights and powers, like basic human rights, are enjoyed by individuals. But they only exist when they have been established by a state, and they are often exercised through associations and institutions, including political parties. Realisation of citizenship rights, therefore, involves many types of communication, as the previous section indicated. Mass media can play an important role – for instance, they can convey information and ideas to many individuals, who are free to choose how to respond.

Communication rights

Some development thinkers have proposed that a 'right to communicate' should be established as an additional human right.[80] Communication is such a fundamental, indeed defining, human characteristic, that it seems to make sense intuitively that we should have such a right. The proposed new right is an extension of the already existing right to freedom of expression (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).[81] It makes explicit the need for means of making communication real: the ability to speak is of no use, after all, if no one hears and responds. But far from being common sense, the proposed new right has a very controversial and divisive history, which is not yet resolved.

The idea emerged in the 1970s, and from the start controversy was acted out largely within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). On one side, supporting the new right to communicate, were those who were concerned that a commitment to the completely free flow of information, shaped only by the market, was resulting in dominance of media, infrastructure and content by big corporations, and dominance of Northern over Southern voices. On the other side were those who regarded intervention in the 'free flow' and the market as infringing on freedom. A UN Commission appointed in 1976 to look into the subject presented its report in 1980.[82] The report concluded that the communication needs of democratic society did require extension of the existing right to include elements of a new concept, the right to communicate, and recommended that the 'implications of the right to communicate [should] be further explored'. However, the UN's acceptance of this finding was very soon undermined by the Cold War and North–South tensions of the period – which contributed to a weakening of UNESCO, and which still colours the debate on a right to communicate today.

80
For an overview of the history and current status of the demand for a 'right to communicate', see for instance, Campaign for Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) (2005) *Assessing communication rights: A handbook,* www.crisinfo.org

81
'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19, United Nations 1948

82
Many Voices, One World, report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (the 'MacBride Commission'), often referred to as the MacBride Report, presented to the UN General Assembly, 1980

The topics which would be covered by a new right are close to the recommendations being made by this paper – they include the need for poor people to have real access to means of communication, the importance of those in power listening to the poor, access to information, the value of local media, and the question of supporting the languages and cultures of minorities or marginalised people. Most development thinkers would probably agree that these things are all part of a sustainable, inclusive and well-governed society. So why is the idea of a new right not more widely supported? One of the objections to it is that the existing right to freedom of expression is already sufficiently comprehensive. Some opponents are uncomfortable with the element of compulsion they see in the proposed new right: if people are given the right to be heard as well as to speak, that seems to imply that someone must be compelled to listen to them. A more general objection is that an international instrument dealing with fundamental rights should not go into details of how those rights are realised.

Campaigners for improved communication are now tending to take a different approach. Instead of demanding the establishment of a new and comprehensive 'right to communicate' they are concentrating on realisation of a number of already existing rights and commitments that relate to communication, under the banner 'Communication rights' – including access to information, universal access to telecommunications, and protection of minority cultures.

Families and communities

Families

Most people live not alone but in families, and so realisation of individuals' theoretical rights and powers depends on relationships within the family. Families – nuclear and extended – are important social organisations for enabling individuals' welfare and their ability to manage their livelihoods and survive shocks. For instance, in many cultures families regularly pool resources to help individual members with major events such as weddings, education or illness. In some, the obligation of wealthier members of extended families to support the poorer members is a major mechanism for social support, distribution of resources and access to jobs (which has, of course, negative results for democracy as well as positive ones for the individuals concerned). Such relationships are enabled by communication. A study of how poor people in India, Tanzania and Mozambique used telephones found that one of the most common uses was to keep in contact with scattered family members.[83] Mobile phones are frequently used to arrange transfer of migrants' remittances back to their family members at home. Poor people are willing to pay a larger proportion of their income than rich people do to keep in touch.

83
'The economic impact of telecommunications on rural livelihoods and poverty reduction: A study of rural communities in India (Gujarat), Mozambique and Tanzania', Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, October 2005

Families are the locus and mechanism for reproducing society's attitudes and individual identities (for instance, gender identity). Families shape individuals' self-perceptions – including gender inequality and expectations of participation in public life; families shape members' attitudes and their behaviour in many personal spheres such as health, sex, or diet; and families have an impact practically on individuals' opportunities – for instance regarding education, mobility or marriage. In short, families influence many aspects of individuals' freedoms and capabilities, which themselves are the basis of development. Communication within families, therefore, is a crucial element of development. By definition, it is hard for external development agents (such as governments or service providers) to intervene directly in communication within families. But many development communication efforts seek to influence internal family communication indirectly – for instance, through giving information about birth spacing to women at clinics, about the environment to children at schools, or about safe sexual behaviour to young men in bars. Mass media (such as soap operas, information spots and discussion programmes on radio) can be designed to stimulate discussion within families; and communication through respected community figures (such as priests and imams) in social spaces used by large numbers of people (such as churches and mosques) is also intended partly to influence discussion and decision-making in families.

Communities

Individuals and families almost all live in communities, and their lives are shaped by their communities' culture and social structures and access to resources, and their own ability to benefit from these. Many development interventions focus on strengthening the capacities of communities to manage resources, livelihoods, public health, and so on, sustainably and on behalf of all community members – for instance, strengthening the skills and capacities of community-level healthcare workers, supporting negotiation processes for communities to manage water resources without conflict, or helping farmers pool their resources for more efficient purchasing and marketing. All such community-level development interventions depend on communication, including discussion, identifying problems and solutions, acquiring and sharing information, negotiation, agreement, joint management processes, and mutual accountability processes within the community. Communities are not isolated and self-sufficient these days, and another major function of communication is to support the capacity of communities to communicate with higher authorities and outside bodies – local and national governments, businesses, and NGOs – to hold them accountable, claim entitlements, and put community concerns on the agenda. Government and other outside bodies also need to communicate with communities, for instance to enable effective delivery and take-up of services. For example, some health services work with traditional birth attendants to ensure that rural women who need more specialised medical care are able to get it.

The focus on communities as an important locus of development change grew in part from a deepening understanding of how communication works. Firstly, people learn more effectively and adopt new ideas as their own when they learn from their peers, and when they can respond and engage in dialogue, rather than when they passively receive information from outside. Secondly, if a development strategy requires communities to adopt new habits or systems – for example, protecting a local forest, or paying for their household water – the new system is more likely to be accepted and successful if people have built 'ownership' by participating in identifying and setting it up themselves. The communication process has to be much more than simply telling people that something is happening. Thirdly, it is not easy for individuals to adopt new personal behaviour unless the culture they are part of also changes: safe sex, for instance, has to become the norm in a young man's peer group before he will practise it himself; and a family is more likely to pay for its daughters to be educated if this has become the expectation in its community. Any effort to change individuals' behaviour has to target the whole community.[84] Development thinking today is increasingly recognising the link between participatory communication and empowerment – that is, increased individual and community sense of capacity to manage their lives and achieve change.[85]

Box 7
Oral history triggers community action in Jamaica

Mocho is a poor area of Jamaica, often scorned as backward by other Jamaicans. Forty years of bauxite mining has damaged the environment, increasing vulnerability to hurricanes. Panos trained community members to interview residents about their personal experiences and ideas for solutions. Collection and publication of these 48 personal stories renewed the community's interest in its history and cultural heritage, as well as triggering a number of other initiatives for community activities and collective action: plans include use of photography to document the environmental damage, a hurricane vulnerability assessment, and establishment of a community disaster-management committee.

A group of young people is working to produce a bi-monthly community newsletter on environmental issues; a committee has been formed to explore the potential of community tourism. Community members have also been representing Mocho on the national and international scene, including joining an international march against climate change in 2007. Talks are also underway with another vulnerable community on the Jamaican coast to replicate the project and share lessons learnt.

Journalists from the national media have covered some of the project activities, including accompanying community representatives to a meeting with the bauxite mining company to seek action on restoring damage done by mining. The publicity given to this meeting led to the company responding to the people's demands in two days, instead of waiting weeks or months as they have usually done. The community plans to continue documenting their negotiations with the company – a key tool for transparency.[86]

84
These ideas that communication should be conceived as a social process rather than as transactions between individuals are being promoted by the Communication for Social Change Consortium, among others. See www.communicationforsocialchange.org

85
An influential thinker about empowering poor people was Paolo Freire, who saw social change as resulting from changes in individual and community self-awareness, which themselves resulted from community–level discussion. See for example P Freire (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, new edition 1996, trans Myra Bergman Ramos, London: Penguin

86
Local voices, global choices: The Mocho oral testimony project, Jamaica: Panos Caribbean

Community radio

Community radio is a type of communication channel that is gaining support in development thinking and practice. Community radio, according to the strict definition, is radio that is owned and run by a community (a geographic community or a community of interest). However, the term is also sometimes used to cover radio stations that are local but owned by local or national government, private owners or religious institutions.

The defining characteristic of community radio is that it provides information relevant to its audience, local news (though in some countries broadcasting law forbids community stations from broadcasting news, limiting them to 'development' topics such as health and agriculture) and a platform for local voices and debate. Through phone-in programmes, studio discussions and interviews and debates recorded in the field, community radio provides opportunities for people to discuss development, political and social issues of local and current concern, and sometimes to question leaders and public figures. For example, Radio Progress, a member of Ghana's Community Radio Network, aired a programme of testimonies from local people about how they experience poverty. One of the speakers mentioned lack of information about what healthcare was available to poor people. After this broadcast, healthcare officials responded by increasing publicity about the National Health Insurance Scheme.

Such programmes are a valuable space for helping communities identify and understand issues, formulate solutions, and ensure inclusion – all aspects of active community-level engagement in public life and development. Community radio also plays a valuable role in promoting local languages and cultures. Community radio is long established in Latin America and some parts of Africa, and governments in other African countries are starting to grant more licences to community broadcasters.[87] In India, legislation allowing community radio was adopted in 2006. Everywhere, a key problem is financing, as poor communities generally lack resources to maintain a radio station themselves. One solution is subsidy from government or external aid donors, but increasing numbers of community stations in different developing countries are showing that self-reliance is possible through partnership or other well-thought-out sustainability strategies.[88]

Box 8
Community radio and popular protest in Nepal

Community radio is credited with a major role in the transition to democracy in Nepal. In February 2005, in response to worsening conflict between the government and Maoist rebels, the King sacked the government, closed the telephone and Internet systems and banned news reporting. Nepal's network of community radio stations found ingenious ways of defying the ban: for instance, forbidden from broadcasting anything but music they started to sing the news. Then they became more openly defiant, informing people of their rights and the duties of government, hosting talk shows, and encouraging people to compose protest songs. They broadcast regular messages urging peaceful rather than violent protest. This contributed to bringing four million people out onto the streets calling for a resolution of the political crisis.

87
For an overview of the current state of community radio, see Community Radio Social Impact Assessment 2007, AMARC, http://evaluation.amarc.org

88
See S Hughes, S Eashwar, V Jennings (eds) (2004) *How to Get Started and Keep Going: A guide to Community Multimedia Centres*, UNESCO

Society and civil society organisations

Beyond local communities, public opinion, social attitudes and habits and aspirations at national and international level are very important for development. For instance, society's attitudes to women, or the attitudes of the majority in a country to minorities, shape the life opportunities of many people in those societies, especially those who are poor and disempowered. Communication, especially through the media, plays a key role in shaping public attitudes. The media can provide forums for discussing changes facing societies, new ideas, social and political conflicts. Media can also present emerging role models (for example, as characters in soap operas) and can offer platforms for minorities and marginalised groups to speak for themselves.

Both factual and entertainment media are important: development agencies make sophisticated and successful use of 'edutainment', in which information and debate on important and complex social challenges are embedded in appealing music or dramatic story-lines enacted by engaging characters. South Africa's *Soul City* is a well-known example of the latter: a long-running and successful radio and TV drama series covering issues to do with HIV and AIDS, health and interpersonal relationships, that reaches 70 per cent of South Africa's population.[89] Research strongly suggests that it has reduced HIV- and AIDS-related stigma in the country.

This is media with a deliberate development purpose. Of course most media content is not like this. Increasing numbers of the world's people enjoy entertainment, often foreign-produced, as new technologies and liberalised global media markets allow mushrooming numbers of TV and radio channels. It is too early to tell what impact this will have. Social analysts often worry about it; they fear that such imported soap operas and music, that appear to bear no relation to people's real lives, are disempowering people, creating passivity and unrealistic expectations, as well as introducing alien cultural habits. But others believe that entertainment media that introduce new ideas, aspirations and possibilities may also have positive results.

Providing people with information is only part of the communication that is needed to change societal attitudes and individual behaviour. The 20-year struggle to overcome the HIV and AIDS pandemic offers an object lesson in what kind of communication works and what does not. An analysis by Panos London in 2003 concluded that while enormous effort and huge amounts of money had been invested in prevention campaigns using the media, information dissemination and messaging, the most successful communication strategies went beyond what is called 'social marketing' and top-down mass media campaigns, and fostered environments where 'the voice of those most affected by the pandemic can be heard'. It concluded that 'only when people become truly engaged in discussions and talking about HIV, does real individual and social change come about'.[90]

Some analysts looking at societies – developed as well as developing – have identified what they call 'social capital' as an important element of a healthy society. American writer Robert Putnam, who popularised the concept in the English-speaking world in recent years, defined social capital as 'social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them', and highlighted interpersonal associations, shared norms gained through personal interaction, and individuals' engagement in civic life as key elements.[91] Since the 1990s the concept has been part of much development thinking. The World Bank identified social capital as an asset that reduces the vulnerability of poor people.[92] Social capital is also identified as key to people's livelihoods, in the 'livelihoods analysis' approach to development used by DFID and other agencies.

89
www.soulcity.org.za

90
Panos London (2003) *Missing the Message? 20 years of learning from HIV/AIDS*, Panos London, pages 1 and 46, www.panos.org.uk

91
R Putnam (2000) *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community,* New York: Simon and Schuster. The concepts underpinning social capital can be traced back to the 19th century and work by James Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville and others. John Dewey referred to 'social capital' in *School and Society* in 1900, while Pierre Bourdieu distinguished between economic, cultural and social capital. The concept is quite variable, and includes issues of class and power to varying degrees

92
See for instance C Moser (1998) 'The Asset Vulnerability Framework: Reassessing Urban Poverty Reduction Strategies', in *World Development*, Vol 26 No 1, pp 1–19, Elsevier

Communication capacities facilitate these kinds of associations and activities. The study of the impact of telecommunications and livelihoods cited above[93] found that telephones contribute to social capital, and a study of world values, which looked at social capital in 47 nations between 1995 and 1997, found a positive correlation between widespread access to mass media and societies with high social capital.[94] On the other hand, Putnam argues that the rise of entertainment media was a main cause of the perceived decline in social capital in the US – to have a positive effect, communication has to be interpersonal.

Social networks are enabled particularly through the interpersonal communication of telephones and the Internet, and through physical association. For example, in Uganda, discussion and knowledge-sharing in personal communication networks made people feel that HIV and AIDS affected them personally, promoting changes in behaviour.[95] Similarly, the HIV and AIDS social movement in South Africa was enabled through interpersonal communication and driven by a desire to build associations and find information from others sharing the same experiences.[96] The active, empowered and engaged citizens who eventually formed the Treatment Action Campaign exercised considerable influence as they harnessed the communication tools of advocacy, mass movement and political pressure to influence the South African Government's policies on antiretroviral (ARV) drugs.

Civil society organisations

The term 'civil society' is sometimes used to refer to organisations and associations. The number and vibrancy of such associations is taken as an indicator of the quality of a nation's life. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can include organisations for cultural and leisure activities, such as football clubs or the bowling clubs of Putnam's title; professional associations, trade unions and interest groups; activists' groups and self-help or support groups on issues or identity questions (for instance, women's groups); and NGOs that provide services. Sometimes religious institutions are included in the definition, sometimes not.

Clearly such associations can be important in supporting individuals – supporting their identity and providing opportunities, social support, and services. They also play a role in political life and as part of the 'demand side' of accountability and good governance, functioning as a means of bringing together individuals to lobby for rights or to influence policy, aggregating demand, and channelling people's voices.

Communication of many kinds is fundamental to such groups: interpersonal dialogue; networking and organising via phone, Internet, and email; gathering information, managing it and channelling it to members; debate and articulation of issues and demands; outreach to wider publics through publications, performances, Internet or mass media; links with similar groups at global level via email and Internet; and advocacy and direct lobbying of government. For groups that are formed by or that serve poor and marginalised people, strengthening their capacities to communicate can boost the organisations' capacities to serve and empower their membership.

93
See footnote 83

94
P Norris (2002) Editorial Vol 7 (1) *Social Capital and the News Media*, the Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics Online

95
E C Green (2003) *Rethinking AIDS prevention: Learning from success in developing countries*, Westport CT: Greenwood Press

96
Panos London (2006) *Speaking freely, being strong*: *HIV social movements, communication and inclusive social change – a case study in South Africa and Namibia*, Panos London. Available at www.panos.org.uk/speakingfreely

CSOs representing different groups with different interests may compete and conflict with one another as well as with the wider national interest. An open 'public sphere' for debate, in media and other ways, is needed for this competition to work itself out. Media can provide information, challenge and ask questions, and provide a platform for debates. Transparency is also needed about how individual CSOs access resources and influence, especially if they grow strong enough to bypass formal political processes and have informal and non-accountable influence on governments. The membership and leadership of CSOs are generally not elected, making them vulnerable to questions about how inclusive they are and who they represent. And there may be issues of inclusion and exclusion within the CSOs themselves – who has power, who makes decisions? Transparency is as desirable for CSOs as it is for governments.[97]

Global civil society

As digital communication – Internet, email and telephones – makes international communication easier, people's horizons are expanding more and more beyond the borders of the country in which they live. Many issues go beyond the jurisdiction of individual states – environmental issues such as climate change, social issues such as women's equality, political issues such as marginalisation of the poor – and people are using new communication technologies to exchange information, debate and mobilise for action around such issues. The 'network society'[98] or 'global civil society'[99] is starting to change the character of the world community (although at present the 'network' mainly includes wealthier and more urban people).

Global governance expert Mary Kaldor points out that more and more people are participating in public discourse, and political debate can no longer be the province of a small elite. The character of the world community will in future, she believes, be shaped by the way its members confer. 'Across the world, social movements, single issue groups, students', workers', women's and peasants' associations, non-governmental organisations, churches, foundations and Internet-based communities are mobilising in pursuit of objectives that no single state can deliver. Governments, globalised corporations and international institutions are responding to pressure from such quarters on an ever more transnational basis.' Although new communication technologies can also be used effectively by groups committed to violence such as Al Qaeda, most of the 'growing throng of transnational actors… rely on dialogue rather than violence… In future, transnational dialogue could enable negotiation to supersede violence as humanity's default instrument for resolving differences.'[100]

The dangers and limitations of global civil society are the same as those for national civil society. It can be difficult for audiences to judge the credibility and legitimacy of a piece of information or an organisation they have found in the ultra-democratic space of the Internet, and it can be as easy to mobilise people around an extremist agenda as a democratic one. The solutions to these problems must be more transparency, and free debate among an increasingly media-literate and discriminating public and politicians. Mass media which can filter and analyse information, provide objective synthesis and establish themselves as trusted and authoritative 'brand names' will be increasingly important if a vibrant civil society is to be forged.

97
The first steps are being taken towards standards of transparency for international NGOs. The International Non-Governmental Organisations Accountability Charter sets out core values and operating principles that include good governance and management; and multi-stakeholder engagement. It also makes specific reference to respect for universal principles such as human rights, independence, responsible advocacy, effective programmes, non-discrimination, transparency and ethical fundraising. As of 2006 signatories were ActionAid International, Amnesty International, Civicus World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Consumers International, Greenpeace International, Oxfam International, the International Save the Children Alliance, Survival International, International Federation of Terre des Hommes, Transparency International and World YWCA

98
'Network society' is the term coined by Manuel Castells to refer to the changes that the technologies of electronic communication have brought to the fundamentals of society (conceptualised as the economy, the state and its institutions and the ways people create meaning in their lives through collective action). However, Castells recognised that the majority of the world's population, lacking access to means of communication, were not (yet) part of the network society. See M Castells (1998) *The end of the Millennium, the information age: Economy, society and culture*, Vol III, Cambridge MA; Oxford: Blackwell (second edition 2000)

99
'Global civil society' is the term used by Mary Kaldor, director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics

100
M Kaldor (2007) 'The beacons of Babel' in *Global Voice: Britain's future in international broadcasting*, London: Premium publishing

A diverse, engaged and empowered civil society: conclusion

People are the main actors in achieving development, whether as individuals, in social groups or associations, or in wider networks. It is the actions and attitudes of individuals, shaped by the communities in which they live, that create opportunities, protect health, and manage resources. Good governance requires 'competent citizens' and active civil society organisations as partners with effective governments, demanding a fair share of resources and holding government accountable. Communication is the essence of the interactions that shape societies and individual lives: communication in families and communities, in associations and institutions, between governments and people, between providers and users of services, and with society at large through mass media. All people must have access to different communication channels – telephones and Internet, face-to-face discussions, and media – if they are to play an active part in political and development processes.

Economic development

Most people accept that a reduction in absolute poverty is one of the main goals of development, and that economic growth is a necessary condition for it.[101] But there is considerable disagreement over what kind of growth is needed and how best it can work to enable poor people to lift themselves out of poverty.[102] The assumption that the benefits of economic growth 'trickle down' spontaneously and equitably to all sectors of society is no longer widely held, and most economists agree that governments have a responsibility to regulate and intervene in markets to meet poverty goals such as promoting the participation of the poor in economic activity. What is, and will remain, contentious is what should be the 'mix' between freedom and intervention in markets in a country at any given time, and what degree of redistribution is desirable and effective for reducing poverty.

This section of the paper will show that whatever the mix of freedom and control, open and participatory communication and information processes are at the heart of healthy and sustainable economic development. It will show the role communication plays in improved and more effective economic policymaking; and its centrality in establishing and sustaining an enabling environment that encourages healthy and more equitable economic growth. It examines the importance of information and communication to infrastructural investment projects, and their contribution to building sustainable livelihoods for the millions of people who live and work in rural areas. The environmental challenges facing the whole world, such as climate change, and those affecting specific localities, like soil erosion or shortage of fresh water, also require intense and permanent communication processes in which individuals, states and international bodies all have to be engaged – to learn facts, debate responses, agree on actions and monitor performance.

Communication in the functioning of markets

The economic theory of markets has always recognised the importance of communication. Adam Smith's theoretical 'economic man' acted rationally on the basis of perfect market information. The fact that information is nearly always imperfect – highlighted among others by Nobel laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz[103] and his colleagues – only reinforces the obvious point that the more information a producer, trader or consumer has, the better. Where information flows freely, markets and businesses grow and the state can regulate effectively; and this is true for developing as well as developed economies. Information and communication are critical factors in supporting all types of economic activity, from small-scale agriculture to transnational futures trading. Communication is fundamental to creating an enabling environment for investment and enterprise; to the functioning of markets; to the efficiency of production processes and provision of services; and to credit and banking facilities.

From a development perspective, the key point is that poor people and small producers are greatly disadvantaged because they usually suffer from possessing much less information and less ability to communicate than rich people and big producers. Efforts are needed to overcome this information deficit, to improve competition and consumer choice, create more effective markets, and contribute towards more equitable economic growth.

101
For instance, DFID defines its objective as ridding the world of extreme poverty (www.dfid.gov.uk); the World Bank as global poverty reduction and the improvement of living standards (www.worldbank.org); and Oxfam as finding lasting solutions to poverty and suffering. Poverty reduction as a goal of development – though headlined in the MDGs – is disputed by some critics, who feel that it focuses on the symptoms rather than the wider causes of poverty, which they see as imbalances in power and access to wealth globally

102
Some analysts observe that economic growth deriving from participation in the globalised economy widens wealth gaps. They argue that growth in economic activity within countries, and promotion of the needs of small producers, have a more beneficial impact on poverty levels than participation in the global economy. See, for instance, *The Least Developed Countries Report 2004: Linking International Trade with Poverty Reduction,* United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

103
See, for instance, 'The Contributions of the Economics of Information to Twentieth Century Economics' *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 115(4), November 2000, pp 1441-78

> **Box 9**
> **Regulation, information and the market**
>
> In India in the 1970s there was a scarcity of good-quality fresh milk because much of the milk produced was watered down to increase profits. Because there was no way a buyer could find out milk's butterfat content, low-quality (cheaper) milk drove out high-quality milk. To solve the problem the Indian National Dairy Development Board measured butterfat content and created brand names that built buyers' trust in the milk quality. As a result the quality of milk available in India improved.[104]

Making economic policy

As we have already explored in the section on politics and governance, open and participatory communication processes are central to more inclusive, effective and pro-poor development outcomes. This is also true in the vital area of national economic policymaking, where the implications of the choices made have profound consequences on the scale and distribution of wealth and power. The articulation and debate of different economic policies and choices is a central feature of political discourse, involving the government, political parties, trade unions, business groups, academia and other civil society organisations. However, the views and interests of poor people and marginalised groups are often ignored or drowned out.

It was partly to redress this imbalance that the World Bank introduced the Poverty Reduction Strategy process in the late 1990s, which attempted to establish a mechanism for the development of national strategies to reduce poverty, which would be run by national governments with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders and interested groups, including the poor. Many Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), as well as addressing welfare issues, include some economic sectors of particular relevance to the poor; and consultation, participation, monitoring and review are built into the PRSP process. However, the consultation processes so far have often been incomplete, not including adequate participation of poor people who are the targets of the strategies. For example, Uganda's first PRSP highlighted agriculture as one productive sector that needed to grow in order to provide opportunities for many poor people to improve their incomes. But it failed to take into consideration the fact that large parts of the country's production, and a large proportion of its poor people, were pastoralists. The PRSP focused on commercial horticulture for export, and failed to include some simple measures that could have helped pastoralists increase and profit more from the export of meat and livestock. Pastoralists – in most countries among the most marginalised groups – had not been consulted because they were not 'visible' to the city-based policymakers.

Debate has been limited in other respects. Some critics have pointed out that while the overall content of PRSPs may be open to debate within a country, the fundamental economic policy orientation of the PRSP has not been up for discussion. They charge that the liberalisation of trade and markets and other features of the 'Washington Consensus' have been assumed as the macro-economic basis for poverty reduction, and there has been no possibility of analysing and challenging the impact of these in an individual country's unique situation. Nor have the specific measures to implement the strategies often been open for discussion. Debate and policy prescriptions have been channelled and incomplete.[105]

104
R Klitgaard (1991) *Adjusting to Reality*, San Francisco: ICS Press

105
For more information on debates about PRSPs, see *Who's richer, who's poorer? A journalist's guide to the politics of poverty reduction strategies*, Panos media toolkit on PRSPs No 1, London: Panos London (2005)

Communication, information and participation challenges are also at the heart of tackling the inequalities related to international economic policymaking. The openness, transparency and accountability of many international economic bodies and forums – such as the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) – is weak or subject to controversy; and frequently the information available to negotiators from developing countries on many highly complex and technical issues is far from adequate.

This problem is not confined to policymakers and technicians. The lack of sufficiently detailed local media coverage in developing countries of the key external driving forces of change – such as the impact of climate change, and international trade and subsidy regimes – leads to public disengagement from these issues, and the views and perspectives of members of the public are not integrated into national and international fora. As a result, policymaking is poorer and policy is almost certainly more difficult to implement. The public needs to be informed more consistently and to a higher level on these political and economic policy issues. This can only happen if the media itself understands and reports accurately and knowledgeably on what are often highly technical issues. Journalists must be supported to understand these complex issues, while editors and owners must find ways to balance their commercial imperatives with their public interest function to enable informed stakeholder decision-making.[106]

The enabling environment

Rule of law, transparency and reduced corruption

Some aspects of good governance are fundamental for creating an environment in which enterprise on any scale can flourish. Establishing the rule of law, security and stability, transparency of business and economic relationships, and predictability of contracts all create confidence and encourage investment, both international and local. They are essential parts of a culture of openness and transparency, access to information, and effective public scrutiny processes. For example, research has shown that where information about contracts and their enforcement is transparent, private investment is stronger.[107] (There are counter-examples: for example, there was a flourishing and competitive market in mobile phone provision in Somalia during years when there was no government.[108] However, this example shows the effect of freedom from government constraints in Somalia, compared with the dominance of cumbersome state monopoly providers in many other countries at the time.)

Where transparency and the rule of law are absent, in political systems of all kinds, corruption flourishes. Economic and business corruption distorts and reduces growth and investment because it introduces inefficiencies and undermines the known 'rules of the game'. Studies show that an increase of one point (on a scale of 1-10) in the corruption index of a country translates into a 0.9 per cent reduction in growth rate, and reduces the proportion that investment contributes to GDP by 4.7 per cent.[109] Obviously there are winners as well as losers when corruption is the norm – but the winners are those with most money, power and contacts with the elite. Reducing corruption creates a more level playing field for smaller businesses, as well as building trust and a sense of empowerment among ordinary citizens.

106
To begin to address the 'information gap' within the media and in the public sphere, in December 2005 Panos brought a team of journalists from African and Asian countries to the World Trade Organization's sixth ministerial summit in Hong Kong. The aim was to strengthen the journalists' knowledge of the issues so that they could report more effectively in the media at home. For some of the features they produced, see www.panos.org.uk

107
Z Drabek and W Payne (2002) 'The Impact of Transparency on Foreign Direct Investment', *Journal of Economic Integration*, Vol 17 No 4

108
H Hassan, 'The phones keep ringing in world's poorest country', Panos Feature, 22 July 2003, www.panos.org.uk

109
S-J Wei (1997) 'How Taxing is Corruption on International Investors', National Bureau of Economic Research (US) Working Paper Series, Working Paper 6030

Box 10
The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 to increase levels of transparency about payments by mining companies to governments, and about the sharing of revenues. It relies on governments of countries rich in natural resources to take the lead – so it will not work if the political will is lacking. By September 2006 around 20 countries were implementing it, and three countries had produced reports (Nigeria, Guinea and Azerbaijan). A consortium of international NGOs is monitoring the implementation, and they comment that so far there is no mechanism for encouraging companies to be as transparent about their operations in countries that are not part of the initiative as in those that are. The initiative would be strengthened, in the view of these NGOs, if there was pressure from the companies' home countries for the same standards of transparency across all their operations.[110]

Simpler and more transparent bureaucratic procedures

Governments can facilitate economic activity by making bureaucratic and regulatory procedures such as business registration, licensing processes, and import/export procedures simpler, faster, cheaper and more transparent. ICTs, mass media, systems reform, knowledge and information management can all be brought into play to achieve this. Reducing time and costs and increasing transparency and predictability are beneficial for large enterprises but even more so for small ones, for whom the costs of complying with bureaucracy are higher in relation to their size. In countries with low levels of transparency, registering a new business costs more than four times what it costs where the level of transparency is high.[111] In Mozambique, to take just one example, to register a business officially requires 13 procedures. The whole process takes an average of 113 days and costs 85.7 per cent of average per capita annual gross national income (GNI). In Sweden, by contrast, three procedures are required, taking an average of 16 days and costing only 0.7 per cent of per capita GNI.[112]

Access to capital

Access to capital is often a major problem for small businesses and thus a significant constraint on increasing economic activity. Poor people lack assets which can be accepted as security for loans. This is not necessarily because they do not have assets, rather that they cannot release the capital within them. Economist Hernando de Soto pointed out that millions of poor people possess land and houses which are not formally registered. Systems to 'obtain and organise knowledge about recorded assets in forms we can control' could enable many poor people to become 'bankable'.[113] This is a massive potential economic benefit of more organised, transparent and accessible information systems. The experience of land registration in Karnataka (see Box 5 on page 20) demonstrates how ICTs can make land registration information more accessible to release capital and support growth.

ICT infrastructure and services

In the past couple of decades, the explosion of global trade and wealth has matched the revolutionary growth in information and communication technologies. For example, between 2003 and 2004 Asia saw average Internet traffic grow by 434 per cent,[114] while intra-regional trade in East Asia rose to 55 per cent of total world trade by the end of 2005, up from 43 per cent of total trade in the early 1990s.[115] Although the precise relationship of cause and effect has not been definitively proven, it is true that to attract international business and capital today a country needs to provide international-standard ICT facilities.

110
The NGO consortium includes Save the Children, Open Society Institute, CAFOD, Care (UK), World Vision, Secours Catholique, and Global Witness

111
D Kaufmann and A Bellver (2005) 'Transparenting Transparency' in *Initial Empirics and Policy Applications*, Preliminary draft, September, World Bank

112
www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/ StartingBusiness/

113
H de Soto (2000) *The Mystery of Capital*, London: Black Swan, p232

114
Global Internet Geography – TeleGeography 2004, PriMetrica Inc. See www.telegeography.com

115
'Trade Policy Trends: Serving the Business Interests', Speech by Haruhiko Kuroda, President, Asian Development Bank, at the Asia-Europe Business Forum, Helsinki, Finland 10 September 2006

Reliable and affordable telephones and digital connectivity are also important for small businesses. Investment in ICTs can lead to efficiency gains, increased productivity and growth for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as for major enterprises.[116] One study found that in developing countries, sales grew by 3.8 per cent and employment by 5.6 per cent for enterprises which utilised ICTs, compared to 0.4 per cent and 4.5 per cent for those that did not.[117] Until a few years ago, telecoms companies tended not to invest in providing infrastructure and services where the users would mostly be poor people, as they thought the returns on their investment would be small. Recently they have begun to recognise that the potential demand among SMEs (and among poor people in general – see previous chapter) for telecoms services does in fact offer profitable investment opportunities.

Mobile phone subscriptions have grown fivefold to 1.4 billion in developing countries since 2000.[118] Before 2006 only 10 per cent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa had network coverage, but today more than 60 per cent do and this is expected to reach 85 per cent by 2010.[119] One of the ways ICTs are starting to help small producers in many countries is by enabling them to find out the prices their products are fetching in local and national markets – using telephones, text messaging, or the Internet. Access to this information puts them in a stronger position for negotiating prices with middle-men; or enables them to cut out the middle-men altogether and increase their own income.

Box 11
ICTs empowering producers

The Indian Tobacco Corporation (ITC), a major agricultural conglomerate, created a network of 'e-Choupals' (Internet-connected computers) in rural communities. The original purpose was to improve the supply chain for produce being sold directly to ITC – providing farmers with lower-cost inputs, information and transparent guaranteed prices. Since June 2000, over 5,200 e-Choupal Internet kiosks have been established to serve 3.5 million farmers in 31,000 villages. In time ITC responded to demand and allowed farmers to use the kiosks to find information, including market price information, about other products. Farmers can access daily closing prices on local markets, which allows them to take their produce to the best paying market. Using the system, farmers' earnings increase by up to 20 per cent, while the company benefits from a reliable supply chain and distribution mechanism.[120]

In 2003 Manobi, a private telecommunications company in Senegal, formed a partnership with three local fishing unions, two telecommunications companies (Alcatel and Sonatel) and the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Fishermen and farmers can check the market prices for their produce twice a week using their cell phones. One farmer, Mr Cheikh Ba, said he uses the knowledge gained of world market prices to more than double the price he receives from intermediaries for his grapefruit. 'If I did not have the Manobi system,' he said, 'I would certainly have accepted a bargain price in fear that the buyer would leave and leave me stuck with my produce.'

Research shows that food producers using this service have seen their incomes increase by an average of 15 per cent.[121] By 2006 there were over 3,500 Senegalese producers consulting the Manobi agricultural market prices by short message service (SMS).[122] In 2006, Manobi and the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) entered into a partnership to develop similar initiatives in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Uganda and Zambia.

Of course, the information could also be provided free on local radio stations or in newspapers!

116
Global Trends and Policies – Information and Communications for Development, 2006, World Bank

117
S Dutta (Insead), A Lopez-Claros and I Mia (World Economic Forum), *Global Information Technology Report 2005–2006*

118
M Foster, 'Cell Phones Vital in Developing World', Washington Post, 27 January 2007

119
'Buy, cell, hold: The spread of mobile phones in Africa', The Economist 25 January 2007

120
D Upton and V Fuller, *The ITC eChoupal Initiative*, 28 October 2003. Revision date: 15 January 2004

121
An overview of ICTs at IDRC, www.idrc.ca/en/ev-48418-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

122
www.manobi.net

Many other examples exist of how the spread of ICTs is throwing up new and inventive solutions to the problems of credit, money transfers and banking for the poor. For instance, palmtop computers linked by wireless to their bank's main computer system can be used by loan officers visiting clients in rural areas to input data directly and speed up transactions. Similarly, low-cost computer connectivity allows banks to franchise credit services to operators in rural areas[123] – for instance, village shop-keepers – or to operate credit and banking facilities through credit cards and ATMs in rural areas. The need for such services is enormous: for instance, in 2005, according to the United Nations, global migrants remitted US$232 billion, of which up to 20 per cent was lost on the way, mostly in bank charges or fraud.

Box 12
Mobile banking

South Africans send about 12 billion rand (US$1.5 billion) each year to their relatives in other parts of the country – money that is usually sent informally and often by or to some of the 16 million people without a bank account. But what they do have – at least 30 per cent of this group – are mobile phones. These people are now being targeted by mobile phone companies such as Wizzit offering banking services via text message that promise a secure way of moving money without the costs of informal transfer or the travel required to access money. In 2006 Wizzit had half a million customers – eight out of ten of whom had no bank account and had never used an ATM.[124]

Intellectual property and the cost of knowledge

In today's world, the creation and exchange of knowledge is a major economic activity – whether it is through patents on technology and discoveries, for instance in the fields of medicine, information technology (IT) or agriculture; brands; or copyrights on artistic products or scientific articles. In recent years the intellectual property (IP) system has extended into new areas (to cover, for instance, micro-organisms and discoveries connected with agriculture) and around the world (because national intellectual property protection is a requirement for countries joining the WTO).

The argument for it is that the discovery, creation and sharing of knowledge must be profitable, in order to stimulate the continued flow of innovation, creativity and exchange that is an essential element of modern society and modern economies. With a strong IP system, knowledge is indeed profitable for its creators, owners and distributors. However, the downside of a strong IP system is that acquiring and using knowledge can be expensive. In general, developing countries are at a disadvantage and benefit less from intellectual property than rich ones, because historically they have produced less patented knowledge, and fewer valuable brands and saleable research findings – partly because most have only recently introduced intellectual property legislation.

123
S Mathison (2005) 'Building Microfinance through ICT innovation', in *Information and Communication Technologies and large-scale poverty reduction: Lessons from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean*, Panos and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

124
'Phoney finance: Mobile telephony and banking', The Economist, 26 October 2006

The spread of IP protection throws up challenges for developing countries and poor people and institutions, for which solutions are only starting to be found. Some critics have argued that developing countries should be allowed to utilise new technologies, patents and intellectual property for free – as many now developed countries did when they were at an equivalent stage of development.[125] One challenge is that traditional communities are vulnerable to having their traditional knowledge and resources 'pirated' by rich companies (which are generally from developed countries). In order to turn such knowledge to their own profit, developing countries must introduce IP rules of their own – but designing systems for protecting collectively-owned and traditional knowledge resources is difficult, since the purpose of patent and copyright was specifically to reward new creation by individuals.

A second challenge for developing countries is that scientific knowledge is often subject to copyright, and acquiring it has become very costly. (This was one of the subjects of an African Union meeting on science and technology in February 2007.) The price of scientific journals can be prohibitive. For example, an annual subscription to Elsevier Brain Science costs over US$15,000, and the International Journal of Social Economics costs over US$9,000. Research from Cornell University on the cost of 312 core agricultural and biological journals found that in the period 1988 to 1994, the price per page increased by 64.7 per cent for all titles.[126] The prices of agricultural journals from commercial publishers increased as much as 77.8 per cent. The cost of such journals puts essential knowledge well beyond the reach of many institutions and organisations, despite the fact that the research is often publicly funded.

Communication and participation in major infrastructure projects

The history of large-scale public and private sector infrastructure investments in the developing world is littered with failures. Why? There are many reasons, but often projects are planned without sufficient consultation and involvement of potential users and beneficiaries – in short, there is too little communication. Large-scale infrastructure, extractive and commercial projects have a massive impact on people in the vicinity; and governments need to analyse the gains and losses in consultation with those affected, and negotiate profit-sharing, compensation measures and mitigation steps with the investor before granting the licences to begin the work. Government concern to attract inward investments in an increasingly competitive international environment, or its unwillingness to have local people involved or share fully in the benefits of projects, means that the consultation and response process is frequently nominal or highly constrained. Even where legitimate national economic or political objectives clash with local interests or views, including people affected at the beginning of project planning gives the best chance that compromise can be reached, costs and benefits shared more equitably and a greater level of 'ownership' and acceptance created.

125
See H Chang, 'Protecting the global poor', *Prospect* magazine, July 2007

126
W Olsen (1998) 'Price Study of Core Agricultural and Biological Journals', report from the Faculty Taskforce, Division of Biological Sciences, Albert R Mann Library, Cornell University

This is even more the case for private sector investments, because local or international companies do not have the same legitimacy as national governments in dealing with the affected population. Real dialogue and participation and effective communication with local people can make an enormous difference in helping companies obtain a 'social licence' to operate. This 'social licence' comes from people feeling confident that they know what will happen and what costs and benefits will accrue to them and their communities from the investment. Investments in high-impact developments such as mining, or sensitive public–private partnerships for delivery of public services such as water, can be undermined by public opposition if communication is neglected – despite the companies concerned having legal authority to do business.[127] Where the public and private sector engage in dialogue, the sense of ownership increases, reducing inefficiency and waste.[128] Sometimes, it is not the objectives of development projects that people object to, but the fact that they have not been included in either the planning or the benefits. People want a say in their future. Where communication processes are used properly, investments are more efficient.

All aspects of good governance apply to major investment projects for both public and private stakeholders: government and private companies must have the capacity to deliver the project efficiently and effectively; be *responsive* to the concerns and interests of local people; and *accountable* to them – the government for negotiating and sticking to a favourable deal and distributing benefits widely, and the company for fulfilling its obligations. Communication and participatory processes of all kinds will help companies to fulfil these criteria (for instance, community consultations and scrutiny processes, information-sharing and debate through appropriate media to ensure people affected understand the impacts, and involvement of local people in policy decision-making). The reality is that there may be a blurry line between sophisticated communication which seeks to 'manufacture consent', and genuine consultation with a willingness to engage with people and possibly change plans. But increased and open information and communication processes are by their nature more likely to expose where consultations and dialogue are specious or ineffectual.

Building sustainable livelihoods

Access to and management of natural resources – forestry, agriculture and fisheries – is the basis of livelihoods for millions of rural people around the world. Natural resources are a major element in many national economies, and how they are exploited is crucial to the long-term food security and sustainability, or not, of humanity's development.

The challenges of poverty, natural resource degradation and food insecurity are all closely linked. In countries where more than one third of the population are undernourished, 70 per cent of people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. In the world's least developed countries, 82 per cent of rural households are poor.[129] Producers, and their communities, suffer the most and have the most to gain from managing their resources to increase productivity. They must deal with the sharp end of resource degradation. The management of natural resources is therefore a key challenge in development and poverty reduction.

The history of environment and natural resource management has been driven by the provision of technical packages. Communication to promote these has tended to be mainly the top-down giving of information – for instance, information about different agricultural techniques or instructions not to cut down trees. However, these approaches have produced very little progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of reducing the number of undernourished people by half from 1990 to 2015.[130] The number of hungry people grew from 791 million in 1997 to 852 million in 2002.[131] Technical inputs and top-down one-way communication are not enough.

127
For instance, a report commissioned by Shell concluded that the companies' 'social licence' (public support for the company to operate) to operate in Nigeria was 'fast eroding'. Unless the company changed its communication and engagement strategy, it would be unable to operate in Nigeria beyond 2008. WAC Global Services (December 2003) 'Peace and Security in the Niger Delta: Conflict Expert Group Baseline Report, Working Paper for SPDC', Lagos

128
B Herzberg and A Wright, 'Competitiveness partnerships – Building and maintaining public-private dialogue to improve the investment climate: A resource drawn from the review of 40 countries' experiences' www.publicprivatedialogue.org

129
'The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2004', Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

130
'The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006', Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

131
World Food Programme, 2007

Recently, for natural resources as for other aspects of development, there has been a shift towards recognising that 'people are at the heart of the ecosystem'.[132] To address poverty and enhance productivity, producers must be empowered to participate in the means and processes of production. Over the last 30 years, communication for development projects all over the world in this sector have shown how farmers must be involved in the development and adoption of new crops and technologies, and the management of credit facilities, market information and access strategies in order to ensure that they are appropriate, effective and efficient.

Communication strategies which are inclusive and participatory are key to this, for when efforts to support the management of natural resources do not include sufficient communication components, they often fail. For example, an evaluation of an unsuccessful programme to support better water and sanitation management in Ghana found that the 'absence of a media and communications strategy meant that issues like traditional use, family and household dynamics appear to have been just plain ignored'.[133] When participatory forms of communication are used which are genuinely receptive to what local people have to say, resource-management efforts have a greater chance of being sustainable.[134]

Box 13

Communication for natural resource management

In Tanzania, drought and flood are major problems – particularly as rainwater run-off causes further flooding and erosion. Initial government efforts encouraged farmers to use drought-resistant crops and divert run-off water away from crops, but with little success. Through participatory approaches, the Soil-Water Management Research Group at Sokoine University helped farmers share local knowledge with other stakeholders so that together, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), they could develop run-off water management techniques that were shared through media, workshops and training courses.

As a result, farmers demand rainwater harvesting technology and government policy recognises rainwater harvesting as a solution rather than a problem. When the President of Tanzania announced a new Water Management Strategy, rainwater harvesting was the top priority.[135]

The importance of communication is becoming even more apparent given the growing impact of the major environmental challenges that threaten the long-term development of all the world's population. Some of these challenges are global, where the threat to the 'commons' affects everyone – such as climate change, over-fishing and loss of biodiversity – and an effective response must be shared by all countries. Others are more local in their incidence and impact, such as loss of soil fertility, shortage of fresh water, pollution and waste disposal. Dealing with all of these issues presents some of the most urgent communication challenges facing the world today. They require the sharing of factual and scientific information; debate on impacts and policy responses; negotiating action between governments and civil society nationally, and governments among themselves globally; discussing and agreeing trade-offs, compensations, mechanisms and measures – all of which depend on transparent monitoring processes and accountability mechanisms.

132
Quarry and Ramírez (2004), see note 19

133
S Kendie (1999) 'Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene: Analysis of Connecting Factors in Northern Ghana', University of Bradford Development and Project Planning Centre Discussion Paper Series 2 No 20; see Summary and Links at www.comminit.com/evaluations/idkdv2002/sld-2388.html

134
Rural extension is the sharp end of communication learning efforts to bring agriculture, health and business practices to rural people. Extension workers are a vital link between communities and rural development institutions and enable the communication of information between both. Studies in Kenya suggest that on average a 100 per cent increase in extension workers per farm translates to a 13 per cent increase in yield: see E Evenson (1998) 'The Effects of Agricultural Extension on Farm Yields in Kenya', Discussion Paper no. 798, Economic Growth Center, Yale University

135
Quarry and Ramirez (2004), see note 19

Economic development: conclusion

In this section we have argued that open and participatory information and communication processes are central to realising the potential of all forms of economic development. There are strong correlations between the growth of ICTs and the explosion of global trade and wealth, but communication also supports the economic activities of small producers and the poor. An enabling environment of transparency and simple bureaucracy encourages enterprise and investment; low-cost and reliable ICTs support production, marketing and access to capital. An open political environment in which the poor are able to participate in economic policymaking supports the development of pro-poor policy. Information, participatory discussions and negotiations are also essential for the success of major projects such as large infrastructure projects, and for sustainable management of the natural resources that are essential to livelihoods of many small farmers, to national economies, and to the future of the world.

Why communication needs support

In this paper we have shown that communication – the exchange of information, and dialogue – is an essential part of all the fundamental processes of development. It is part of good governance, of the life of an empowered and dynamic society, and of economic development and poverty reduction. None of these processes can take place without communication between and among all sectors of societies, within and among nations.

We argue that support for communication should be a key element in any development support and planning. The role of communication should be more clearly identified in development analysis and planning by governments and development agencies, from high-level international agreements down to local-level resource management projects. At present communication is often taken for granted or neglected, with the result that too few resources and too little expertise are devoted to it. But if more attention was paid to communication, development outcomes would be better – specific sectoral initiatives would be more effective, and the capacities of societies and governments to respond to development challenges would be increased.

Why are we saying that more support needs to be given to communication? With the spread of political freedom and of new communication technologies in the past two decades, the quantity, speed and accessibility of communication are advancing rapidly all over the world: new media houses have blossomed, the development of the Internet has introduced a quantum leap in the amount of information and communication possible, and the demand for mobile phones has far exceeded expectations, including among relatively poor people in developing countries. This all suggests that communication is doing well and does not need more development support. But it does, as the following section will show.

Communication as a public good

Market mechanisms are not always the most effective in meeting the needs of poor and marginalised people – and it is their needs that should be at the heart of development strategies. Poor people are often unable to access communication channels to receive information and make their views known outside their immediate social environment. There is no newspaper distribution, telephone landlines or satellite footprint in many rural areas; there is little broadcasting and less Internet content in minority languages; politicians do not visit constituents who have no economic power. In addition, many people – women, young and old people, the very poor, and other marginalised groups – are further constrained in their capacity to communicate by local cultures and power structures. If there is one radio in a household, the man listens to it; if an Internet kiosk is a journey away, a woman may not be allowed to go there.

Nor are market mechanisms generally good at providing public goods. 'Public goods' is an economic term referring to goods which, once produced (or existing), benefit all – for instance, education, or judicial systems. A characteristic of public goods is that the more people use them, the greater the common benefit. Panos believes that communication should be regarded as a public good because it contributes to development, good governance, peace and prosperity. Like other public goods, communication processes cost money to produce but the producer cannot always profit from them. There are many examples. For instance, in rural areas where incomes are low, the provision of ICT services may not be profitable even though it enables many development processes to take place. Good quality journalism is expensive and essential to good governance, but may not sell enough newspapers or attract enough advertising to the newspaper or radio station to be profitable. Many kinds of knowledge and information are public goods – they become more valuable the more they are used; and so do networking systems linking different sources of information.

We argue, therefore, that development planning should regard information and communication as public goods, and should seek to support them. 'Support' does not necessarily mean financial support. It may also mean governments making policy changes, and opening up or intervening in markets for communication services; or international organisations leading by example in opening their operations to public scrutiny; or CSOs giving more status and power to their communication officers. Support should generally seek to fill gaps and redress market failures (for instance, failure to provide ICT services in rural areas) rather than to over-ride the market – because the market is better than monopoly or government-managed services at ensuring the innovation, competition and efficiency that are necessary if communication is to make its full contribution to development.

Treating communication as a public good does not mean that governments should control it. Freedom of expression, and freedom to establish and use different channels of expression, is a *sine qua non* of a vibrant communication environment supportive of development.

The public service role of media

In developing countries, patterns of media reach vary enormously, with newspaper readership stronger in urban areas, radio the single most important medium in Africa, and television becoming increasingly pervasive in Asia and South America. For people everywhere, rich and poor alike, the media are the primary providers of news and information from outside the community, and media coverage reflects and affects every aspect of cultural, social, political and economic life. The media (referring here mostly to traditional mass media – print and broadcasting) play a fundamental role in information and communication processes. Media support and enable all aspects of good governance: political processes and the negotiation of power; relationships between people and government; and government responsiveness. Media are a forum for debating policy options and strategies and for government to gain people's consent and trust. Media play a defining role in accountability, transparency, monitoring, and reducing corruption. Community media are just as important as national media. For example, 'in Northern Mali local radio stations broadcast the annual Evaluation of Commune performance and its consequences for capital budget support. Following these broadcasts the mayors of poorly performing areas whose grants have been reduced are often said to hide from their constituents to avoid recrimination.'[136]

136
K Y Amoako, Executive Secretary of UNECA, writing in New Economy, September 2004, cited in Mary Myers et al (2004) *The Impact of ICD in Africa: A paper for the Commission for Africa* www.commissionforafrica.org/english/report/background/mary_myers_et_al_background.pdf

Media are also part of civil society. In Mozambique, the community media movement has been described as 'the most powerful people's movement in Mozambique at the moment'.[137] Media can reflect the different voices that make up society, the different issues that concern it and the clash of opinions within it. Media help articulate needs and demands, shape opinion and attitudes, form coalitions and movements. Media are a platform for political and cultural expression and self-realisation of individuals and groups, and can play a role in social cohesion. They enable debate on social and cultural issues as societies deal with change (for instance, in gender relations). Media can enable reflection and engagement in global as well as local and national issues.

All these functions require media that are able and willing to perform a public service role.[138] A public service role is not limited to publicly-owned, state-owned or community media. Commercial and religious media can also fulfil it, combined in various degrees with their other functions of entertainment, profit or evangelism. UK journalist and writer John Lloyd has noted that for the media to fulfil this public service role in empowering citizens they must tell truths in three ways: through the 'clash of opinion' that characterises the political process, through investigation that fuels the engine of accountability, and the 'truth of citizenship' – the explanation of context and events, the narrative of which opinion and revelation are part.[139] The essentials of public service media are accessibility, including for poor and marginalised people, and quality content: content that is true, informative, and reflects different voices and perspectives. In other words, content that is based on good journalism.

But the existence of media able to fulfil the public service role cannot be taken for granted. Apart from government interference, there are many other challenges to good quality media serving the public interest. Indeed some analysts question whether media can be expected to fulfil this function at all. In a free society, it is argued, media are commercial ventures and must operate as such, providing whatever type of content is profitable. The very concept of public service media is also sometimes challenged. It implies an ideal of media as tellers of objective truth – an ideal that some analysts feel is a Western concept, not universally desired or expected by media professionals or audiences in all developing countries. Development support seeking to strengthen the public service role of media needs to tread a delicate path among the different realities of free market-driven media in a free society.

Much development discussion of and support for media focuses on media's freedom from government control and interference. It highlights this as the critical factor in enabling media to play their 'watchdog' role in political accountability processes. Freedom from government control or interference is of course an essential condition for this, but it is not a sufficient condition for the kind of public service media which we argue are so important. Media may have formal independence from government, but be controlled by people close to political parties, special interest groups or ruling elites. The concentration of media ownership by elites is a major issue in many parts of the developed as well as the developing world.

137
B Jallov, 'Women and Community Radio in Mozambique', to be published in *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol 7.3, September 2007

138
The term 'public service' media is used here to refer to media content that addresses issues of public concern, for the public good – as distinct from media that is purely for entertainment or commercial purposes, and from media that promotes conflict and division. It does not imply ownership of media by the state or the public

139
Lloyd (2004), see note 63

Economic considerations also limit the real freedom of many media. Privately-owned media, and some government- and publicly-owned media, have to make a profit, by appealing to an audience and advertisers. Competing for an audience, media are under pressure to provide entertainment and to soothe their readers or listeners with what they want to hear rather than challenging them. The need to attract advertisers also creates pressure – to appeal to richer sections of the population rather than the poor who do not constitute a profitable market for advertisers. The experience of many countries when they liberalised their media in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the democratisation process was that they gained enormously in numbers of media outlets, but the new outlets were concentrated in cities, and the quality of what was published or broadcast did not improve. The kind of journalism that fulfils the public service role – journalism that involves seeking and checking information, questioning and analysing it, and gathering different perspectives on issues – is expensive to carry out, and may not be profitable.

It is the *quality of content* that makes media, whether publicly or privately owned, meaningful actors in development. That is what needs to be supported – because it may not thrive without support. High-quality media content that promotes the voices and interests of the poor requires many conditions, in the creation of which governments, aid donors, the media themselves, and civil society all have a role to play.

Supporting the public service role of media

One desirable condition is financial security. Some analysts see financial security as the most important factor in building strong public service media. If media are sufficiently well resourced, they argue, professionalism and the quality of content will improve and the needs of audiences will be met.

Community radios often need financial support, since the resources of the poor communities they serve are not sufficient to support them. Community media help to empower poor people and are a vital element in promoting their participation in political life. Commercial and public media can also benefit from financial support, to enable them to send journalists around the country and give them the time needed to investigate issues and analyse information.

For development agencies whose support mainly goes to governments, it may not be easy to find ways of simultaneously supporting media which the government may see as hostile. On the other hand, in some countries governments themselves see that good quality media are a public good even when they voice opposition, and support them in various ways – through reduced taxes, subsidised inputs, or direct financial support.

Adequate basic infrastructure and services are also important. It is difficult to run a media house if the electricity supply is erratic, while Internet connectivity and telephones facilitate good and timely journalism.

Plural ownership of media is essential. Regulation is needed to limit concentration of ownership, promote competition and perhaps facilitate the entry of small actors such as community radio stations into the market. Legislation and licensing conditions should not imply control by government: they should be independent and controlled by civil society or the media itself, and be implemented transparently. In many countries at present licences for community media in particular are banned or heavily regulated, limiting the range of perspectives and breadth of discussion in the public sphere. Like freedom, plural ownership is not a sufficient condition for a vibrant public media sphere: ownership by an opposition political party, for instance, is no more likely to provide balanced and high-quality reporting than ownership by the party in power.

Good media need skilled and professional journalists. In many countries training has not been able to keep up with the number of journalists required by liberalised media, and the training on offer does not meet today's needs. Support for journalism training (and media management) is needed, but the professionalism, standards and strength of the media professions can also be helped by supporting stronger media institutions such as editors' associations and journalist unions. Financial viability is also relevant: when media struggle financially, journalists' salaries are not high enough to attract and retain skilled people, so experience and learning are lost.

Journalists cannot practise unless they can get information, including information from government and state institutions. Access to information legislation and effective implementation of it are essential if media are to hold government and other public actors accountable.

There are very different views, in all countries, about the degree to which media content should be controlled. Should the public be protected from 'hate media' and from socially unacceptable content such as pornography? Is regulation the best way to ensure that the interests of minorities and marginalised groups are represented, and that the media provides 'public service' content and observes professional standards? This is a contentious area in every country in the world. What degree of oversight, regulation and obligation is compatible with freedom and a functioning market? And by whom? Panos London believes that oversight by the media itself, and by civil society, rather than by government, is most likely to be compatible with good governance. Radio Mille Collines, which helped to incite the genocidal violence in Rwanda in 1994, is sometimes presented as an example of the dangers of free, unfettered media. While this is an extreme example, media manipulation of public opinion is unfortunately not uncommon. The best antidote to such manipulation, however, is a diversity of media, not restriction. Pluralistic independent media that are inclusive and responsive to diversity have historically played a vital role in preventing, mocking or challenging voices that breed extremism. As a recent publication looking at the effect of media on development points out: 'Healthy public spheres can host a wide range of views which can dilute intolerance. Policymakers should increase support for media assistance programmes to widen access for moderate voices and balanced discourse.'[140] In short, liberalisation, pluralisation and regulation are required for balanced media environments and content provision.

Civil society organisations and government can contribute to improving the quality of debate in the media, if they see media as a partner, value its contribution as an independent social actor and actively seek to engage with it.

Last but not least of the conditions in which public service media can thrive, is critical and demanding audiences. Media will be able to supply good-quality public interest content if audiences demand it, but are unlikely to do so otherwise. Audiences should be able to distinguish good-quality media from bad, objectivity from partisanship, opinion from analysis, and investigative reporting from slander.

The importance of media for development has been recognised in several recent initiatives by government and multilateral development agencies, and by media organisations themselves. There has also been much discussion among media support organisations, in consultation with developing country media, on how media can most effectively be supported. The overarching challenge is to strengthen the perception – among governments and mainstream media – that active and plural media are a public good.

140
Global Forum for Media Development,
Media Matters, London, 2007, p6

Media as a public sphere

An assumption implied in much discourse about media, including in the preceding analysis, is that there is a 'public sphere' for which mass media are a principal forum.[141] Debate of public issues, building consensus on policy, shaping opinion, building cohesion and inclusion – all these require that the public in any country should have to some degree a common experience of media. This might be through a small number of agenda-setting newspapers or broadcast programmes, for example, and a limited number of news bulletins regarded as authoritative. This situation has existed in the past and still does today. Most countries have had a limited number of mainstream national newspapers, and in many countries the government or a public broadcaster has had a monopoly of the airwaves. The content of this limited media world was subject to known, if not always applied, professional norms and standards.

But this shared 'public sphere' is starting to fragment, in developed and also in developing countries. With media liberalisation and cheaper technology, audiences have many more formal media outlets to choose from, while the Internet is enormously expanding the possibilities of informal media. Any individual or group can produce its own media output: websites, blogs, citizen journalism. The increase in freedom and 'voice' is certainly democratic in some respects, but what does it mean for audiences? They have to choose between an enormous range of options. The content of the 'informal' media has generally not been filtered by professional journalistic standards and often makes no claims to being objective or authoritative – the opposite is often true. Both the volume of media content available, and new delivery mechanisms – for instance, selected TV streamed straight to a mobile phone – make it possible for every individual to select his or her own media content, avoiding the mainstream and public discourse altogether if she or he wishes. This represents an increase in individual freedom and self-expression, but potentially a loss for public engagement.

We cannot yet know what will be the long-term consequences of these changes in the media scene. It will almost certainly be impossible and undesirable to restrict the production of informal media content on the Internet. Traditional mass media are struggling to adapt to the competition from new media, but the high costs of providing professional public service journalism will be increasingly hard to meet. From the point of view of supporting the media's role in development, a few things are clear:

- Media themselves need support to reflect on and adapt to the changing scene

- The public need to become more educated and discriminating in their consumption of media – so that they can make meaningful choices from the wealth of media available to them

- Governments need to learn how to engage with the new possibilities. (As always, the line between engagement in debate and attempting to control and influence debate is a fine one.)

- Public, government and media must debate the changing scene and agree on rules, expectations and limitations and how to realise these.

141
The concept of the public sphere was developed by Jurgen Habermas. See for instance J Habermas (1962) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans T Burger, 1991, MIT Press, Cambridge MA; J Habermas (1985) *The Theory of communicative action: Reasons and the rationalisations of society (Vol 1) and Lifeword and system: A critique of functionalist reason* (Vol 2), Trans T McCarthy, Boston MA: Beacon Press

Box 14
Media for peace and democracy, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

'Citizen's journal' (Journal du Citoyen) is a weekly insert in Kinshasa's main daily papers, aimed at strengthening citizens' understanding of democracy and DRC's peace process. Established in September 2005, ahead of the 2006 elections, *Journal du Citoyen* is a joint project of Panos Paris and Belgian NGO Apefe, under the auspices of the DRC's High Media Authority.

In the tense and volatile atmosphere of DRC's transition from civil war to peace, high quality information and editorial neutrality are essential. *Journal du Citoyen* offers a combination of news reports, practical advice, graphics, and profiles of candidates – the quality of which has been universally praised. It is produced by an editor and a team of freelance journalists.

Through 2006 the *Journal du Citoyen* grew rapidly to achieve the largest print-run of any Congolese newspaper. In Kinshasa, 8,500 copies are printed and a further 11,000 are produced by photocopying or emailed and printed in the provinces. It is also disseminated electronically and has a website.

In December 2006, as part of the UN/African Union-supported peace process in the Great Lakes region, the heads or representatives of 11 states in the region signed a pact for security, stability and development at the end of a summit held at the UN in Nairobi. The editor of *Journal du Citoyen* and 17 journalists from DRC, Rwanda and Burundi were there to cover the summit – almost the only independent African journalists present. Some of their reports were gathered into a special Great Lakes edition of the *Journal du Citoyen*, which marked the end of its successful first year.

Getting media support right

In developing countries the resources or political will are sometimes lacking to support independent media. How can donors and other stakeholders support media and communication for development? This is particularly challenging when an increasing majority of aid is being channelled through direct 'budget support' to governments in the developing world, making it more politically difficult for donors to support non-government media or pressure governments to liberalise media and access to information. What can they do? Possibilities include:

■ pressing developing country governments to recognise the long-term value of media and information and pass freedom of information and access to information legislation

■ supporting the legislative development of open media regulatory environments by governments; and ensuring that they are maintained by independent, well-financed regulators

■ supporting the professionalism of media through capacity building, including support for collegial self-regulatory and capacity-building processes among media themselves

■ supporting development of infrastructure

■ strengthening civil society's capacities to produce, consume and engage with media and communication.

ICT Issues

Like the traditional mass media, ICTs are spreading rapidly, including in poor countries, and so at first glance they may not seem to be candidates for development support. Indeed, the mobile phone sector is sometimes taken as an example of how well the market provides without intervention from government or development agencies – a technology will spread if the demand exists.[142] The simple view of a digital divide between rich countries that have plentiful access to ICTs and poor countries that do not, common 10 years ago, is not often heard today, but as with mass media, there are many areas in which the unfettered market is not shaping the ICT sector to provide 'public goods' most effectively. On the other hand, in many countries the constraint on poor people's access to ICTs is not the failure of a free market but continuing government intervention, through protection of a national telecommunications provider.

ICTs as a public good

ICTs are a public good at the national level, for several reasons. As we have seen, ICTs enable economic growth: in the words of Manuel Castells, 'Information technology is not the cause of the changes we are living through. But without new information and communication technologies none of what is changing our lives would be possible.'[143] Small businesses as well as large ones can benefit from ICTs, as we have shown. Governments can use ICTs in many ways to improve their performance, for instance in the provision of health and other services. ICTs are potentially a tool to develop and expand all the social inclusion and political engagement processes this paper has touched on, which are increasingly seen as fundamental to development. But all these benefits of ICTs for development will only be realised if ICTs are universally accessible, reliable and affordable, which is unlikely to be achieved by the market alone, but requires deliberate policy from governments.

The 'public good' characteristics of ICTs are even clearer at the global than at national level. Communication is a global network, the Internet is a global phenomenon; thus many aspects of infrastructure and service provision are also global, such as radio spectrum, and routing of international calls.

Some development analysts have argued that new ICTs should not be the object of development aid because they are not useful to the poor: compared with basic needs such as food and water, they contend that communication is a luxury, and the Internet has little content that is relevant for poor people. At the other extreme, in the 1990s there was tremendous enthusiasm for the step changes it was thought ICTs could make for poor and rural people if they were introduced as development projects, an enthusiasm that has not been borne out by experience so far. The real truth about the value of ICTs for development probably lies somewhere in between. The sceptics' arguments are heard less often as the momentum of using ICTs grows and as many of the benefits outlined in this paper are recognised; while the enthusiasts' fervour is tempered by a more nuanced understanding that technologies introduced without being based in the existing communication cultures and habits of people do not bring change. The gap between ICT 'haves' and 'have-nots' is itself a development issue: as Northern/rich/urban life becomes more dependent on ICTs, the exclusion of those without access to the technologies or the skills to use them becomes more serious.

142
Four times as many people had access to mobile phones than to fixed-line phones in sub-Saharan African in 2004; by 2010, 85 per cent are projected to have network coverage. Mobile phone subscriptions have grown fivefold to 1.4 billion in developing countries since 2000. In India, 7 million new subscribers joined mobile networks in June 2007. (Source: J Ribeiro 'India adds record 7 million mobile users in June,' www.infoworld.com, 25 July 2007). (For sources of figures, see Panos London (2007) *At the heart of change: The role of communication in sustainable development*, footnotes 35 and 36)

143
M Castells (1999) 'Information Technology, Globalisation and Social Development', United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Discussion Paper No 114, September 1999

Like media, ICTs need support from governments and development agencies if they are to function in ways that fully support the inclusion of the poor in development processes. ICTs should be treated as an element of development, in terms of both financial support and (equally important) as regards policy, regulation and planning. If they are not, they may instead contribute to widening the wealth gap between rich and poor within and between countries. A number of issues that need particular attention include: the right policy balance for investment and inclusion; the open source software debate; and international infrastructure.

The right policy balance for investment and inclusion

Experience shows that competition among private providers results in better and lower-cost telecommunications services than provision by a government or publicly-owned provider. But at the same time, this paper is arguing, the market cannot be relied on to meet the needs of the poor. Governments have to find the right balance between policies to attract private investment into their telecommunications sectors and policies to ensure inclusion and development.

Opinions differ widely about the social impacts of privatising provision of other services like water or healthcare, but in the ICT sector the benefits of competition are very clear: lower costs, higher quality of services, technological innovation, and innovation in services and pricing structures. There needs to be competition among different providers of phone and Internet infrastructure and services, for instance between rival mobile phone operators. Governments mostly recognise this, and since the advent of mobile phone services in the mid-1990s, the telecommunications sector has become one of the very few sectors to attract a high level of foreign direct investment in developing countries, accounting for 11.5 per cent of the total foreign direct investment (FDI) flows of US$1.7 trillion.[144] Between 1990 and 2003, 122 of 154 developing countries financed their telecommunications infrastructure with foreign investment.

WTO's Basic Telecommunications Agreement has been a strong influence on opening up the market. As of June 2005, 104 of the 148 WTO member states had made commitments to opening up telecommunications services. However, in many cases the opening up is limited and the competition playing field skewed. Fifty per cent of developing countries retained monopolies on international telephony, largely because they see this as a source of revenue for themselves rather than as a public service and public good. Many governments protect and privilege their national telecommunications operator. Protection may be deliberate, for instance by allowing the national landline operator to enter the market for mobile services, or by restricting private companies' access to essential infrastructure such as satellites. Other barriers to investment may result from inertia rather than deliberate policy: outdated policy on the allocation of spectrum, for instance, or cumbersome procedures for approval of imported technologies. The WTO Agreement allows member states a transition period of protection, and many states are making full use of this, with the result that the move towards full and open market competition is happening, but more slowly than it might.

Limited freedom of the market is a major factor in the prohibitively high costs of telephone and Internet use in many developing countries. In 2004 the average cost of a three-minute call to the US was US$0.77 from high-income countries, and US$1.95 from low-income countries. One month's average use of the Internet was US$45.50 in low-income countries in 2004, compared with US$20.90 for the same usage in high-income countries.[145]

144
Global Trends and Policies (2006) Information and Communication for Development, Washington DC: World Bank

145
As in note 144 above

Promoting lower prices is one of the most important things governments can do to enable poor people to make use of ICTs. 'Bottom of the pyramid' markets are gaining recognition, in telecommunications as in other economic sectors, where a sufficient number of small users bring costs down and make a service viable; but despite this there is clear evidence in many emerging economies like India that unregulated market-driven growth tends to lead to concentration of services around urban areas, where infrastructure and support are easier and cheaper to provide, and the market continues to neglect rural villages. Most governments have made a commitment to providing universal access to telephones and Internet, that is, to putting telephones and Internet within easy reach of everyone in the country. They are exploring ways of achieving this, for instance through cross-subsidy schemes or direct funding of rural ICT development. Spectrum allocation is another area in which government intervention may be needed. If bandwidth is auctioned freely, the highest bidders are likely to be mobile phone or commercial TV companies, whereas if governments have an overall view of communication as a public good, they can reserve some spectrum for non-profitable users such as community radio stations.

Overall, governments and the private sector are making progress towards realising the potential of ICTs for the poor, but there is still a long way to go. Development agencies can provide financial support as well as support for policymaking processes and strengthening capacity to manage new systems and institutions.

Box 15
Mission 2007: Taking ICTs to every Indian village

India's 'Mission 2007: Every village a knowledge centre' programme aims to scale up to national level the use of ICTs for poverty reduction and social equity, introducing to every village in India telecentres that 'are open to all, irrespective of age, sex, religion, caste, and level of literacy and education'.[146]

The key to this initiative's success will be that it is driven by the Government of India in partnership with civil society (professionals/academics, including the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation and OneWorld South Asia), the private sector (the Nasscom Foundation), and donors (International Development Research Center (IDRC), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation). Mission 2007 is important because it represents a model for the kind of 'scaling-up' necessary if ICTs are to realise their potential for development.

146
'India's "Mission 2007": Every village a knowledge centre', by M S Swaminathan, www.panos.org.uk/iwitness

The open source software debate

Many governments and institutions are considering whether to switch to using open source software as their national or institutional standard.[147] The open source movement is spreading – in 2006 'Apache' operating systems were used by 61.44 per cent of web servers and Apache was growing faster than proprietary alternatives. The perceived advantages of open source software include lower ICT costs in the long term; proprietary software firms profit by constantly upgrading their products and ensuring the old products become obsolete and have to be replaced. For poor countries, making major investments in systems that will soon be obsolete represents a considerable cost. One advantage of an open source-based system is that it can be designed in such a way that it can be updated incrementally. Another advantage is that open source is seen to offer more flexibility for development of software using languages other than English: at present, Internet content is overwhelmingly in English, and the language of software and systems is English. Open source will make it easier for non-English speakers to create their own content and find content that is useful to them – a key factor in the usefulness of the Internet for the poor. Champions of open source also point out that adopting open source frees a government or institution from dependence on Northern/rich country technologies, allowing them to foster development of talent and ICT resources in their own countries.

But the choice of open source is not clear cut. Opponents point to the lack of skills and experience in using, supporting and developing open source software in most developing countries, and to the possible inefficiencies that will result from moving away from the proprietary systems that dominate all fields. The short-term costs of switching are also significant: staff of institutions and all users of IT have to be trained in new systems, for instance.

The arguments have been intense over the past few years and whether to switch from proprietary to open source is a major policy decision, for private institutions as well as for governments. (Governments are major purchasers of ICTs: in Africa, government spending supports 70 per cent of the ICT industry.) The choice may become less difficult in the future as proprietary software companies are starting to see value in embracing openness rather than resisting it: for instance, Microsoft Corporation's Shared Source Initiative, announced in 2001, allows a limited sharing of the Windows source code with governments, companies and educational institutions. It is also possible for governments to adopt procurement policies that allow for a mixture of open and proprietary standards.[148]

Support is needed to help governments and institutions with the decision-making processes. If they decide in favour of open source, support is also needed for the high initial costs of transition – training, adapting systems and institutions, software development, and public education.[149]

International infrastructure

International communication from many developing countries is very costly, contributing to the high costs of ICT use, particularly in countries that lack up-to-date international infrastructure. For example, the countries of Eastern Africa do not have an undersea optical fibre network linking them with one another or the rest of the world. Internet users in the region are forced to access overseas websites via satellite links that are slow, unreliable and prohibitively expensive. The current rate for 1 Megabit of bandwidth in Eastern Africa is between US$7,500 and US$12,000 per month. If a projected cable link was installed along the east African coast, experts calculate that the cost would come down to as little as US$500 to US$800 a month.[150]

147
Open source software, or Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), is distinct from 'proprietary' software. Proprietary software is developed and sold as a profitable business, often by major corporations such as Microsoft, which hold copyright over the software, often restrict how it can be used, and generally keep the 'source code' – the basic instructions – hidden so that users cannot copy or adapt the software. Open source software developers believe in the free sharing of knowledge and sell or give away their software with the source code included, to enable users to copy and adapt the software themselves

148
See, for example, R Ghosh (2005) Open Standards and Interoperability Report: An economic basis for open standards, MERIT, University of Maastricht, http://flosspols.org/deliverables/FLOSSPOLS-D04-openstandards-v6.pdf

149
For more information on open source policy options, see *Giving away secrets: Can open source convert the software world?* Panos media toolkit on ICTs No 5 (2007), Panos London

150
B Jopson (2007) 'Kenya lays ground for cable broadband link', Financial Times, 9 July 2007, London

East Africa may be lagging furthest behind, but other regions would also benefit from upgrading and increasing the bandwidth available through their existing undersea fibre optic cables. The cost of communication across the Atlantic is at its lowest level ever and still falling, which experts attribute to the large number and huge capacity of undersea cables across the Atlantic.[151]

International communication infrastructure benefits all parties, and is too costly or difficult for a single investor to provide. It has historically been built largely by collaboration between states, who have been, for example, the principal stakeholders in satellites. But this was for reasons of state, particularly for security purposes, and there was limited scope for wider involvement. Now, as with national telecommunications systems, private investment or a mixture of public and private is generally seen as most desirable: private investment brings the benefits of innovation and flexibility as well as finance. But the challenges of managing collaboration among different governments and local and global private investors are enormous, with the variety of stakeholders having different interests and ways of working.

The East African Submarine Cable System (EASSy) project illustrates some of the challenges. The project plans to install a badly-needed high-bandwidth submarine cable from South Africa to Sudan, which will link Africa's east coast, as well as several land-locked countries to one another and the rest of the world. The project was first mooted by telecommunications companies in the region in 2002. The EASSy investors' consortium now consists of 21 companies from 15 countries, as well as three international companies. Getting from the initial proposal to signing the construction contract (on 29 May 2007)[152] has taken over four years – and some important issues of how the different stakeholders will use, finance and profit from the cable are still unresolved. One of the difficult issues still to be finalised is the definition of 'open access' to the cable and what exactly this means. The investors agree that every operator in the region that wishes to should have access to bandwidth, but not necessarily the same capacity or at the same price – market competition should apply. Opponents of this view, who include the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Internet service providers, network operators, and NGOs, want EASSy to be regarded as a public good which could contribute significantly to universal telecommunications service, and thus to development, in the region. They argue that the investors' preferred model would disadvantage smaller telecommunications operators, smaller or poorer countries, and less profitable users. They want 'open access' to mean that every operator has equal access in terms of capacity and pricing.

There is a need for development agencies and donors to support the processes of debate and negotiation for EASSy, and to ensure that the needs of the poor are properly considered.

151
See www.telegeography.com/products
Global Bandwidth Forecast Service

152
www.eassy.org

What needs to be done and who needs to do it

There is much to be done. As we highlighted in this paper's introduction, many governments, donors, international development organisations and NGOs already know many of the things that need to be changed and there is a plethora of declarations, charters, agreements, pledges and other statements of principle and calls to action in this field.[153] What is missing is a 'holistic view' that puts all of these pieces together into an integrated framework. Support to the media, the establishment of legal rights to freedom of speech and access to information, the development and exploitation of the revolutionary new opportunities around information and communication technologies, building greater participation of poor and marginalised people and integrating their 'voices' into social, economic and political processes, should all be seen as an integrated, mutually reinforcing whole.

Such a coherent vision would promote the formation of 'open societies' where information and communication processes are seen as public goods that benefit all citizens and generate and multiply development impacts. The following recommendations need – fundamentally – the requisite political will to be accomplished. But they also require greater financial resources, leadership, expertise and a willingness to enter into partnerships of mutual interest with many stakeholders.

Agenda for action

1
Build more open, transparent information and communication systems and political cultures

- Governments should promote more open, participatory information and communication environments and the development of a public sphere with a right to communicate, by establishing freedom of expression and freedom of information legislation and supporting their use.

- Governments need to win the support and engagement of their citizens if they are to govern peacefully and effectively. To do this, they need to engage with citizens using the multiple channels of information and communication that are increasingly available, and support people's expectations of transparency and their desire to share information freely.

- Governments should ensure their own internal culture and administrative systems are oriented around transparency, dialogue and listening. This requires institutional change and training, as well as political commitment.

- To benefit from new openness on the part of governments, citizens need to have the capacities and skills to make use of the opportunities offered to them. This requires investing in education, skills and basic infrastructure, as well as designing communication processes that match the cultures and social conditions of the intended users.

- Donors can support civil society organisations and other actors (such as the private sector) to use freedom of information laws, to monitor government performance and hold governments accountable, to lobby and participate in more open policymaking (such as PRSPs); and to be increasingly transparent themselves. All these processes need expertise to design and lead them, and training and organisational change to implement them.

- Donors can persuade, help and support governments to see the long-term benefits and develop the political will for open and participatory communication systems and processes; and support their development.

2
Treat information, communication and the media as 'public goods' and invest accordingly

- Governments, donors and the private sector should approach communication and information processes – including the media – as 'public goods', with investment and responsibilities divided accordingly.

- Governments should ensure that reliable and affordable ICTs are available for everyone. They should facilitate the operation of the market by opening national ICT sectors to competition in infrastructure and services: competing private providers are more effective than state providers in bringing innovation, quality and low costs.

- Governments should also fill the gaps in market provision of communications and media through regulation or support, in areas where the market does not meet the needs of poor and marginalised people. This might mean, for instance, subsidies for the provision of telephone services to poor people or remote areas; or regulation of frequency allocation to ensure that non-profit users (such as community radio stations) are not squeezed out by profitable actors (such as mobile phone companies).

- Media in a free competitive market suffer financial pressures that often militate against their capacity to carry out high-quality public interest journalism. Governments and development organisations should seek innovative ways to provide financial support for public interest media content without editorial interference and without unduly undermining the operation of the market. (This is a challenge for developed as well as developing countries.)

- Governments should act to address issues that are beyond the competence of individual private sector actors. Such issues might include, for instance, provision of electricity to rural areas; development of software for local languages; or leadership to bring together neighbouring governments and private sector actors to solve problems of international ICT infrastructure.

- Governments and other institutions need to learn about and reflect on the costs and benefits of switching to open source software standards. Potential benefits include designing and introducing systems which will be able to absorb new technological developments in the future rather than needing to be replaced.

- Development aid donors should support governments in their actions to redress market failures.

- Aid donors should also support governments in the processes of designing and introducing new information and communication systems; and in building the environment of skills, training, and basic infrastructure (such as electricity) without which new ICTs cannot be effectively used.

- International donors should also support the difficult processes of negotiating international ICT agreements – for governance, and for building and managing international infrastructure. The different partners involved – including governments, private sector and civil society organisations – often have different short-term interests, and the modalities of working together for long-term and wider benefit are only starting to emerge.

3
Take a holistic view of communication processes and integrate communications into development planning and implementation

- Governments should take a holistic view of information and communication processes. They should establish an overarching policy framework for enabling communication to help meet their development goals (incorporating media, ICTs, knowledge, skills and capacities, institutional reforms). A holistic approach means starting from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised and understanding the flows of information and communication that affect their lives. This communication analysis will investigate the social aspects of inclusion/exclusion from communication. Who is excluded, why and what can be done?

- Support for communication should be a key element in any development support and planning. The role of communication should be more clearly identified in development analysis and planning by governments, international organisations and development agencies, from high-level international agreements down to local-level resource management projects.

- Governments and development organisations should build their own knowledge of and expertise in communication in all its aspects, at senior levels. Addressing this should be a matter of urgency.[154]

4
Invest in media development

The establishment and maintenance of a diverse, dynamic and free media is vital to development. The importance of getting the media 'right' is especially great in young democracies, as media plays an important role in forming the nature of society. The importance of media for development has been recognised in several recent initiatives by governments and multilateral development agencies and by media organisations themselves. There has also been much discussion among media support organisations, in consultation with developing country media, on how media can most effectively be supported, most recently in two initiatives aimed at strengthening Africa's media.[155] These analyses were consistent in highlighting the following areas if media development is to take place:

i) Establish media freedom and an enabling and supportive regulatory environment

- Governments should establish a secure base of individual freedom of expression and access to information; and legislation which supports and codifies its operation. This includes legislation on libel and defamation, which should be clear and consistently applied.

- Regulation is needed to limit concentration of ownership and promote competition. Legislation and licensing conditions should not imply control by government; they should be independent and controlled by civil society or the media itself, and be implemented transparently.

- Regulation to facilitate the entry of small actors such as community radio stations into the media sector should be adopted. In many countries at present, licences for community media in particular are banned or heavily regulated.

- International donors should support the processes of development of legislation, including public consultation, and the training and institutional changes needed – in governments, media and civil society – to ensure new laws are properly implemented.

154
See also the recommendations from the 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development in Rome at www.devcomm.org/devcomm/ OutcomesTheRomeConsensus/ tabid/250/Default.aspx?macroId=15& microId=1501

155
See the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (Draft - 2006) *The case for strengthening media in Africa: Framework and proposals* at: www.uneca.org/africanmedia/; and the BBC World Service Trust (2006) *African Media Development Initiative* at: www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/ specials/1552_trust_amdi/index.shtml

■ International development organisations face a dilemma: their development partners are generally governments, and so they cannot support media freedom directly in countries whose governments are opposed to it. However, they may be able to support processes of debate and reflection among governments, media and civil society in these countries, in order to promote a climate in which the governments might eventually move towards opening up the media.

ii) Support the development of media infrastructure and long-term sustainability

■ Governments should find ways of providing direct and indirect support to foster high-quality public interest media content.

■ Governments should ensure the provision of adequate basic infrastructure and services, which are vitally important for the media to work effectively – such as electricity supplies, Internet connectivity and telephones.

■ Community radio stations in particular may need financial support, since the resources of the poor communities they serve are not sufficient to support them. Such support may be provided by governments but also by international donors and civil society organisations.

iii) Build media capacity and professionalism

■ Governments, international donors and media support organisations should all contribute to supporting:

  ■ training in journalism (and media management). Good media need skilled and professional journalists

  ■ establishing and developing journalism and media institutions such as associations and unions. These can help to build the professionalism, standards and strength of the media professions

  ■ Initiatives to give journalists the specialist knowledge they require to understand and report on economic, environmental, health and other policy issues, both at the national and international levels.

iv) Support improvement in the quality and diversity of media content

■ Governments should introduce policy and regulatory frameworks and support systems for encouraging and supporting local media content (which costs much more to produce than reproducing global media content such as imported soap operas). International development and media support organisations can directly support such initiatives and local content production.

■ Media, media institutions within countries, and international support organisations should all play a role in developing the public's 'media literacy'. This would enable audiences to distinguish good quality media from bad, objectivity from partisanship, opinion from analysis, and investigative reporting from slander.

■ Governments, international organisations and the media themselves should support public debate on the norms, standards and expectations of the media – to build awareness and shared standards on freedom, content, and social responsibility.

■ Civil society organisations and government can contribute to improving the quality of debate in the media if they see them as partners, value their contribution as independent social actors and actively seek to engage with them.

Conclusion

Helping the billions of people currently living in absolute poverty to improve their lives is the greatest challenge facing the world. At the same time the effects of climate change and other environmental problems – which are likely to affect poor people disproportionately – have to be addressed. Governments, the private sector (increasingly with state-level resources – the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has resources of approximately US$31.9 billion) and the international community recognise the moral and practical urgency of the challenge.

The essential components of what needs to be done are simply stated but exceedingly difficult to accomplish: leaders must establish the rule of law and healthy, responsive political systems; governments must govern better; sustainable and equitable economic growth must be achieved; and civil society must be strengthened and empowered. The MDGs have set a series of ambitious targets that address some – but not all – of the essential needs. Achieving the MDGs and the larger, more far-reaching tasks will require huge investments of political will by governments in the developed and the developing world; the creation of more equitable economic growth and international trade; and the establishment of a more open public space in which citizens individually and civil society collectively can discuss, critique, contend and contribute together.

As this paper has argued, none of this will happen in a sustainable way unless free, open information and communication flows and processes are developed, nurtured and maintained. Communication is central to all aspects of development. It is a prerequisite for better, more transparent and accountable governance, and for wealth creation and economic growth. It underpins all the MDGs and is arguably as central a need of human beings as food, shelter, health and security.

Governments and development actors need to recognise the central role of information and communication in development – especially the importance of strengthening the capacities of poor and marginalised people to participate in political and development processes. Addressing the challenge of communication is urgent. New ICTs can expand opportunities for poor and marginalised people to participate – but strategic support is needed to ensure that ICTs fulfil their development potential rather than widening the wealth gap between rich and poor. The establishment and maintenance of diverse, dynamic and free media is also vital to successful development. The importance of getting the media 'right' is especially great in young democracies, as media play an important role in forming the nature of society.

Strategic support for communication must be based on the recognition that openness and transparency nurture good governance and participatory political and development processes; that communication and media are public goods; and that communication must be included in all development interventions. A holistic view of communication is needed, which starts from the perspective of the poor and embraces all channels and types of communication – ICTs, media, face-to-face communication, sector-specific initiatives and general infrastructure and systems. Neglecting or taking a partial view of communication leads to missed opportunities, failures of development initiatives, higher costs and malign effects such as divisiveness and exclusion.

All stakeholders in development have a role to play in the agenda for action proposed in this paper – governments, donors, private sector investors, civil society organisations and the media. Communication should be identified as an essential element of all development commitments, analyses and plans – at global, national and sectoral levels. Formal commitments to communication should be included in such undertakings as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the UN Millennium Declaration, as well as in national development strategies. These commitments must be more than empty rhetoric – to become reality they need inputs of planning, skills and resources, just like any other development goal. They require leadership and expertise at the highest level. Unless such commitments are made and acted upon, development interventions will continue to fail and the world's poor will continue to be sidelined.

About Panos London

Inclusive

We believe that embracing the views of poor and marginalised people is essential for sustainable and effective development.

Taking part in dialogue and debate contributes to a healthy and vibrant society.
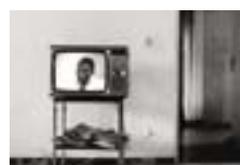
Empowering

We believe that poor and marginalised people should drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives.

We enable people to share information and ideas, speak out and be heard.

Balanced

We believe people need accessible information reflecting a wide range of views.

This allows them to make informed choices about crucial issues that have an impact on their lives.

Diverse

We respect different views, value local knowledge and encourage a range of approaches in our work worldwide.

We believe that freedom of information and media diversity are essential for development.

Illuminating

We shed light on ignored, misrepresented or misunderstood development issues.

We believe that the views of poor and marginalised people give greater insight into their lives and offer unique perspectives on the challenges they face.

www.panos.org.uk

The target date for the Millennium Development Goals is only eight years away yet millions of people still live in poverty, without access to clean water, a good education and any hope of equal access to local and international economies.

While politicians, economists and development experts disagree on the best way to change this situation, *The case for communication in sustainable development* argues that communication and information are essential to whatever development path is followed. Communication can be a powerful agent of change and can enable people to create change for themselves. Indeed, without communication and information being an integral part of every development intervention, the report concludes that these interventions will continue to fail and the world's poor will forever be sidelined.

Cover image
Belonging to a cooperative group gives these women in Cameroon the chance to communicate their views more widely. Sustainable development demands that people participate in the debates and decisions that affect their lives.
GIACOMO PIROZZI │ PANOS PICTURES