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At the heart of change

**The role of communication in
sustainable development**

Promoting dialogue, debate and change

Acknowledgements

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People need to be able to receive information but also make their own views heard. This woman in Chennai, India talks to tuberculosis awareness campaigners.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ARV	antiretroviral
ATM	automatic teller machine
CAR	capability, accountability, responsiveness
C4D	communication for development
DFID	Department for International Development
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GNI	gross national income
ICT	information and communication technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MeTA	Medicines Transparency Alliance
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PETS	public expenditure tracking system
PRSP	poverty reduction strategy paper
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



Executive summary

A healthy civil society is characterised by the vibrancy and quality of communication between individuals, groups, institutions and organisations. This woman takes advantage of the mobile phone network in Monrovia, Liberia.

TIM A HETHERINGTON | PANOS PICTURES

Development efforts are not fulfilling the promises made in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to reduce poverty and improve poor people's lives. Why not? One fundamental reason is that policymakers and development experts do not recognise the essential role that information and communication play in development.

Sustainable development demands that people participate in the debates and decisions that affect their lives. They need to be able to receive information, but also to make their voices heard. The poor are often excluded from these processes by geography and lack of resources or skills; and many groups – including women – are also kept silent by social structures and cultural traditions. Inclusive political processes, through which citizens can shape political agendas and hold their governments to account, are an essential foundation of successful development. Political processes are communication processes – not only through formal elections, but also the ongoing dialogue between people and their governments and the shaping of public agendas. For instance, mobile phones are increasingly used to strengthen the integrity and credibility of elections; while the media play a crucial role in political debate. Healthy political processes need open communication environments.

Reaching the MDGs in 2015... will also require a belated recognition that communication is central to all aspects of sustainable development. »

Communication also lies at the heart of good governance, where governments are responsive, accountable and capable of fulfilling their functions with the active engagement of civil society. Good governance requires that transparent information on the state and public services is available to citizens so that they can monitor government performance. 'Sunlight is the best disinfectant', US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously observed, and transparent information and communication flows reduce opportunities for corruption. Improved communication can also facilitate the day-to-day administrative relationships between citizens and bureaucracies – for instance, applying for licences or obtaining land records – and the effectiveness and efficiency of public services.

The fabric of civil society is woven from the ongoing communication and exchange between people – through interpersonal, informal and cultural processes as well as through formal institutions and official channels. A healthy civil society is characterised by the vibrancy and quality of the networks between individuals, groups, institutions and organisations; and the 'social capital' (the trust and respect) they create. Information and communication are fundamental to this process. Decades of research on issues as diverse as HIV and AIDS communication and sustainable agriculture has shown that where people are involved and engaged in discussions of issues that affect them, societal attitudes and individual behaviour are much more likely to change.

Economic development also depends on communication at every level, from helping a poor producer market her goods to strengthening a minister's hand in negotiating international trade agreements. When governments create an environment marked by open and transparent information and communication flows, they help to establish the conditions for economic growth and fairer markets. The revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs, such as telephones and the Internet) also offers exciting new opportunities for small- as well as large-scale economic activity. Governments should try to ensure that ICTs are available and affordable for everyone, because while ICTs are already spreading fast, particularly mobile phones, the market will not provide for the needs of poor people without some intervention and regulation from governments.

In all these areas, the media play a central role. They provide a forum for political debate and accountability, and they also help shape social attitudes – for instance to women's equality. Media freedom and pluralism of ownership are prerequisites if the media are to fulfil their watchdog function of holding the powerful to account. But these fundamentals do not guarantee that the voices of the poor and marginalised groups are reflected in what is printed and broadcast. For the media to provide high-quality public interest content, in which a wide range of voices is heard, liberalisation, pluralisation and regulation are all required.

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. What needs to be done to realise the potential of communication in maximising development outcomes?

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

Governments and institutions must accept the reality of a networked world, which will shape politics and civil society in ways that are only just starting to emerge, and adapt to citizens' expectations of transparency and the free flow of information.

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

Governments should recognise that media and communication are public goods, 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.

■ **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 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.

■ **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.



A man in Nairobi, Kenya reads the newspaper in his lunch break. The media generally, as providers of information and comment, have a central role to play in development. SVEN TORFINN | PANOS PICTURES

Introduction

Development efforts are not delivering the results the world's poor need and the global community promised in the Millennium Declaration signed by world leaders in September 2000. At present, two out of every five people are living on less than US\$2 a day. The latest World Bank forecasts predict that by 2015 more than 600 million people will still be living on US\$1 a day, and 'without measures that accelerate change, many countries may fall short of the [Millennium Development Goal] targets.'¹

Why is progress so slow? One of the main reasons is the failure to recognise that open, inclusive, participatory communication and information processes are prerequisites for successful, sustainable development. Communication processes form the lifeblood of politics: they are central to the creation of a healthy, vibrant civil society and efficient, more equitable economies; they are also a critical element of social adaptation.

The introduction of a printing press using 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 information and communication technologies (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.

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'²: the capacity for people to participate in a diverse range of decisions that affect them, and to enjoy specific 'functional'³ aspects that constitute a healthy life. Concentrating more resources on fostering better communication and information processes among people – and between people and governments – will increase the power and ability of individuals to take a meaningful part in debates and decision-making processes that are relevant to their lives. This is crucial to achieving Sen's real freedoms. In short, information and communication processes are fundamental to sustainable development and lie at the heart of change.

¹ World Bank (2006) *World Development Indicators 2006* http://devdata.worldbank.org/wdi2006/contents/Section1_1.htm

² 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

³ 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)

‘[Radio] helps, since it lets you know what happens in the country... It’s educating us about how to live within the family, the way to cook well... They say that not being spoken about means being excluded. I switch on [the radio] because listening...can make events that seem difficult easier...by getting to know things you couldn’t know [before].’

Palmira, a 60-year-old woman from Mozambique, talks about the importance of radio to her.

But if such change is to benefit the poor, providing generalised support for information and communication processes will not be enough. The focus needs to be on supporting and strengthening communication processes and channels used by poor and marginalised people who, because of their disadvantaged situation, already face many barriers to receiving information – including illiteracy, distance from sources of information, not speaking the majority or official languages, and limited access to radios, televisions and other media (owing to a lack of electricity or other services). The capacity of poor people to make their voices heard is also limited: they often lack access to powerful people and to costly communication technologies such as phones and computers, as well as the skills to use them. Even within communities, social customs and power structures often keep some groups, especially women, silent and excluded from decision-making.

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 Millennium Development Goals (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 affect their lives was identified as a key element of poverty in itself.⁴ This paper is therefore a call to action: national and international policymakers and leaders should respond to this need and rise to this challenge.

Communication involves processes of dialogue, exchange of information and resources, and the capacities that enable understanding, negotiation and decision-making.⁵ Support for communication in the context of sustainable development does not just mean providing more information to poor people – it means giving them ‘voice’. It means enabling them to participate actively in different communication processes. It involves a dialogue in which power-holders listen to, consider, respect and use the knowledge and views of the poor. It means recognising that, while not all forms of communication include participatory processes – indeed, many simply aim to persuade or pass on information – all forms of participation are essentially communication processes.⁶

This importance and ubiquity demands that policymakers take a holistic view of a society’s information and communication processes, instead of the *ad hoc* or fragmentary approach they often take at the moment. Panos London contends that four key areas need to be tackled using an integrated approach: establishing and realising legal rights to freedom of speech and access to information; supporting media; developing and exploiting the revolutionary new opportunities offered by ICTs; and enabling greater participation of poor and marginalised people in social, economic and political processes.

⁴ World Bank (1999) *Voices of the Poor*, Washington DC: World Bank

⁵ Panos (2006) *Breaking barriers: Effective communication for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010*, Lusaka, p4. Available at: www.panos.org.uk/PDF/reports/breakingbarriers.pdf

⁶ Quarry and Ramírez note that ‘Communication and participation are essentially two sides of the same coin’, and identify three forms of communication: i) communication to inform (policies, etc); ii) communication to educate (health, social marketing, etc); and iii) participatory communication (use of communication tools to enable participation). W Quarry and R Ramírez (2004) *Communication for development: A medium for innovation in natural resource management*, IDRC & FAO, p15

Information and communication processes are fundamental to sustainable development and lie at the heart of change. »

Many development policymakers already acknowledge in principle the importance of communication. However, action is lagging behind. Policymakers often lack sufficient knowledge of what specific steps they can take to strengthen communication processes. Sometimes political will is also absent: after all, enabling poor people to participate directly challenges existing power structures.

Adopting a holistic approach would facilitate the formation of open societies where information and communication processes are seen as ‘public goods’ that benefit all citizens and maximise the impact of development.⁷ 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 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,⁸ and many kinds of knowledge and information become more valuable the more they are used (as do the networking systems that link them together).

At the heart of change establishes such an approach, showing how information, communication, the media and ICTs are powerful agents of change, how they can give ‘voice’ to the poor and contribute to more sustainable development. There are many contending views of the role of governments, civil society and the economy in successful development; but this paper argues that information and communication processes are central to all of them. It explores the roles that information and communication processes play in all of the key elements that foster development:

- equitable and inclusive political processes
- national and international governance processes that are effective, responsive and accountable
- supporting engaged citizens and dynamic civil society
- generating inclusive economic growth, sustainable livelihoods and transparent, efficient markets.

The following sections show how all types and means of communication contribute to these four elements. We argue that a free, pluralistic media environment – where media outputs are many and diverse, but also of high *quality* – is vitally important to successful development. The paper’s conclusion suggests an agenda for action by policymakers, development experts, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector (including the media).

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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

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For example: in rural areas where incomes are low, provision of ICT services may not be profitable enough for the private sector to provide them, although it enables many development processes to take place. Similarly, good-quality journalism is expensive and essential to accountability, but may not sell enough newspapers or attract enough advertising to a radio station to be profitable



Communication's contribution to healthy political processes

New technology, such as that used in Venezuela to identify voters by their fingerprints, should improve the quality and transparency of elections and increase public confidence in the political process.

DERMOT TATLOW | PANOS PICTURES

Communication is central to political processes and the exercise of power. Without deep-rooted processes of dialogue and negotiation between a state and its citizens, a state's representative institutions have little meaning. In fact, the entire political process and the ongoing exchanges within civil society and between citizens and political institutions through which people and political parties organise themselves around demands, principles and agendas, are communicative acts at heart.

This is obviously true of the formal process of voting. New communications technologies are increasingly being used to improve the quality and transparency of elections and generate greater public confidence in them. For instance, during Kenya's 2002 election, the mobile phone network crashed as people used text messaging to mobilise one another and monitor the polling booths. Election results were disseminated as soon as they were counted, even in the most remote areas. The use of mobile phones in this instance contributed to more effective campaigning, greater transparency and probably less ballot rigging.⁹

Those seeking power are keenly aware of the importance of information and communication. Traditionally, the first objective of rebel groups trying to seize political power is the presidential palace, closely followed by the state television and radio station. Even in less violent political struggles, governments and opposition parties compete to win media support and influence public perceptions.

⁹ 'Mobile phone plays role in free Kenyan elections', posting by Bill Kagai to Democracies Online, www.mail-archive.com/do-wire@tc.umn.edu/msg00587.html; www.balancingact-africa.com/news/back/balancing-act_164.html

Once in office, politicians find it hard to 'listen' to the electorate. Political crises often erupt because government ministers are isolated and fail to respond to the changing views of citizens. Partly to deal with this tension, attempts to manage information and the media are becoming an increasingly important aspect of the functioning of political parties and politicians in the developed world.

Managing communication to build public understanding and trust – 'strategic communication' – is a necessary and legitimate task of governments.¹⁰ But the desire to influence and control can go too far, into the 'dark arts' of 'spin' – in other words, communication that is managed in order to hide uncomfortable truths and deceive the public to some extent. 'Spin' corrupts the language of political communication, generating cynicism and disengagement from the political process. It is the antithesis of the open, inclusive, clear and engaged communication required for successful development in any country, and reflects the fact that not all communication is benign. Opinion can be manipulated, truth hidden or distorted and the media used to promote the interests of elites. As the quantity of communication increases, the bad increases with the good. The benefits of more communication bring with them the dangers of worse communication.

'If the government works properly, people get justice, development is done and people's problems are solved...But the problem is that candidates – after winning the election – care less for people and say our job is accomplished...'

Karim (35) from the Manchar Lake area, Pakistan. He used to be a farmer, but his fields were inundated by water and contaminated with toxic chemicals as a result of a massive drainage project to link the lake to the Indus river.

The solution to this is not to restrict or close down channels of communication, although the establishment of judicious, transparent and publicly accepted regulation and control is important. Instead, the general public need to become more 'media literate' so that they are better equipped to distinguish good quality from bad; active in challenging and in seeking information themselves; and able to produce media of their own (particularly marginalised populations such as minority language and ethnic groups, and under-represented sections of society such as women and young people).

Hilary Benn, formerly the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, has 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.'¹¹ But 'getting the politics right' means getting the communication right, as good politics only occurs when all sectors of society have the information and opportunity they need to become involved in the debates that affect their lives. Healthy political processes need open communication environments. If the rate of progress towards the MDGs is to be increased, development needs pro-poor, people-centred political processes that put voice and accountability (in the shape of communication processes that support participation, inclusiveness, responsiveness and equity) at the heart of the relationship between the citizen and the state.

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Strategic communication – a term also used for communication campaigns designed to achieve specific development goals, such as changing people's health behaviour – is a professional methodology used to bring about voluntary change in the attitudes and behaviour of certain groups. It looks for incentives that will persuade people and requires creativity in framing arguments in a way that is appealing to those groups

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Hilary Benn, speech to Demos, 23 October 2006; www.demos.co.uk/files/File/HB_speech_-_final.pdf, p2

Communication at the heart of good governance

Responding to the perceived poor record of development assistance in reducing poverty and a series of corruption scandals involving developing country leaders, northern-hemisphere donor governments and multilateral finance and development organisations are increasingly promoting 'good governance'. This focus can be highly contentious, with critics seeing it as a way for the governments of rich countries to blame those of poor countries, instead of recognising their own role in what such critics regard as perpetuating underdevelopment.¹²

Nevertheless, few would dispute the fact that good governance matters at the national level and that it is hard to create. Where it is established, it promotes the rule of law and enables a political system that builds citizens' sense of inclusion, fairness, voice and participation. It provides security, stability and an environment in which people can make the most of their lives. However, any concept of good governance must also include the existence of an active public sphere in which social, political and economic issues can be openly debated, consensus reached or disagreements managed, and genuine social participation and political responsibility established. This dynamic, ongoing process puts information exchange and multiple communication flows at the heart of the challenge of establishing and maintaining good governance, for governments and citizens alike. Approaches to good governance that focus solely on improving the 'supply side' of government performance, or which concentrate overwhelmingly on elections and representation (conceiving of citizens simply as voters who express their consent from time to time but leave government to elected rulers and elites) are inadequate and flawed. A useful framework to evaluate the quality of a state's governance was provided in 2006 by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), which defined governance as the state's *responsiveness* to its citizens' aspirations and needs, *accountability* for its actions, and its *capability* to perform key functions.¹³ Communication is central to each of these processes.

State *responsiveness* describes the behaviour of government – the way in which it takes account of its citizens' expectations and needs, and responds to them. Key elements of government responsiveness are realised through communication processes, such as polling, open and reactive bureaucracies, and debate through the media. Too often, the voices of the wealthy and powerful are those that are 'heard' by governments and the wider public, and they become more influential than the voices of the poor. Yet a government has obligations to all its citizens, and should ensure that channels and mechanisms exist for poor and marginalised people to make their voices heard.

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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 CO₂ 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

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UK Department for International Development (2006) *Eliminating world poverty: Making governance work for the poor: a White Paper on international development*, London: DFID, p20

Good policy tends to emerge from good policymaking – and good policymaking involves listening and engaging with people who are interested in or affected by an issue. Greater consultation and responsiveness increases public ownership and trust in government, and often leads to more effective policies. Research has shown that wider and more effective communication can inspire increased public support and contribute to political gains for governments, such as longer tenure.¹⁴ Astute politicians will see that real, two-way communication has tangible political benefits.

State *accountability* is realised through the functions of transparency and monitoring. Transparency is an essential component in making all kinds of systems and processes accountable to their users, stakeholders and consumers – not only for national governments but also for international bodies and the private sector.¹⁵ ‘Sunlight is the best disinfectant’,¹⁶ US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously observed, and transparent information and communication flows reduce opportunities for corruption – particularly in the areas of government recruitment and promotion, and budgetary control.¹⁷ There is evidence to suggest that greater penetration of ICTs and mass media in a country is also linked to lower levels of corruption.¹⁸ Countries that are more transparent – for example, in the provision of economic information – score higher on indicators for government effectiveness and accountability, as well as for encouraging investment.¹⁹

Access for all citizens to information – held by governments but also by the private sector – is an essential component of good governance, enabling civil society to monitor developments and hold those in power to account. Citizens need access to information in order to know and demand what they are entitled to, as well as to understand policies and processes so that they can question them and enter into informed dialogue. By 2006, nearly 70 countries had adopted comprehensive freedom of information legislation to facilitate access to records held by government bodies. Another 50 are in the process of doing so,²⁰ though legislation is often unnecessarily delayed.²¹

Improving the quality and quantity of state provision of security, health and education services in the developing world is a fundamental requirement if the MDGs are to be achieved. Information and communication processes and technologies offer substantial potential benefits to boost the *capability and performance of state bodies* and increase the quality of *public service delivery*.²² Some of the ways in which ICTs can help governments improve their administrative productivity and efficiency include: collecting and using statistical information; online record-keeping and document archiving; and providing greater transparency of processes such as staff recruitment and legal reporting. ICTs can also simplify day-to-day relations between citizens and state administration in processes such as licence applications or land ownership records.

However, ICTs are not a ‘golden key’ to change – they only augment the political will of the institutions behind them. Without organisational and systems reform – and strong leadership to guide it – changes to improve public administrative capacities and service delivery may be resisted lower down in bureaucracies and implementing agencies. The increased use of ICTs in government is of no use if the governance systems do not acknowledge public needs or if the information being used is wrong. And technologies do not bring about change if they do not match the skills and capacities of the people who are meant to use them – for example, a website might not be useful to a non-literate woman.

14

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

15

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

16

Louis D Brandeis (1914) *Other People's Money – and How the Bankers Use It*, New York, NY: Stokes

17

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

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Researchers found that where media and ICT penetration was greater, corruption levels were lower – with the most significant variable being newspaper circulation. See S Bandyopadhyay (2006) *Knowledge-driven economic development*, Economics Series Working Papers no 267, Department of Economics, University of Oxford

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R Islam (2003) *Do more transparent governments govern better?* Policy Research Working Paper 3077, World Bank, in A Bellver and D Kaufmann (2006) *Transparenting Transparency, Initial Empirics and Policy Applications*, The World Bank Institute

20

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

21

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. See BBC World Service Trust (2006) *African Media Development Initiative: Research summary report* at www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/specials/1552_trust_ami/index.shtml

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

The design of more effective public service delivery or large-scale infrastructure projects requires widespread and in-depth consultation with the public in order to tailor the projects appropriately and gain consent and ownership of the strategies and priorities adopted. This is not a wasteful or pointless exercise: research shows that the delivery of public services is more efficient when prospective users have the opportunity to provide input into their design.²³ Even where legitimate national economic or political objectives clash with local interests or views, including local people at the early stages of project planning gives the best chance of reaching compromise, sharing costs and benefits more equitably and creating a greater level of 'ownership' and acceptance. The reality is that there may be a blurry line between sophisticated communication, which seeks to 'manufacture' consent, and genuine consultation, which shows a willingness to engage people and possibly change plans based on their input. But increased, open, information and communication processes are – by their nature – more likely to expose cases where consultations and dialogue are specious or ineffectual.

When people express objections to a development project, it is often not the project's goals they take issue with, but their lack of involvement in both the planning stages and the intended benefits of the initiative. People want a say in their future. Where communication processes are used properly, the sense of ownership increases and investments are more efficient.²⁴

The publication of statistical research and independent impact assessments, and initiatives such as citizen report cards, telephone 'hotlines' and independent ombudsmen, can also give the general public and civil society the tools they need to monitor performance and hold service providers to account. In 1996 the Ugandan Government 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 it on radio, and requiring primary schools to post information on inflows of funds in a public place. This empowered citizens to hold all the stakeholders to account and drew attention to where money was being mis-spent. As a result of the campaign, around 80 per cent of education funds began reaching schools.²⁵

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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. 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

24

See: www.publicprivatedialogue.org

25

R Reinikka and N Smith (2004) *Public expenditure tracking surveys in education Peru, Uganda and Zambia*, Ethics and corruption in education series, IIEP; 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



Active civil society organisations, such as this women's group in Niger, can help shape and drive development.

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Communication is fundamental to a vibrant civil society

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R Putnam (2000) *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, New York: Simon & Schuster. Putnam defines social capital as 'social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' which he considers to be enabled by the interpersonal associations and shared norms gained through personal interaction. The concepts underpinning social capital can be traced back to the 19th century work of James Madison and Alexis de Tocqueville. In the 20th century, John Dewey referred to 'social capital' in *School and Society* in 1900, while Pierre Bourdieu distinguished between economic capital, cultural capital and social capital

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An analysis by Harvard University of the World Values Survey (which looked at social capital in 47 nations from 1995–97) found a positive correlation between widespread access to mass media and societies with high social capital. P Norris 'Editorial: Social capital and the news media', *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 7:1

Most aspects of everyday life have a communicative dimension. The fabric of society is woven from ongoing communication and exchange – through interpersonal, informal and cultural processes as well as formal institutions and official channels. Civil society consists of different interest groups pursuing agendas that are sometimes complementary, sometimes competing. As we have seen, civil society works as an essential counterweight to, and partner of, governments in establishing and maintaining what is referred to as the 'demand side' of good governance. Just as important, however, is the role civil society itself plays in shaping and driving development.

A healthy civil society is characterised by the vibrancy and quality of the *networks* between individuals, groups, institutions and organisations, and the *social capital* they create. Social capital is a measure of the degree of engagement by individual citizens in civic life and therefore the strength of civil society.²⁶ Information and communication processes are fundamental components in the construction of social capital.²⁷

Social networks are also enabled through communication – particularly 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.

'I encourage people to speak out... you can get very sick if you carry this burden alone... We talk about everything in the group. From general HIV/AIDS information to forgiveness to death... we cover a lot of topics in our support group. We work with the media. We recently had a few radio talks on HIV/AIDS at our local radio station. And we are planning to put some more photos in the local newspapers...'

Gerald, who volunteers with South Africa's Atlantis Integrated HIV/AIDS Network, which includes the Treatment Action Campaign, in an interview about his experience of belonging to a social movement group.

While bringing about changes in public policy can be difficult, it happens frequently in practice. Changing societal attitudes and individual behaviour is much more challenging, but far more significant for achieving sustainable development. The 20-year struggle to overcome the HIV and AIDS pandemic offers an object lesson in what works – and what does not – in attempts to change social attitudes and behaviour. 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'.³⁰

The media can play a vital part in generating and sustaining such change, but their content must have relevance for and give voice to local communities. For example, research has strongly suggested that the internationally renowned Soul City in South Africa (which produces a television soap opera and accompanying programmes and materials on radio, youth newspapers and outreach activities reaching 70 per cent of the population) has reduced HIV and AIDS-related stigma in the country.

28
Edward C Green (2003) *Rethinking AIDS prevention: Learning from success in developing countries*, Westport CT: Greenwood Press

29
Panos London (2006) *Speaking freely, being strong: HIV social movements, communication and inclusive social change – a case study in South Africa and Namibia*. Available at www.panos.org.uk/speakingfreely

30
Panos London (2003) *Missing the Message? 20 years of learning from HIV/AIDS*, p1 and p46. Available at www.panos.org.uk

Similarly, within the field of natural resource management – forestry, agriculture and fisheries – there is a shift towards recognising that ‘people are at the heart of the ecosystem’.³¹ Over the last 30 years, communication for development projects all over the world in this sector have shown that 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 if they are to be appropriate, effective and efficient. When participatory forms of communication are used in projects that are genuinely receptive to what local people have to say, resource-management efforts have a greater chance of being sustainable.³²

Gender remains one of the most challenging development issues because in many countries women are excluded from decision-making and their voices marginalised. Addressing these challenges demands a range of communication efforts: to pressure governments to introduce legal and constitutional changes; communication to and within institutions to remove barriers to women’s participation; and to change social and cultural attitudes, both of women themselves and of men who often have the power to effect the necessary change, but not the understanding. Media and ICTs can create opportunities for women to empower themselves, to make the case for equality and act together to overcome age-old prejudice and inequity.³³

At the international level, communication processes are increasingly enabling a new global civil society. ICTs have strengthened existing forms of association to give rise to an emerging global ‘network society’³⁴ which has massive implications for civil society, citizenship and the political process of development in rich and poor countries. ICTs make it easier for issue-based global social organisations – such as peasant, indigenous peoples’ and women’s movements – to be formed and to function. Communication, therefore, both enables the production of social capital and provides the functional capabilities to pursue civic engagement, which is so important to sustainable development.

31
See footnote 6, p5

32
Rural extension is the sharp end of communication efforts to bring new 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

33
For example, in a village in southern India, a telecentre was established in the premises of a temple. People who had not been allowed into the temple for centuries – including menstruating women as well as Dalits – were allowed in to use the telecentre. For more details, see <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/tech/00/05/biztech/articles/28india.html>

34
‘Network society’ is the term coined by Manuel Castells to refer to the changes that the technologies of electronic communication (first electronic exchange, then computer networks, then the Internet) 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). See M Castells (2000) *End of Millennium, the information age: Economy, society and culture*, vol III, Oxford: Blackwells



Better access to low cost, reliable ICTs can help small businesses, like these in Pokhara, Nepal, participate in the economy on a more equal basis.
AMANDA LEUNG | PANOS PICTURES

Communication for efficient and more equitable economies

Open, participatory communication and information processes also enable healthy and sustainable economic development. Where information flows freely, markets and businesses grow and the state should be able to perform its public interest role more effectively. This is true for both developing and developed economies. Open access to information, and participatory debate, are important at every level – whether in facilitating the day-to-day activities of small-scale producers, establishing business-friendly environments at national level, debating national economic regulation and policy, or negotiating international trade agreements.

Market information is always imperfect, but poor people and small producers are disadvantaged because they usually lack information that is readily available to rich people and large-scale producers. Better access to information can help small producers participate in markets on more equal terms: for example, the Internet and text messaging are being used in many countries to enable small farmers to know what price their products are fetching in local and national markets. Access to this information puts them in a stronger position for negotiating prices with intermediaries.

Governments can support economic activity, therefore, by encouraging the spread of reliable and low-cost ICTs, which are already growing rapidly. Four times as many people had access to mobile phones than to fixed-line phones in sub-Saharan Africa in 2004; by 2010 85 per cent are projected to have network coverage.³⁵ Mobile phone subscriptions have grown fivefold to 1.4 billion in developing countries since 2000³⁶ and in India seven million new subscribers are being added to mobile networks every month.³⁷ But in many countries governments are still protecting their national telecommunications companies, reducing opportunities and keeping costs of services higher than they need to be.

There are many other examples of how the spread of ICTs is providing new, innovative solutions to the fundamental needs of poor people and helping to include them in the wider market – what C K Prahalad calls the ‘bottom of the pyramid’.³⁸ For instance, in 2005 global migrants remitted US\$232 billion, of which up to 20 per cent was lost on the way – mostly in bank charges or fraud. In South Africa alone, 12 billion rand (US\$1.5 billion) is sent each year to 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 30 per cent of this group own mobile phones, and South African phone companies such as Wizzit are now offering banking services via text message that promise a secure but lower-cost way of moving 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.³⁹

35

‘Buy, cell, hold: The spread of mobiles in Africa’, *The Economist*, 25 January 2007

36

ITU Internet Report (2006) *digital.life*, ITU

37

‘India & Globalisation Special Report’, *Financial Times*, 26 January 2007, p6

38

C K Prahalad (2005) *The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid: Eradicating poverty through profits*, Wharton School Publishing

39

The Economist, 26 October 2006

Governments can also encourage investment and facilitate entrepreneurship by creating a culture of transparency and reduced corruption. They can boost economic activity on a large as well as small scale by making bureaucratic and regulatory procedures – such as business registration, licensing processes, and import/export procedures – simpler, faster, cheaper and more transparent. In countries with low levels of transparency, registering a new business costs four times more than in countries where the level of transparency is high.⁴⁰ In Sweden, for example, registering a business officially involves three procedures, takes an average of 16 days and costs only 0.7 per cent of per capita gross national income (GNI). In Mozambique, it requires 13 procedures, takes an average of 113 days and costs 85.7 per cent of average per capita GNI.⁴¹

‘Poverty can only be alleviated if the government extends interest-free loans to poor people through some NGO and takes these loans back in easy instalments, only then people can establish their business. There should be a garment factory for women in Sanghar city, where thousands of women and girls are ready to work...’

Salma, a woman in her late 40s who left her husband when he did not provide for the family and set up a business as a tailor in Sanghar in Sindh province, Pakistan, was talking to a journalist from the Pakistan media.

Access to capital is often a major problem for small businesses and thus a significant constraint on increasing economic activity. Poor people generally lack assets which can be accepted as security for loans. Economist Hernando De Soto pointed out that this is not necessarily because they do not have assets but because these are not officially recognised – for example, their houses might be in informal settlements.⁴² There would be great potential economic benefit in establishing mechanisms for releasing the capital locked up in these assets; and creating and maintaining transparent and accessible information systems would be central to such reforms.⁴³

Reducing corruption also contributes to a more enabling environment for economic activity. Where a culture of openness and transparency exists, with access to information and knowledge, and effective public scrutiny processes, corruption is reduced and economies grow. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 was designed to increase levels of transparency about payments by companies to governments, and about the sharing of revenues. EITI is an important and valuable model for making economic information available to inform citizens better and prevent corruption. It is a model that should be extended to other economic sectors.⁴⁴ However, it is important that this information be provided regularly and in a consistent way, otherwise it risks being manipulated for political purposes.

40
World Economic Forum (2005), *Global Competitiveness Report 2005–2006*, Chapter 2.1

41
See www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/StartingBusiness

42
H De Soto (2001) *The Mystery of Capital*, London: Black Swan

43
The newly-established Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor is currently working with UNDP to see how the obstacles can be overcome. See <http://legalempowerment.undp.org> for more details

44
This is now beginning to happen with the launch in April 2007 of the Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA) which aims to make data public on the price, availability and quality of medicines for HIV, malaria and tuberculosis in order to improve access to medical care. See Financial Times, 19 April 2007, p4

Where a culture of openness and transparency exists, with access to information and knowledge, and effective public scrutiny processes, corruption is reduced and economies grow. »

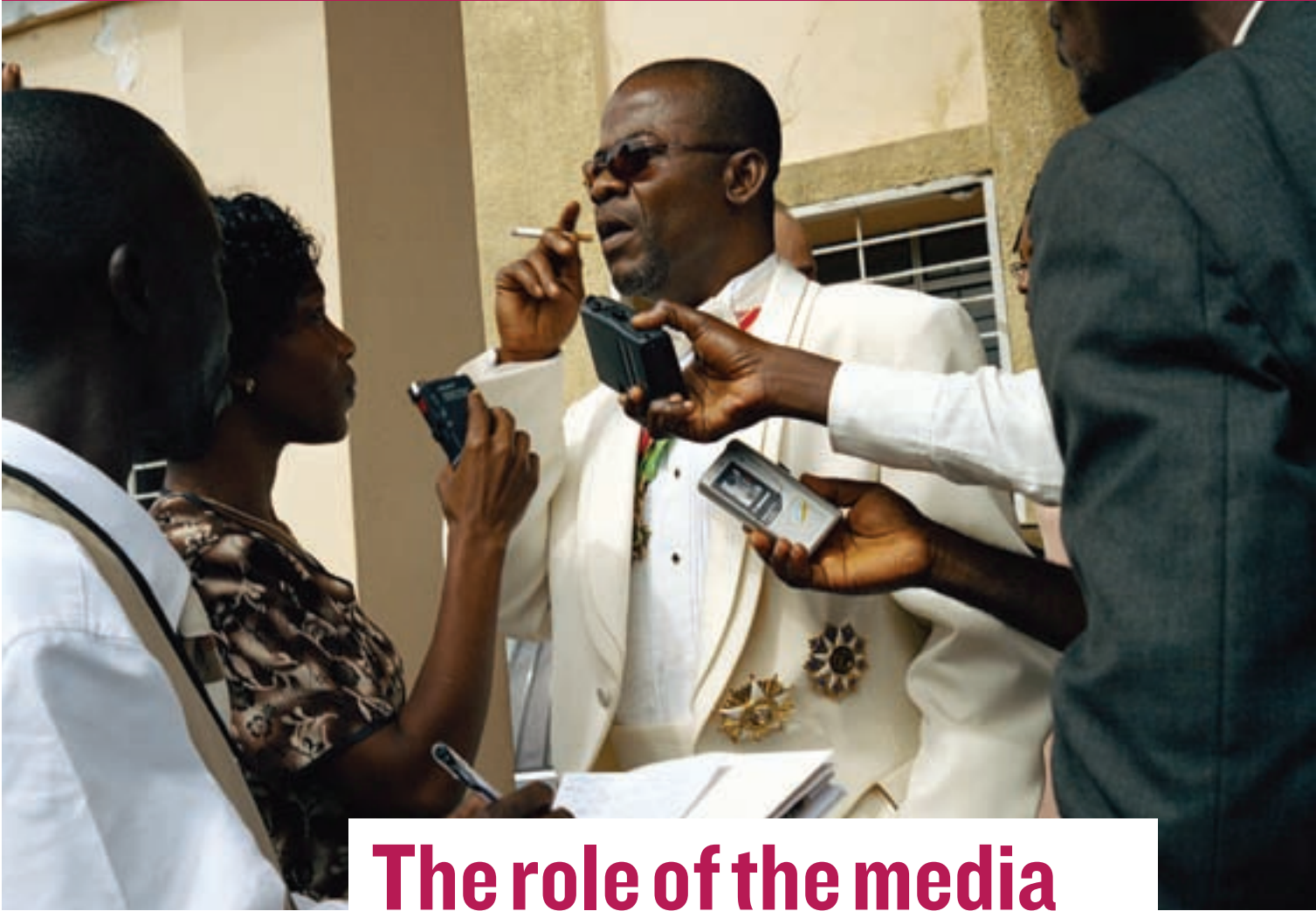
In the vital area of national economic policymaking, where the choices made have profound consequences for the distribution of wealth and power, the views and interests of poor people and marginalised groups are often unheard or ignored. Open debate and scrutiny of economic policy, through free media, is more likely to result in policy that facilitates pro-poor economic growth and supports the livelihoods of the poor. But one of the most sustained international attempts to bring poor people into policymaking has, so far, been limited in its success. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) approach, introduced by the World Bank, aimed to include a wide range of domestic stakeholders and interested groups in the formulation of low-income countries' short-term development strategies, often as a pre-condition for debt relief and international financial support. In the first round of PRSPs the consultation processes were generally weak: debate about countries' overall economic policies was avoided, and there was inadequate participation of poor people – the intended beneficiaries of the strategies.⁴⁵ Public participation has increased in many countries in subsequent rounds of PRSPs, but whether this will be sustained remains to be seen as countries introduce their own national development plans, often stressing the importance of long-term economic development.

Where international policymaking is concerned, there are also inequities in communication, information and participation that need to be addressed. The openness, transparency and accountability of many international economic bodies and forums – such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank – need to be improved; frequently the information and analysis available to negotiators from developing countries on many highly complex and technical issues is far from adequate.

This has become even more apparent, given the scientific complexity of the major environmental challenges that threaten the long-term development of all the world's population. Some of these – such as climate change, over-fishing and loss of biodiversity – are global challenges, where the threat to the 'commons' affects everyone, and countries must work together to respond effectively. Other environmental challenges – such as loss of soil fertility, shortage of fresh water, pollution and waste disposal – are more local in their incidence and impact. Dealing with them presents some of the most urgent communication challenges facing the world today. It requires the sharing of factual and scientific information; debate on impacts and policy responses; negotiating action between governments and civil society nationally, and among governments at a global level; and discussing and agreeing trade-offs, compensations, mechanisms and other measures – all of which depend on transparent monitoring processes and accountability mechanisms.

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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 output and profit more from the export of meat and livestock. Pastoralists – who are often among the most marginalised groups in any country – had not been consulted and were not 'visible' to the urban-based policymakers



The role of the media

In early 2007 Charles Gyude Bryant, head of the transitional government in Liberia from 2003–2006, was charged with embezzling more than US\$1million of state funds while in office. The Liberian media actively commented on his government's performance while he was in power. Here they interview him on the day of his inauguration.

TIM A HETHERINGTON | PANOS PICTURES

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, therefore, play a fundamental role in information and communication processes. The media support and enable all aspects of political processes and the negotiation of power, relationships between people and government, and the formation of good governance. The media are also an important part of civil society, reflecting different voices, competing interests and the clash of opinions within it. They help articulate needs and demands, shape opinion and attitudes, and provide a vehicle for political and cultural expression.

Free media⁴⁶ are an essential component of accountability. They have the potential to report on and investigate the decisions and behaviour of the powerful, exposing corruption and providing a space for issues to be debated and agendas developed. In *Poverty and Famines*,⁴⁷ Amartya Sen famously argued that no famine has ever taken place in a country that has multi-party politics and free media. While the relationship between politicians and the media is – at times – antagonistic,⁴⁸ most governments are committed, at least in principle, to establishing a regulatory and enabling environment that allows the media the freedom and 'space' to speak and act freely. It is when such political will and protected space are absent that the media cannot, or fail to, hold governments to account.

46

'Free' media is defined as free of government and state interference. Media freedom and independence is also affected by the boundaries of its own institutional constraints and concentrated ownership

47

A Sen and J Dreze (1981) *Poverty and Famines*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

48

The 19th century US journalist Emery Kelen cynically noted that: 'The interview is an intimate conversation between journalist and politician wherein the journalist seeks to take advantage of the garrulity of the politician and the politician the credulity of the journalist.' Cited in Jonathon Green (1986) *The Cynic's Lexicon*, London: Sphere Books, p112

The media also need to be pluralistic⁴⁹ in terms of ownership, scope and scale (encompassing mass media, community and citizen media). Pluralism of ownership and diversity of media create the public sphere in which different voices and opinions can contend. All media organisations and entities operate according to their own agendas and priorities, business opportunities and constraints. Many are owned by individuals or organisations – business people, political actors or parties, or religious organisations – who promote their particular interests. The media are not neutral, even when they are committed in principle to ‘public service’. They must attract and keep their audience and consumers, as well as satisfy the expectations and demands of owners and staff. An apparent plurality of media can be deceptive. The experience of many developing countries when they liberalised their media in the 1980s and 1990s was that they gained more media outlets, but these were concentrated in cities, and the quality and diversity of what was published or broadcast did not improve. The increasing concentration of media ownership in many markets in both the developed and the developing world means that – despite a plethora of titles and outlets – the actual ‘voices’, range of interests and views reflected may be extremely narrow.

‘Before it was a silent life between men and women... women kept their ideas to themselves, even if these would have been a help to the community... Nowadays, the radio is a major source of information. This keeps women up to date with all the news from the area, the town, neighbouring countries and overseas. We now have women who preside over meetings in the village, in the local area... They have all been democratically elected by village groups and other political structures.’

Fatimata, a 62-year-old woman
from Ouahigouya in Burkino Faso

For a truly independent and pluralistic media to exist, there also needs to be pluralism of media *content*. Only when media is diverse and pluralistic in both form and content can the competition of voices, opinions, facts and interests be fully engaged. When this takes place, governments and the powerful in all sectors of society are far more likely to be held to account. The quality of media content is as important as the quantity. Achieving quality and engaged, informed and respected media is a responsibility of the media themselves; and while citizens have the right to choose the kind of media they want, the media have a real self-interest in helping to establish a public of educated consumers who are ‘media literate’, who know what they want and need, and who legitimate the media’s role in holding the powerful to account.

By taking on this challenge, the media are performing a public service role. Such a 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. The essentials of public service media are *accessibility* (including by poor and marginalised people) and *quality content* that is true, informative, and reflects different voices and perspectives. In other words, content that is based on good journalism. It is the quality of content that makes media – whether publicly or privately owned – meaningful actors in development.

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‘Pluralistic’ media is defined as media that are diverse and independent, thereby providing a variety of information to all groups in society

“Only when media is diverse and pluralistic in both form and content can the competition of voices, opinions, facts and interests be fully engaged.”

Quality of content inevitably raises the issue of censorship. There are very different views, in all countries, about the degree to which media content should be controlled; and every society will continually be struggling with the tension between individual freedom of expression and the collective loyalties, beliefs and mores that bind a community. Should the public be protected from ‘hate media’ and from socially unacceptable content? If so, how and by whom? The choices societies make may be very different, and will change over time. No system of regulation and control is without flaws, but Panos London believes that oversight by the media themselves and by civil society rather than government is most likely to stay rooted in the collective view and 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.’⁵⁰ In short, liberalisation, pluralisation *and* regulation are required for balanced media environments and content provision.

In the past, the limited number of media outlets meant that the public had a shared experience of the media, whatever their quality. Now this shared ‘public sphere’ is starting to fragment, in both developed and developing countries. With media liberalisation and cheaper technology, audiences have many more formal media outlets to choose from, and now any individual or group can produce its own media output, as a website, blog or through citizen journalism. The increase in freedom and ‘voice’ is welcome and liberating, but most of the content on the world wide web has not been filtered by professional journalistic standards and often makes no claims to being objective or authoritative. The fragmentation already allows new communities to form around shared interests and concerns, but on the Internet, many people will be speaking with nobody listening. The challenge for both established and new media outlets will be to establish sites and arenas where quality information can be gathered and stimulating debates can flourish. Only then will there be confidence that more informed, inclusive debate is taking place in the new world ICTs are creating.

Conclusion

Open, participatory information and communication processes lie at the heart of changing societies and individual behaviour. They contribute substantially to better, more transparent and accountable governance, to the creation of a vibrant and dynamic civil society, and to rapid and more equitable economic growth. But they need to be put at the service of the poor, who want to be informed, to understand and contribute to the debates and decisions that affect their lives – at community, national and international levels. Poor people – indeed, all people – long to speak and be heard. This is a challenge as important as any of the MDGs, for it underpins them all. It is time to take this challenge seriously.

A start has already been made. Governments, international organisations and NGOs already know many of the things that need to be changed in order to put information and communication at the centre of development initiatives; and there is a plethora of declarations, charters, agreements, pledges and other statements of principle setting out what should be done in this field.⁵¹ What has been missing is a wide-ranging, holistic approach to the information and communication challenges in their entirety and – even more importantly – the sustained political will to address them. It is precisely because politicians and power-holders recognise the importance of information, communication and the media that they fear the consequences of increasing access and availability.

Their reluctance has to be overcome. Opening up information and communication flows does have risks. But the benefits far outweigh those risks. Effective communication is not about ‘media management’, top-down pronouncements, sophisticated public relations, targeted advertising and ‘spin’. Those approaches lead to a loss of public confidence and growing distrust in the integrity of the leaders and institutions that use them. Effective communication emerges from a process of engagement and dialogue, from listening and responding. It offers a more powerful means by which political, governance, social and economic objectives can be reached at both the national and international levels.

Helping billions of people currently living in a state of absolute poverty to improve their lives is the greatest challenge facing the world over the next 20 years. Addressing the effects of global climate change at the same time – which is likely to affect poor people disproportionately – increases the scale of this challenge. Reaching the MDGs by 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.

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Panos London has compiled a list of recommendations and commitments for strengthening communication made by key international development conferences and agreements since the 1980s. See: *Mapping declarations and statements on communication for development*, at www.panos.org.uk/heartofchange

Formal commitments to communication should be included in international undertakings...as well as in national development strategies. ▸

Addressing the challenge of communication is urgent. The latest ICT revolution – just like the introduction of movable type to the printing press 500 years ago – is providing new tools and expanding opportunities for poor and marginalised people to turn information into knowledge, equipping and empowering them to participate in the debates and decision-making processes that affect them. Access to communication technologies and flows of information are increasing rapidly, and this will have significant effects on society and politics in both developed and developing countries. Governments and governance institutions cannot ignore this. They must adapt to the networked world. Strategic support for communication processes should therefore be built on the following principles:

- 1 Openness and transparency nurture good governance and participatory political and development processes.
- 2 Communication and media are public goods.
- 3 Communication is an essential element of all development interventions.

Below we suggest an agenda for action that needs to be undertaken by governments, international organisations, NGOs and the media, if the power and potential of information and communication are to be more fully realised.

As a prerequisite, 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. 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 international undertakings such 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.

Agenda for action

1

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



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- 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 its 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 based on transparency, dialogue and listening. This requires institutional change, managerial and technical training, and 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 policy-making (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 of, 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 the poor or people in 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 remains a challenge for both developed and 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 that will be able to absorb new technological developments in the future and so will not need to be replaced too frequently.
- 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. The various partners involved in building and managing international infrastructure – 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.



These people in Bangalore, India have television satellite dishes but governments should ensure that reliable and affordable ICTs are available for everyone, even in remote areas.

MARK HENLEY | PANOS PICTURES

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 that enables communication to help meet their development goals (incorporating the media; ICTs; knowledge, skills and capacities; and institutional reforms). A holistic approach means starting from the perspective of poor and marginalised people 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 are they excluded and what can be done about it?
- 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 all aspects of communication. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.⁵²

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See also the recommendations – The Rome Consensus – from the 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development in Rome at www.devcomm.org

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.⁵³ 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 should be adopted to facilitate the entry of small actors such as community radio stations into the media sector. In many countries, licences for community media in particular are currently banned or heavily regulated.
- International donors should support the legislation-development processes, including public consultation, and the training and institutional changes needed – in governments, media and civil society – to ensure new laws are properly implemented.
- The growing trend by the development ministries of OECD governments to channel increasing amounts of aid in direct 'budget support' to developing world governments must be balanced by increasing financial support to civil society and media development organisations working to support media freedom and capacity and expand participatory debate.

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.
- The community radio sector, in particular, needs financial support, since the resources of the poor communities they serve are frequently insufficient to support radio stations. Such support may be provided by governments, international donors and civil society organisations.

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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* (see footnote 21)

iii) Build media capacity and professionalism

Governments, international donors and media support organisations should all support the following:

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

Notes

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.

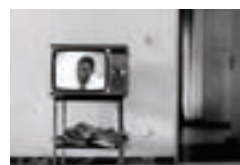
Empowering



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.

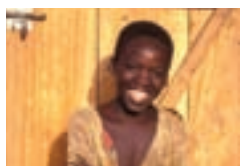
Diverse



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

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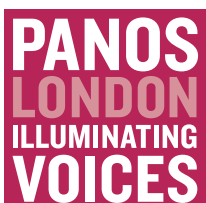
In this landmark publication, Panos London sets out what it believes should be the role of communication in long-term, sustainable development. It challenges governments and all involved in policy-making and planning to listen to the views of ordinary people, to involve civil society in decision-making and to recognise the important part the media can play in debating development issues and challenging government accountability.

Written in a clear and concise style, *At the heart of change* suggests four key areas for action by governments, NGOs, the media and international organisations, in order to realise the power and potential of information and communication.

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.

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