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MEDIA DEVELOPMENT'S ROLE IN SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL PROGRESS

"By making one part of a country aware of other parts, their people, arts, customs, and politics; by permitting the national leaders to talk to the people, and people to the leaders and to each other; by making possible a nation-wide dialogue on national policy; by keeping the national goals and national accomplishments always before the public--thus modern communication, widely used, can help weld together isolated communities, disparate subcultures, self-centered individuals and groups, and separate developments into a truly national development."

- "Father of Communication Studies", Wilbur Schramm -



Introduction

In 1948 the United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information declared access to information an essential freedom—one that underpins all others. In this sense access to information can be understood as an end in itself. Yet a 1962 UNESCO survey found that over 70% of the world lacked access to adequate information. In response the UN called for all countries to include a media development strategy within their economic development plans. In addition to securing this fundamental right, they said, “information media have an important role to play in education, social, and economic progress.”¹

More recently, the UN recognized the important role of independent media in bringing about good governance — something increasingly demanded by citizens across the globe. People want “their voices to be heard and they want institutions that are transparent, responsive, capable and accountable.”²

In defining the central importance that information plays in sustainable development, a 2007 Panos report highlighted how information empowers people to determine their own development path. “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 fulfill their potential.”³ A plural, independent media plays an essential role in delivering the information people need to participate in the debates and decisions that shape their lives.

Despite a general agreement on the importance of media development in broader social, economic and political progress, the international community—governments, development agencies, donors—largely views the development of an independent media sector as a secondary objective instead of a matter of critical importance. Consequently international donors allocate less than 1% of international aid budgets to media development.⁴

The purpose of this literature review is to present evidence suggesting that a quality, independent media has a positive impact on society and should be viewed as a critical development outcome in itself. The review is divided into three sections addressing three areas where media can have a positive effect on societies:

Governance Impact: Corruption has a negative impact on society, particularly in furthering poverty and income inequality.⁵ Numerous studies show a robust link between a free, strong, and independent press and reduced corruption. A free press exposes private and public sector corruption. It monitors government officials and increases voters’ knowledge, allowing voters to hold corrupt politicians accountable during elections, causing politicians to reduce corruption.

Economic Impact: Economic actors need accurate and timely information to allocate resources efficiently. Investors and other groups increasing value and demand a governance-monitoring role from the media.⁶ A free and



independent press can provide information and monitoring to the economic policy development process leading to more effective economic policies. It can also reduce political risk and increase good governance—conditions that are important for robust economic development.

Social Impact: In order for development to be just and sustainable, citizens must productively participate in the decisions that shape their lives. Participation requires an informed citizenry. A free and independent media supply timely and relevant information to citizens allowing them to change their own behavior and to demand higher social standards for society.

I. Media improves governance by monitoring the actions of those in power and alerting the public to corruption or abuse of trust.

A strong, free, and independent media sector leads to lower corruption levels

Corruption acts as a tax on productive activities in an economy, leading to the flow of resources to unproductive ones. An independent media that monitors those in power and delivers accurate information to citizens has been shown to be an effective check on corruption across multiple studies.⁷

A 2006 cross-country study of 51 countries over the period 1995 to 2004 found that even slight reductions in restrictions on journalists (e.g. reducing violence against journalists) have a positive impact on corruption. The study found that improving the economic viability and competitiveness of the media sector, leading to a one standard deviation increase in press freedom, “would be associated with a decline of corruption between 0.6 to 1.7 for economic influences and 0.7 to 1.4 for political influences.”⁸

A 2004 study of 97 countries and covering the time period from 1995 to 2002 found press freedom to have a significant impact on corruption. The study found that reducing free press restrictions by 1% leads to a 5.1% improvement in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). “The presence of free press brings public corruption cases to the voters while voters in a democracy in turn punish corrupt politicians by ousting them from public offices. Hence elected politicians react to the voters by reducing corruption.”⁹

A widely cited 2003 paper in the *Journal of Public Economics* provides further evidence that a free press is a powerful control on corruption. Analyzing a cross-section of 125 countries from 1994 to 1998 the authors found a strong relationship between press freedom and less corruption, and one that suggests the direction of causation runs from higher press freedom to lower corruption. The evidence suggests that a one standard deviation improvement in press freedom could reduce corruption by between .4 and .9 points on the 0 to 6 scale.¹⁰

Media can also indirectly reduce corruption. A 2000 study found that in countries with weak civic monitoring capabilities (including a strong, independent media) high levels of education might not have the expectedly positive impact on corruption (i.e. better educated bureaucrats



should provide better public services). Without being monitored, politicians may use their education to become more efficiently corrupt. The study “examine(s) the impact of higher education on corruption..., while controlling progressively for other variables that have been identified to influence corruption (e.g. press freedom).” The results support the study’s hypothesis that “in countries with low levels of civic monitoring of those in power, education may actually increase corruption.”¹¹

Access to information helps citizens hold their governments accountable

By providing easy access to information to users of public services, the media empowers citizens to demand quality and accountability from their governments. A 2004 study by the World Bank examined a Ugandan newspaper’s campaign to inform teachers about education grant funds and the impact the campaign had on improving the education system by reducing regulatory capture.¹² The hypothesis was that more informed teachers would hold officials accountable for the proper use of the funds. The study used distance to the nearest newspaper outlet as an instrument for wider exposure to the campaign (via parents, for example) and found a strong relationship between proximity to a newspaper outlet and lower capture.¹³

A 2004 paper by David Stromberg found that better-informed citizens are more likely to vote, which in turn encourages politicians to be responsive. The results of his research on how radio penetration impacted relief program fund allocations indicated that governors allocated more relief funds to areas where a larger share of the population had radios. The effects were both statistically significant and economically important. “The estimates of this study imply that for every percentage point increase in the share of households with radios in a certain county, the governor would increase per capita relief spending by 0.6 percent.”¹⁴

While there is still debate, recent research has emphasized the leading role independent media plays in the process of improving democratic governance. Evaluating decades of data on press freedom and political development, Karin Deutsch Karlekar and Lee Becker found that a healthy press sector is highly correlated with broader political freedoms. Taking a closer look at countries that experienced sharp increases or decreases in political freedom, the researchers found that press freedom is often a lead indicator for the direction a country’s political system is headed.¹⁵

A plural media improves government responsiveness by giving a voice to the vulnerable

There is a robust link between media development and government responsiveness, especially to the poor, who have numerical strength in a democracy but are often ignored by politicians. A media sector that reaches and gives voice to the vulnerable can create informed citizens that can better monitor the actions of incumbent politicians and use this information in their voting decisions.

A 2002 study by Timothy Besley and Robin Burgess examined data in India from 1958 to 1992 and showed “that state governments [were] more responsive to falls in food production



and crop flood damage via public food distribution and calamity relief expenditure where newspaper circulation is higher and electoral accountability greater. In the study, a 10 percent drop in food production was associated with a 1 percent increase in public food distribution in states that are at the median in terms of newspaper circulation per capita. For states that are in the 75th percentile in terms of newspaper circulation per capita, the study found that a 10 percent drop in food production was associated with a 2.28 percent increase in public food distribution.”¹⁶

Perhaps the most famous articulation of this relationship came from Amartya Sen in his 1981 Coromandel lecture published in 1984: “India has not had a famine since independence, and given the nature of Indian politics and society, it is not likely that India can have a famine even in years of great food problems. The government cannot afford to fail to take prompt action when large-scale starvation threatens. Newspapers play an important part in this, in making the facts known and forcing the challenge to be faced.”¹⁷

II. Media improves the efficiency of the economy by providing actors more and better information with which to make decisions and improving stability.

Media enhances political coordination in the development of sound economic policy

A 2002 paper by Christopher Coyne and Peter Leeson provides clarity on the role of the media in economic development by analyzing the role of media as a coordination-enhancing mechanism in policy development. The report looks at a number of historic case studies, including successful economic development examples such as Poland and Hungary, and less successful ones including Ukraine. In the successful cases of Poland and Hungary, “not only has the media played a role in transforming situations of conflict into coordination, but also access to information has allowed politicians and the populace to coordinate on good conjectures leading to economic progress.”¹⁸

Media sector development can reduce political risk, increasing stability for higher risk countries

Countries that have more political risk can gain stability by increasing the effectiveness of their media sector. This is the finding of a 2011 econometric study of the impact of a healthy media sector on the political risk condition of Sub-Saharan African countries. “The quantile regression analysis... suggests that a free media and greater access to information has a greater impact on improving political risk status for countries with high political risk situations than for countries that are more stable.”¹⁹



III. Media catalyzes positive changes in society by providing the information that influences public opinion.

Media leads to increases in awareness and changes in behavior across social issues

Numerous studies over the last 40 years from around the world have provided evidence of the catalytic role played by the media in providing information that influences public opinion leading to social change. The impacts can be seen across social issues such as public health²⁰ (including maternal health²¹ and child behavior²²); gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) identity²³; and climate change.²⁴ Targeted, well-executed media campaigns reach audiences via a medium they pay attention to, leading to increased knowledge and changes in behavior.

Information access linked to less environmental degradation

Higher participation (levels of literacy, information access, and equality) reduces the level of environmental degradation that a country is willing to accept during its growth process. This is the main finding of a 2002 study by Salvatore Bimonte that tested cross-sector data from 35 European and CIS countries including Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia. The study found that information accessibility (i.e. number of newspapers per 1000 people) is a determinant of the level of environmental quality at which economic growth starts to be beneficial for the environment. The paper maintains that the only way to make development sustainable is to increase the level of participation. Therefore, to make development sustainable one needs to involve people in the growth process.²⁵

Summary

This review presents evidence to suggest that independent media play a critical role in improving governance and reducing corruption, increasing economic efficiency and stability, and creating positive social and environmental change. The media provide information to actors throughout society allowing them to participate in the decisions and debates that shape their lives. The media also play an important monitoring role in a democracy that enables citizens to hold their governments and elected officials accountable—leading to better policies and service implementation. For these reasons and others media development should be viewed as a desirable development outcome that underpins all others



¹ Schramm, Wilbur Lang. Mass media and national development: The role of information in the developing countries. No. 25. Stanford University Press, 1964.

² Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. [0]. Available: <http://www.un.org/sg/management/beyond2015.shtml>. Accessed 05/02/2014: 21.

³ Wilson, Mark, Kitty Warnock, and Emrys Schoemaker. At the heart of change: The role of communication in sustainable development. Panos, 2007.

⁴ Wilton Park. *Conference report: Media and fragile states*. 2014. Available: <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1278-Report.pdf>

⁵ Gupta, Sanjeev, Hamid R. Davoodi and Rosa Alonso-Terme . 2002. 'Does corruption affect income inequality and poverty? Economics of Governance 3(1): 23–45.

⁶ Kaufmann, Daniel, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi. "Governance matters IV: governance indicators for 1996-2004." World Bank policy research working paper 3630 (2005).

⁷ Chowdhury, Shyamal K. Do democracy and press freedom reduce corruption?: evidence from a cross country study. No. 85. ZEF discussion papers on development policy, 2004.

⁸ Freille, Sebastian, M. Emranul Haque, and Richard Kneller. "A contribution to the empirics of press freedom and corruption." European Journal of Political Economy 23.4 (2007): 838-862.

⁹ Chowdhury, Shyamal K. Do democracy and press freedom reduce corruption?: evidence from a cross country study. No. 85. ZEF discussion papers on development policy, 2004.

¹⁰ Brunetti, Aymo, and Beatrice Weder. "A free press is bad news for corruption." Journal of Public economics 87.7 (2003): 1801-1824.

¹¹ Ahrend, Rudiger. Press freedom, human capital and corruption. Delta, 2002.

¹² Regulatory capture is a form of political corruption that occurs when a regulatory agency, created to act in the public interest, instead advances the commercial or special concerns of interest groups that dominate the industry or sector it is charged with regulating. SOURCE: Wikipedia

¹³ Reinikka, R. and Svensson, J., 2004, 'The Power of Information: Evidence from a Newspaper Campaign to Reduce Capture', Working Paper 3239, World Bank, Washington D.C.

¹⁴ Strömberg, David. "Radio's impact on public spending." The Quarterly Journal of Economics 119.1 (2004): 189-221.

¹⁵ Karlekar, K. and Becker, L.B. "By the numbers: Tracing the statistical correlation between press freedom and democracy." Center for International Media Assistance. Available:

http://cima.ned.org/sites/default/files/Layout%20FINAL_0.pdf

¹⁶ Besley, Timothy, and Robin Burgess. "The political economy of government responsiveness: Theory and evidence from India." The Quarterly Journal of Economics 117.4 (2002): 1415-1451.

¹⁷ Sen A. Food Battles: Conflicts in the Access to Food. Food and Nutrition. 1984;10.

¹⁸ Coyne, Christopher. J & Peter T. Leeson. 2004. Read all about it! Understanding the role of media in economic development. KYKLOS, Vol. 57: 21-44. [0]. Available: <http://www.peterleeson.com/Kyklos--Media.pdf>. Accessed 24/02/2014.

¹⁹ Roy, Sanjukta. Media development and political stability: an analysis of

sub-Saharan Africa. [0]. Available: <http://www.mediamapresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Media-Development-and-Political-Stability-FINAL.pdf>. Accessed 03/03/2014.

²⁰ Daniel Catalán-Matamoros (2011). The Role of Mass Media Communication in Public Health, Health Management - Different Approaches and Solutions, Dr. Krzysztof Smigorski (Ed.), ISBN: 978-953-307-296-8, InTech, Available from: <http://www.intechopen.com/books/health-management-different-approaches-and-solutions/the-role-of-mass-media-communication-in-public-health>

²¹ Effect of mass media campaign to reduce socioeconomic differences in women's awareness and behaviour concerning use of folic acid: cross sectional study." *Bmj* 319.7205 (1999): 291-292.

²² Jessor, Richard, et al. "Problem behavior and psychosocial development: A longitudinal study of youth." *America (New York)* 137.11 (1977): 19-22

²³ The influence of media role models on gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity." *Journal of homosexuality* 58.3 (2011): 330-354.

²⁴ Sampei, Yuki, and Midori Aoyagi-Utsui. "Mass-media coverage, its influence on public awareness of climate-change issues, and implications for Japan's national campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions." *Global Environmental Change* 19.2 (2009): 203-212

²⁵ Bimonte, Salvatore. "Information access, income distribution, and the Environmental Kuznets Curve." *Ecological economics* 41.1 (2002): 145-156.