

## B. RESPONSE

### **The case for Media Support in Development Aid.**

*“We will actively support the development of free and independent media in our programme countries through negotiations with governments and through support for media capacity-building initiatives” (Irish Aid White Paper, 2006)*

In this submission the case is made for the support of Media as part of the next Irish Aid White Paper and program for development.

While Irish Aid is already supporting some media projects in Africa, and the department budget is constrained for the foreseeable future, this paper argues for the continued support for media development initiatives and highlights how Media is central to development, in its relation to governance, to increased aid effectiveness and how it is vital for empowerment of local communities in program countries.

There is already a large body of research on media and development that finds strong and significant positive correlations between freedom of the press and development. But most recent research by Internews (2012) has found that broad-based economic growth and political stability seem to be strongly connected to the presence of a free and independent press.

The research found that ‘Free press’ countries are less dependent on foreign aid, provide a better environment for businesses within the country and are more likely to be democratic and have much stronger democracies overall than countries without a free press.

A free press is also associated with higher literacy and is a vital factor in maintaining democracy over time, globally. Thus, literacy, a free press, and democracy can create a virtuous cycle that lays the ground for improvements in governance, and in development overall.

### **Introduction**

In the coming decade, most of the fastest growing economies will be African, but the region’s progress in improving governance, poverty reduction, and human development lags far behind its economic growth.

At a time when the world is being transformed by mobile communications and social media, billions of people still live in countries where the production and distribution of vital information relies on an unstable, easily manipulated media infrastructure.

A stable and independent media could be a positive force, not only in the poorest countries, but also in more promising developing countries that are struggling to create durable institutions that

support economic and social development. A free and independent media can draw attention to corruption and poor leadership that often impede change. Independent media helps generate discussions and debate about critical reforms, improving the quality of decisions and helping to strengthen consensus on the way forward. And for donors, an independent media can help ensure that the money spent on overseas development assistance is used efficiently and follows good principles of aid effectiveness. "Media development aid creates the independent journalism that tells you whether all the other aid is being stolen," said Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation.

The growing literature on economic development has increasingly realised media of a country to be a critical component of its development process. While factors like human capital, investments, social, and other demographic factors are critical components of any recipe for development, the role played by an efficient (or, an inefficient) media sector has gained importance over time. An ideal media industry, public or private, forms the eyes and the ears of the populace.

Media and communication can be a powerful force for positive social change. Radio, TV and print, social media, mobile telephony and interpersonal communication can engage large numbers of people relatively cheaply, facilitating the exchange of information and ideas, dialogue, discussion and debate.

Donors and international NGOs have been working in the field of media development for at least 50 years, but most noticeably over the last two decades since the fall of the Soviet Union. Of the \$129 billion that was spent by donors on international development in 2010, about 0.5% was specifically targeted at the media, which comes to approximately \$650 million spent on media development in that year.

Media development support is intended to improve the health of the media sector. A healthy media sector is independent from both government and vested commercial interests, generates quality content that reaches citizens, and helps them to make informed decisions. A healthy media sector also means that people can access, engage with, and create their own content if they so desire, and gives citizens a voice in the governance of their country.

Many donor governments now view efforts to promote democratic governance and with that, assisting media, as a fundamental element of international development work, along with more established efforts to provide emergency food or material aid. Programs to tackle the economic and social problems of developing and transitional countries cannot be fully effective without open, fair and well-managed government. And so it is important that the mechanisms that make governments accountable to their citizens work.

Media is a major source of such accountability and there is a growing realisation of the power of media and information to change the world. Hillary Benn, former secretary of state for international development in the UK, argued that:

*In developing countries, it's not about me or other donors being accountable – it's about developing country governments being accountable to their own people. A free and open media plays a hugely important role in helping to make this happen.*

President Obama, in his May 2011 speech on the Middle East, declared a remarkable commitment to access to information and freedom of the press:

*Real reform does not come at the ballot box alone. Through our efforts we must support those basic rights to speak your mind and access information. We will support open access to the Internet, and the right of journalists to be heard – whether it's a big news organization or a lone blogger. In the 21st century, information is power, the truth cannot be hidden, and the legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens.*

There is extensive theoretical and qualitative literature on the topic of media and development and the research provides clear and compelling evidence that freedom of the press is a critical ingredient in good governance, economic growth and development.

### **The Evidence for Media Support**

Liberal theorists from Milton to John Stuart Mill argued centuries ago the existence of a unfettered and independent press is essential in the process of democratisation, by contributing towards the right of freedom of expression, thought and conscience, strengthening the responsiveness and accountability of governments to citizens, and providing a public platform and channel of political expression for a variety of groups and interests.

Numerous observers have also emphasised that a free press is valuable for good governance, and for human development. This perspective is exemplified by Amartya Sen's famous claim that "no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press" (Sen, 1999). Sen claimed that in independent and democratic countries the free press encourages government responsiveness to public concerns. The media enhances the voice of poor people and generates more informed choices about economic needs and priorities.

African academic Francis Kasoma noted "it is not by accident that the three countries in Africa that have maintained democratic governance namely Botswana, Senegal and Mauritius, are also the countries that have consistently maintained a free and independent press" (Kasoma, 1995).

So, more liberal media landscapes have been recognised by the international community as strengthening development processes but what systematic evidence supports these claims?

An extensive literature demonstrates how media can make governments transparent about its actions and accountable to the masses.

Norris and Zinnbauer (2002) showed that an independent press is strongly associated with good governance and human development. In particular, free press nations are characterised by less corruption, greater administrative efficiency, politically stable environment, efficient rule of law and better economic development in general.

Brunetti and Weder (2003) found that there is less corruption in nations with a free press. The reason, they argue, is that journalist's roles as watchdogs promote the transparency of government decision-making process, and thereby expose and hinder misuse of public office, malfeasance, and financial scandals. In its 'watchdog' role, the news media functions to promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers in power.

The evidence presented by Brunetti and Weder shows a strong association between the level of press freedom and the level of corruption across countries. The results suggest that an independent press represents an important check against corruption.

The most recent research on media and development by Internews Media Map project (2012) used Freedom House free press indicators, World Bank Development Indicators and Polity Measures of Democracy. Their substantial econometric and statistical evidence shows a strong connection between a free press and both economic development and democracy.

For example, overall, governance indicators for the Sub-Saharan Africa region show dismal progress over the last decade. Comparing the free press countries to not free press countries, however, there is a notable difference. In contrast to not free press countries' tendency towards autocracy, free press countries are not only more likely to be democratic, they have much stronger democracies overall. The measure of democratic strength is positive, significantly higher, and has improved over time for free press countries, whereas the score for not free press countries, while also improving, is still negative. Similarly, and more strikingly, free press countries do notably better in the area of political stability and the absence of violence.

Similarly, countries in Africa with a free press show significantly higher democratic accountability than countries with a not free press. Democratic accountability is defined here as how responsive government is to its people. In principle, the less responsive a government is, the more likely it is to fall—peacefully in a democratic society, but possibly violently in a non-democratic society. Countries with a free press are better able to provide the information about government activities and decisions that enable citizens to hold their governments to account. As one might expect when a country's press is free to hold the government accountable for its actions, free press countries also experience less corruption. Not free press countries have markedly worse scores.

Additionally, one important sign of the increasing economic stability and growth of a country is a decline in reliance on foreign aid (Official Development Assistance, or ODA). They found a striking pattern emerges when the importance of ODA to the overall GDP is compared between free press countries and not free press countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the not free press African countries over the last decade, foreign aid has been on the rise overall (though falling in the aftermath of the global economic crisis), while for countries with a free press, foreign aid as a percentage of GDP is significantly lower than for countries lacking one, and has held steady over time.

A business-friendly environment is another indicator of good prospects for further economic development. An analysis of various measures of the business environment in Africa revealed that free press countries are much more conducive to business than not free press countries. This is likely due, at least in part, to the fact that a free press can reveal detrimental government

interference in business, and because free flows of information about business and business regulation support a strong market economy.

Thus, in general, African countries with a free press are more likely to have democratic political systems, enjoy better governance, offer better conditions for business within the country, and are less dependent on foreign aid than not free press countries. All of these factors are indications of better institutions and are critical factors of economic development.

**So, there is clear evidence that a free press, better development, and better governance are all linked.**

### **Recent Technological Advances**

The events of the so-called Arab Spring threw into relief the potential of both new and social media to transform countries at lightning speed.

Whilst there are many arguments for support of traditional media it is impossible to ignore the huge advances going on in the field of new media technologies.

The growth of both cellular and digital technology has moved to parts of the world where the lack of effective communications infrastructure has traditionally been one of the biggest obstacles to growth. Mobile networks are proliferating throughout the developing world and digital technologies are altering the way individuals' access news. Increasing levels of internet penetration in developing countries, the growing use of mobile devices for news and information messaging, and the proliferation of blogs and social networking sites have all created new ways to get and share information. This is nowhere more clearly visible than in Africa.

Mobile access in Africa has consistently exceeded the world average since 2005. For example in Kenya, even regions that are relatively isolated and disadvantaged show strong use of mobile phones. The widespread use of mobile phones and SMS had a significant effect on the 2007 elections, as citizens were able to message the outside world even in the face of a government-mandated media blackout, texting that the elections were fraudulent and violence was rampant.

In Nigeria, new subscribers are signing up with mobile phone services at a rate of almost one every second. African farmers can decide what crops to plant by checking prices at local markets using their cell phones.

Across Africa, the mobile phone is becoming a cornerstone for industries like healthcare and agriculture. For many it is making banking truly accessible for the first time. Close to 18 million Kenyans use their mobile phone as a bank account, depositing and transferring money remotely using M-Pesa to avoid excessive travel and wait times.

A growing body of research worldwide is showing that mobile phones can improve public health by connecting people with doctors for the first time, reminding people to take medications or bring children in for vaccinations, and even enabling doctors in remote areas to view, update, and manage crucial clinical records.

Cheap and ready-for-use mobile devices are removing existing barriers and are empowering citizens to connect to governments to access a wide range of information and services in a number of policy areas, e.g. legal information, health, education, finance, employment, transportation and public safety.

However, in areas of the world that are sometimes too remote to get a newspaper delivered, let alone access the internet, radio is still the predominant source of information.

Radio is king in Africa, with 61% of Africans reporting that they listen to the radio every day. This rate is more than double that of the next closest region, the Middle East and North Africa, at 29%.

But mobile phones now provide a first opportunity at two way communications and a chance for citizens to participate in the debates that affect their lives. Mobile interaction "closes the loop", enabling audiences to listen to a discussion, contribute insight, and then hear their views and encourage additional participation. More importantly, this enables more people to have a voice in the discussions that affect them.

What these new technologies are doing is growing the importance of old and traditional media in communities that were out of reach, and had no means of dialogue through the media. Communities have been given a voice, but mobile phones have also given a new lease of life to old form media.

As Ethan Zuckerman of Harvard University's Berkman Center has observed, "considered together, radios and mobile phones can serve as a broad-distribution, participatory media network with some of the same citizen-media dynamics of the Internet, but accessible to a much wider, and non-literate audience".

The ubiquity of mobile technology presents an exciting opportunity even for those in "last mile communities" to interact with radio shows using a tool they already have. The growth and penetration of mobile connections, and innovation in relation to these media will only grow during the period of the next white paper.

## **Conclusion**

At a time when there is substantial debate in the international arena about the value of Aid and whether it works, many voices from Africa and elsewhere argue for a change of strategy (see Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid*). In this context it make sense to invest more in strengthening institutions within developing countries and building skills and capacity within the local population to strengthen civil society and the necessary institutions of a strong society and economy. Supporting Independent Media is one part of this solution.

This submission highlights the powerful and undeniable contribution that a free and independent media makes to development. The evidence has shown how investment in media support can help in developing countries' long-term economic and democratic prospects. There is clear evidence presented that a free press, better development, and better governance are all linked.

Media development activities can include journalism and management skills training, ethics training, support for better press laws and licensing regulations, creation of journalists code of ethics, establishing journalists networks, revising university curricula, teaching media literacy, and beyond.

Whilst acknowledging that the budget of the Irish Aid department is constrained, it is hoped that this will change within the period of the next white paper as the Irish economy recovers. The author would argue for continued, if not, increased support for media development. And as with other international funders there is potential also to be explored in the joint force of media with new technologies.

This author would suggest that Irish Aid could get involved with other donors in larger 'donor baskets' to support large scale training and media support projects. There are many media organisations such as BBC Media Action, Internews, and Equal Access that implement media support projects in Irish Aid programme countries and these could be partnered with for training and support projects. These NGO's are also embracing the use of new technologies in their projects, where appropriate, so would be a good introduction to this area. On a smaller scale direct support to local community radio stations in programme countries would help these organisations that try to survive on shoe-string.

These are just some suggestions where Irish Aid could start to investigate how its limited resources could be best used to help in strengthening media in Africa.

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