

Problematizing 'media development' as a bandwagon gets rolling

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Abstract

International initiatives have gained momentum around analysing 'media development' – a notion related to, but generally distinct from, media's contribution to 'development'. The focus on the 'development' of media is conventionally (although not logically) about international interventions in non-dense media environments. The conceptual and normative character around the terminology of 'media development' can be critically interrogated, and the meaning of the phrase revised with the aid of the concepts of 'media mobilization' and 'media density'. The topic can also be contextualized against a historical backdrop, and questioned in terms of its assumptions about media effects. Critical theorization of 'media' also shows the need to go beyond the blinkers of 'old' media.

Keywords

donors, foreign aid, media and democracy, media and development, media assistance, media density, media development, media studies, media sustainability, new media, UNESCO

Introduction

In 1980 UNESCO took up a proposal to mobilize voluntary contributions from industrialized countries to support media in developing countries. The result was the establishment of the International Bureau for the Development of Communication (IPDC), dedicated to the 'development of free and pluralistic media' (see Jayaweera, n.d.). Aligned to this thrust, UNESCO later promoted the Windhoek Declaration in

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1991 and 3 May as World Press Freedom Day. However, prior to all this UNESCO had a long history of involvement in media issues (such as in the New World Information and Communication Order debates). And over the years, the organization has continued to put substantial resources into 'media development' (for example, see www.unesco.org/webworld/ipdc; Orgeret and Rønning, 2002). In 2008, the organization published an elaborated understanding of 'media development'. This comprised a series of indicators which were described as a 'diagnostic tool' to determine areas for assistance and national communication strategies (UNESCO, 2008). As a body that plays an influential role in global standard setting, UNESCO's commendable formalization of its approach to 'media development' warrants attention. This article argues that there is, however, ample room for critique and revision of the UNESCO approach, and indeed the 'media development' paradigm more broadly.

The rise of 'media development' as a notion has also been boosted by the formation of the Global Forum on Media Development (see Internews Europe and the Global Forum for Media Development, 2006; see also gfmf.info/). Around the world, there are bodies dedicated to 'media development', such as the Uganda Media Development Foundation and the Tanzania Media Fund (www.tmf.or.tz/). The European Union has created a website on the topic in relation to Africa (media-dev.eu/).

The scope of the paradigm can be seen in several initiatives that operate in the area. In 2007, the Africa Media Development Initiative – co-ordinated by the BBC World Service Trust (2007) – assessed 17 African countries in terms of: (1) the extent of the 'media sector', (2) media support agencies, (3) media law and regulation, (4) technology, (5) professionalization, and (6) local content production. Between 2006 and 2008, the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa funded what it identified as four interdependent pillars necessary for 'media development': (1) legal and policy environment, (2) access to information, (3) professionalism (quality of information), and (4) viability (financial sustainability). Also operating with a broad conceptualization of 'media development' is the Center for National Media Assistance at the USA's National Endowment for Democracy. For the Center, the development of (independent) media depends on 'strong supporting legs – professional journalists, a supportive legal environment, economically sustainable media, and news literate citizens and public officials' (CIMA, 2008: 3).

Another initiative which relates to the same expanse of concern is the Media Sustainability Index by the International Research and Exchange Center (IREX, 2006; Whitehouse, 2006). This approach refers to five 'criteria' (sometimes also called 'objectives'): (1) the legal situation for media, (2) the professional performance of journalism, (3) a pluralism of news sources, (4) the business viability and editorial independence, and (5) supporting institutions. There is also the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's media barometer (Schellschmidt, 2005), which draws on the wide-ranging scope of the Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa (www1.umn.edu/humanrts/achpr/expressionfreedomdec.html).

These initiatives generally interpret 'media development' from the vantage point of (broadly western-style) democracy, but they are nonetheless more broadly focused than press freedom assessments such as by Reporters Sans Frontieres and Freedom House. 'Media development' is also more wide-ranging in its use than in, for instance, the focus of Singapore's Media Development Agency (mainly a licensing authority, see

www.mda.gov.sg). It can be noted that all these diverse interpretations of – and emphases within – ‘media development’ variously include or exclude particular issues (e.g. some ignore access or technological infrastructure, others exclude media literacy). However, they are not necessarily incompatible (see Banda and Berger, 2008; Becker et al., 2004). At the same time as the ‘media development’ paradigm is associated with democratic thinking, it also conventionally includes activities that focus on the strengthening of media *qua* business institutions. This encompasses work by the Media Development Loan Fund in Prague (www.mdlf.org/), the Ontario Media Development Corporation (www.omdc.on.ca/site11.aspx), South Africa’s Media Development and Diversity Agency (www.mdda.org.za), the Southern African Media Development Fund (www.samdef.com) and the Asia-Pacific Institute For Broadcasting Development (www.aibd.org.my). These bodies concentrate on skills advancement and business sustainability as institutional ends in themselves, and less on democracy-related issues. While economic sustainability may conflict with a democratic or developmental role, the latter outcomes cannot exist without a viable business model (even if not necessarily market-based) (LaMay, 2006, 2007).

Nevertheless when grouped together, all this activity suggests an evolving practice in ‘media development’ that treats the phrase as a meaningful and accepted concept, and which also implies an understanding of what it is not. Thus, the referent of ‘media development’ for many of the groups cited above can be seen as rather different from the issues covered within ICT4D (see www.ict4d.org.uk; www.globalknowledge.org/ict4d). First, the information and communications technology paradigm is not equivalent to a focus on the media as such – it ranges, instead, across telecommunications as well as broadcasting, while also excluding print media. (This separation of ICT and media is assessed later in this article.) Second, ICT4D looks at what ICT can do for development, rather than how to develop the technology itself.

‘Media development’ as generally interpreted is also a distance from ‘media for development’ such as covered in the eponymous journal published by the World Association for Christian Communication (see www.wacc.org.uk). The object of ‘media development’ is the media, the object of ‘media for development’ is the role of media in society. However, there is some overlap and conflation (see Paneerselvan and Nair, 2008), whereby ‘media development’ discourse very often aggregates *both* the development of media institutions *and* developing media roles as a means to other goals (e.g. elections monitoring, safe sex promotion). The link is that developing the media as an end in their own right is perceived as a necessary condition for social goals to be actualized even if the emphasis is on the latter. At the same time, in the practice of ‘media development’, much resourcing to media is indeed directed to issue-specific programmes which do not necessarily address the long-term development of media as such (CIMA, 2008: 27). However, ‘media development’ in this wider-ranging sense is still not equivalent in meaning to that body of knowledge related to the role of media in the very broad (and yet focused) field of ‘development communications’ – for example, in regard to health campaigns (see Inagaki, 2007; Servaes, 2002; www.comminit.com; www.devcomm-congress.org/worldbank/public.asp). Yet, whether emphasized or not, or having a relationship to ‘development communication’ or not, the point is that ‘media development’ is founded on certain assumed political, social and economic effects of

media. There is thus often a blurring between those perspectives that aim for a particular media-scape or media ecology, and those focused on harnessing that system (or parts of it) for particular roles. On its own, however, the teleological focus of the second perspective is only a partial aspect of 'media development', which concept more properly extends to the development of the media sector as such.

Another point about 'media development' is that the discourse commonly (although not inherently) entails the very specific sense of interventions – and especially externally originating proactive steps to 'develop' the media, and usually between North–South developers and 'developees'. Ongoing 'organic' developments within the media (e.g. a newspaper starting a website on its own initiative and resources) are not generally perceived as being a function of 'media development' interventions. Even initiatives like the formation of Al Jazeera, despite being significant for gauging how 'developed' Qatar's media system is, are not very often described as an example of 'media development'. Instead, the phrase tends to focus on exogenous ways to initiate or influence such 'development' (e.g. US support for Al Arabiya). It is also worth noting that the growth of media historically through systems like postal subsidies in the US (see Starr, 2004), and even contemporary de- and reregulation as a result of civil society or corporate lobbying, is not automatically perceived as 'media development'. Rather, the phrase commonly refers to interventionist projects, most of which are driven by an ulterior purpose and instrumentalist understanding of media (for instance, regarding media as a means to reduce corruption or HIV-infection). In conveying this perspective, one study of the agencies involved in 'media development' has been titled *Media Missionaries* (Hume, 2004). Elsewhere, reference has been made to 'the would-be media system architect' (LaMay, 2006: 51). No matter how common it is, however, this disconnect between external interventions to develop media, and internal developments within media, limits the utility of the concept of 'media development'. This article accordingly argues for a revision.

Disentangling the components of 'media development'

'Media development' in the sense of interventions is sometimes used synonymously with the slightly less ideologically tinted phrase of 'media assistance' (see, for example, Kalathil, 2008). 'Assistance' of course still has very particular (positive) connotations, as do the terms 'support' or 'strengthen' (see UNECA, 2007). From a different point of view, however, many interventions could be designated 'media manipulation' or 'media meddling'. A less value-laden phrase is 'media mobilization' – i.e. interventions that may be regarded positively or negatively, but which either way are intended to capacitate media for one purpose or another.

In this interventionist sense, both terms ('media development' and 'media mobilization') designate a means to an end. An example is training actions intended to empower journalists to better report on elections, gender or minorities. But in another sense, 'media development' is also sometimes used to convey the meaning of an outcome – a consequence of a given media mobilization activity (e.g. journalists who have been trained in reporting on elections). This dual meaning – *doing* 'media development' (a process) to *produce* 'media development' (a state) – creates incoherence, as is shown later. Going further, added confusion can arise because 'media development' conceived

as outcome (an object that is constituted by a stage of desired 'arrival' for media) is also sometimes conflated with other ultimate outcomes (such as democratic or developmental effects), whereas it is arguably better discerned as being an end which, in turn, may serve as a means to yet further goals. The assumptions in such a chain of cause and effect are discussed later in this article.

This complexity of 'media development' is noticeably collapsed within UNESCO's formal conceptualization. Drawn up with some consultation (in which the author of this article was included), the UNESCO schema is based on an initial model (see Puddephatt, 2007) which in turn consists of numerous indicators which are grouped under five 'categories' which indiscriminately mix together the two senses of media development as an outcome, and as activities towards that outcome. While an assessment of the field needs to look at both areas of focus, it is confusing to use 'media development' to cover distinct (albeit interrelated dimensions). To illustrate this, one can begin by noting that, according to UNESCO, the five categories make up 'a holistic picture of the media environment' which can enable analysts to construct 'a comprehensive map of the media ecology' (UNESCO, 2008: 10). The reference here is to 'media development' as an object (an 'ecology') rather than an activity. In this rendition, such an object would not necessarily hinge on 'media development' intervention activity, and this is a welcome step to freeing 'media development' from being treated as only those outcomes that result from external interventions. But, as is shown, the difficulty is that the UNESCO framework has means and ends tangled together within the object to which 'media development' refers.

In summary, the UNESCO schema covers (1) the legal environment in regard to free speech and pluralistic ownership; (2) the performance of the media regarding diverse voices and democratic discourse; (3) the state of media skills; (4) media-related associations; and (5) the degree of public access to media infrastructure. (Media literacy is somehow included within the second 'outcome' area.) Like most other 'media development' schemes (for example those cited above), these various elements are all ranked equally. But, arguably, the legal environment is more of a basic variable that underpins the state of the others – a precondition for 'media development', rather than an outcome or feature of a 'developed' media as such. In this sense, it is a means that makes possible (though not inevitably) certain ends (e.g. performance on diversity and democracy). It is part of the enabling environment (Price and Krug, 2000), not the media as such. These distinctions between media context and the media-as-such are significant. Conflating them under the polysemous phrase of 'media development' hinders any assessment of 'chicken-egg' questions that confront intervention strategies. For instance, it obscures the issue of whether media are seen as a factor in creating a convivial communications environment (through policy reform, agenda-setting, etc.), or as a function of such an environment. It does not help address the question of 'which comes first' in the sense of interdependencies and causalities. There are immense strategic implications in this for media mobilization practices, and accordingly the variables highlighted by UNESCO should be rearranged into categories with varying levels of significance.

A deeper problem underlying the UNESCO elaboration of 'media development' is that it does not explicitly surface what core phenomenon the five categories are supposed

to be describing. This is because a general definition of 'media development' is lacking. The categories thus play a circular role: they are 'media development' and 'media development' is them. But missing in this is a separate overall notion of the concept, the existence of which could communicate a logic of how the five categories are supposed to add up to an object beyond their distinct dimensions. An analogy would be saying that the elements of democracy are rule of law, universal franchise, free press, etc. – without giving a more generalized 'essence' of what 'democracy' is meant to mean at a more abstract level. To take a Hegelian analogy, we are not apprised of what qualities would enable us to classify apples, pears and oranges as counting within (and towards) the generic category of fruit. Without such a level of broad essential definition, it is difficult to distinguish means and ends in 'media development', with the knock-on consequence being that cause and effect are hard to strategize.

Exploiting the analogy further, the point can be made that tomatoes count as fruit scientifically, but they are vegetables in terms of the social conventions of most western cuisine. By the same token, without an explicit definition of 'media development', social conventions at work in elaborating the elements of the concept are concealed. That there is a particular normative position embedded in the UNESCO schema is evident in UNESCO's inclusion of public broadcasters as an indicator of 'media development'. The same applies to its underplaying the possibility of the genre of public broadcasting (across various kinds of broadcasters). As a result, only a country with a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation style of broadcaster would probably count as close to being developed on this particular indicator. Conversely, the rise of Fox News in the USA would not change the characterization of that country's television landscape as being un- or underdeveloped in the UNESCO criteria (see also CIMA, 2008: 75). From a different normative position, there appears to be a relative underplaying of business aspects and sustainability issues as a necessary feature for rendering a particular mediascape 'developed'. Likewise, the notion of media literacy is inescapably normative, whatever content is given to it. The general problem in all this is that the features that define the object of 'media development' become subject to particular cultural and even political preferences.

In addition, while much emphasis is placed on the informational role of media, and while the entertainment role is touched on, there is scant recognition of a normative definition relevant to developing countries in which 'media development' status might include media playing a very specifically educational role (e.g. on HIV-AIDS). An additional critique of the UNESCO normative bent has been raised by Paneerselvan and Nair (2008: 3), who charge that the indicators neglect dialogue and discourse as essential features of 'media development'.

Another questionable normative issue is the claim by UNESCO that its system is not intended for cross-country comparisons. This position appears to be more a function of international sensitivities within this intergovernmental organization than a result of any inherent methodological barrier. In addition, despite its evident holism, the schema also expressly presents itself as suitable to be dismantled into a diagnostic toolkit of disparate elements, and therefore as amenable to application in a (politically) piecemeal manner (CIMA, 2008: 76). One research attempt to apply the UNESCO framework (to Mozambique) ended up adding an extra section to take cognisance of ICTs, community radio and community multimedia centres (Rønning, 2008). In other words, the UNESCO

approach can also slide into normative eclecticism, which reduces its general utility. In all this, however, UNESCO is not alone. The dangers of embedding a narrowly normative approach in conceptualizing 'media development' are also evident in many other approaches. For instance, the IREX and Freedom House indices have been linked to a pro-US bias (Becker et al., 2004; Behmer, 2008).

In the face of such problems, a different approach to conceptualizing 'media development' can be considered. This commences by delinking 'media development' from exclusively external interventions, and also clearly differentiating it into activities and outcomes. In addition, 'media development' as object is also then differentiated as to which variables are preconditions (means), and which designate media features per se. Finally, contentious normative criteria need to be set aside in the first instance, and a wide consensus reached on a basic definition of 'media development'. This is not to assert that a value-free position is possible, nor to imply that the normative is unimportant. For instance, a gender and/or generational component (or absence thereof) in defining 'media development' will entail value-statements one way or another. However, the argument being made here is that as far as possible, common (and explicit) denominators need to be found for defining what, at minimum, constitutes 'media development' at a general level and can serve as cross-cultural currency.

In this regard, it is possible to limit the term to designating, as an object, media having increasing capacity to generate and circulate information, which can in turn be described as a 'deepening' of media density. In this view, phenomena like the explosion of tabloid newspapers, or the expansion of a government broadcaster, would be registered as 'media development' (irrespective of whether such are seen as normatively desirable or not). UN agencies and modernization theorists (e.g. Lerner and Schramm, 1976; Schramm, 1964; and more recently UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2009) have for years pointed to the importance of newspapers and TV sets per 1000 of national population, etc. The scaffolding for interpreting 'media development' can logically and consensually be built along these lines, although also keeping in mind that what constitutes these media platforms is historically defined. For example, internet publications may well be more quantitatively relevant today in many developed countries in terms of information consumption than the number of print-based newspapers.

To take the argument further, 'media density' can be further analysed in terms of the various genres of public that media enable. In particular, one can focus specifically on the expansion of *journalism* as made possible by an expansion of media platforms. To take an example from the BBC World Service Trust (2007) research, for instance, the number of professional journalists per 1000 citizens in a given society would seem to be at least one valuable indicator all could agree upon. In the same manner, what then becomes relevant from this viewpoint is the presence not just of citizen bloggers and citizen media, but particularly the volume (and quality) of journalism that emanates from them.

There are indeed normative elements in singling out journalism from, for instance, entertainment or advertising, but few people would regard this genre as a mere marginal part of 'media development'. To propose it as a primary focus is not to say it is an exclusive focus, and it is at least an object that most people would agree should be a major part of 'media development'. Moving on, it is clear that normative colouring continues to be

an issue in defining what kinds of information and communication constitute journalism as such. But this too could be defined with minimum discord at a very high level of normative abstraction. For example, it can be described as activities which mean 'content' gathered, organized, analysed and circulated to multiple consumers and which 'content' pertains to a notion of 'public interest' and is represented as 'realist communication' (Berger, 2000). The point in defining 'media density' is not to fetishize particular kinds of sociological and institutional characteristics, and/or media technologies, but to operate at a more abstract (albeit related) level that strives for minimal definition that can achieve maximum normative commonality such as around the desirability of journalism made possible by media platforms.

If, for current purposes, we interpret the object of 'media development' as incorporating (at least) a basis for expanding *journalism*, certain consequences follow. One can, drawing from broader development theory (see Berger, 1992), refuse (at one level) a distinction between media 'growth' and media 'development'. The UNESCO normative view would hold that 'development' of media is not just growth or expansion of the sector, and therefore not just a quantitative question, but pivotally also about 'quality' issues. Accordingly, UNESCO's schema points to indicators such as (more) ethical journalism being practised. Such measures clearly entail normative positioning, and on such a basis one can indeed discern degrees in the quality of journalism that is in circulation. But making them essential to the definition of 'media development' per se, ends up in misleadingly characterizing some 'media-dense' societies as nevertheless lacking in 'media development' because despite massive media infrastructure and circulation of journalism, they lack 'ethical journalism'. In the UNESCO view, it is even possible (and clearly confusing) to be able to regard the formation or expansion of a tabloid newspaper or governmental broadcaster as counting as growth but not as 'media development'. Such a value-driven assessment can produce a blindspot regarding important developments which do not accord with the particular normative take that underpins the UNESCO framework.

On the other hand, the UNESCO position also logically allows for a scenario whereby a characterization of 'media development' is possible even without any effective increase of media density. For instance, there could be qualitative development without quantitative expansion. For example, this might be a government-oriented broadcaster transforming towards a public-service model, but without there being any extra stations, news programmes or audience expansion. In the UNESCO view, this scenario would count as 'media development'. In contrast to this view, however, it can be argued that, in the long term, what matters most is the extent to which there are increases in the amount of journalism in circulation. In other words, 'media development' can therefore be understood, in part, as the 'deepening of media density' which increases media infrastructure and/or the institutional/organizational base – which is necessary (albeit not sufficient) to undergird increases in the production and consumption of journalism.

'Media mobilization' – what and who

As noted earlier, 'media development' may also refer to (external) activities targeted towards deepening density, i.e. to the concept of 'media mobilization'. This

phenomenon is often actualized by a myriad of agencies, usually aligned to specific normative views of a desired media-scape and its assumed role in society. Formations active in media mobilization – whether by financing activities or executing them directly – include bilateral government aid bodies or governmental organizations (GOs) like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); multilateral international governmental organizations (IGOs), such as the World Bank and UNESCO; private foundations such as the Soros Open Society Institute or quasi-private groups like the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (see Becker and Vlad, 2005; Freier, 2001). There are also organizations like universities, expert consultancies and press freedom non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and even international religious organizations. The Global Forum for Media Development website in 2009 referred to a network of 500 members engaged in ‘media development’ in 100 countries (gfmf.info/index.php/about_gfmf/). In some instances, national governments also allocate resources either directly or via agencies, and companies may do likewise as part of corporate social responsibility programmes or to leverage publicity or influence.

Maps of media interventions indicate that the lion’s share of resources is contributed by western bilateral agencies for operations abroad, although China has also recently contributed to African media (Banda, 2008b; Copson, 2003; Hume, 2004; Price, 2001). Many domestic ‘media development’ organizations are, in effect, contracted intermediary bodies (Howard, 2003; Miller, 2003; Price et al., 2002), although their local roots and interests may dilute donor interests. At any rate, a given ‘package’ of media mobilization typically entails a type of resource and scope of operation, a specific implementing agency and assumptions about desired impact. The combination impacts on power relations, on which nationals implement programmes and on what kinds of activities receive backing. The goals may be to sustain particular kinds of media in crisis contexts, to incubate entirely new outlets, to contribute to fair elections, or to achieve state strategic objectives (Price and Noll, 2002).

In all this, media mobilization is frequently linked to former colonies with cultural or linguistic ties to donors, or to states where conflict threatens national interest or regional stability of donor nations (Price et al., 2002: 53). Much media mobilization is thus informed by national interest and historical factors, although there are also institutional and environmental factors, political economy, preferences of individual decision-makers and the philosophies of donor organizations (Price, 2001; Price et al., 2002: 40). Differences exist in relation to how donors understand and apply media mobilization as a result of different national journalistic traditions, politico-economic positions and geopolitical considerations (Kasoma, 1999; Miller, 2002). Some historical examples are support for commercial radio (USAID and Internews in Afghanistan), as compared to community radio aid (Danida via South Africa’s National Community Radio Forum), with both being distinct from promoting public service broadcasting (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung via the Southern African Broadcasting Association). The late Zambian scholar Professor Francis Kasoma highlighted national influences as follows:

... the French would see state-ownership and control as a basic approach to the press serving a democratic political set-up... the British would support a privately owned press or at least one owned by a public corporation similar to the British Broadcasting Corporation. The Canadians would support a mixture of private and publicly owned press but not a government owned press, while the Americans would support only a privately owned press. (Kasoma, 1999: 17)

The analysis above undercuts articulations of apolitical ‘technical assistance’ (see Price and Krug, 2000: 47) and moves us away from a romanticized view of ‘media development’, and into some of the politics of media mobilization (see also Banda, 2008a). This becomes even clearer through noting that international media mobilization may be used by governmental or linked agencies as an instrument of ‘public diplomacy’ on behalf of a given state (Miller, 2002: 13). Here, the purpose is mainly to propagate a ‘public opinion environment’ to encourage target countries’ leaders and citizens to ‘make decisions supportive of the advocate country’s foreign policy objectives’ (McClellan, 2004). Private foundations may differ inasmuch as their involvement is argued to form part of ‘more philanthropic goals’ (Miller, 2002). In both cases, however, international media mobilization is not neutral but instead amounts to what has been dubbed a ‘foreign policy of media space’ – a concern to shape the structure and content of media in another state for one reason or another (Price, 2001). This led Kasoma (1999: 11) to invent the ‘donor-driven theory of the press’. There are, nonetheless, many variations in specific policy. Bettina Peters of the Global Forum for Media Development suggests that differences may depend on how interventions are conducted (3 May 2007, personal communication):

- Directly from donor to beneficiary (media, journalism school, regulatory authority, etc.).
- From donor to international media NGO to beneficiary.
- From donor to international media NGO to local media NGO to beneficiary.
- From donor to local media NGO to beneficiary.

In her view, the level of influence of governmental foreign policy goals varies depending on this relationship. She also notes that many international and local media NGOs are genuinely concerned with assisting ‘media development’ objectives that are defined by local players.

At the same time, it is worth observing that a ‘media development’ industry evolves its own vested institutional interests. In this regard, so-called ‘media support’ can often end up akin to much other ‘development’ practice, where little of the aid actually reaches the intended recipients but is rather absorbed by intermediary ‘developers’, often from the donor countries, who act as consultants, trainers, project administrators, etc. (see Berger, 1995: 3). On the other side, ‘developees’ become adept at relating to the market for ‘media development’ resources – for example, by either becoming donor-driven, or by proactively ‘selling’ particular services and outcomes to the funders whose rationale depends on delivery in these areas (see LaMay, 2007).

The extent to which the impact of such media mobilization actually promotes the object of ‘media development’, and thence second-level effects, is the subject of the next section.

Assumptions about the role of ‘media development’

‘Media mobilization’ is assumed to promote certain social consequences (Miller, 2003). Paneerselvan and Nair (2008: 4) criticize this teleology from the standpoint that media are of intrinsic value as a development indicator, hence their ‘instrumentalist role is but purely a corollary’. (It could also be argued that certain kinds of media performance are not just a means to democracy, but an essential part of the definition of democracy.) At any rate, very seldom, it seems, is ‘media development’ considered purely as an end itself. Exceptions perhaps are ‘media cluster’ initiatives such as the Dubai Media City (see Picard, 2008) – although even here, one can extrapolate intended spin-off goals such as foreign investment and national prestige. In general, the significance of media in regard to knowledge, attitudes and behaviours has been aligned to (varying) notions of democracy and human and economic development (Miller, 2002). Accordingly, ‘media development’ is conventionally treated as contributing to ‘good governance’, education, agriculture, healthcare, nation building, etc. (see, for example, Inoguchi, 2002). Other goals have been institutional reform, development of economic markets, expansion of public discourse on policy issues and citizen participation (Howard, 2003; Kumar, 2004; Price et al., 2002; World Bank, 2002).

To realize such ‘second-level’ goals, ‘media development’ is widely understood to imply that a level of ‘development’ of media as a sector itself is a necessary (if not sufficient) precondition. For example, it is assumed that enhancing the media environment (such as promoting press freedom laws), and improving access to media and journalistic professionalism, are foundational to wide political participation and to socioeconomic development (as opposed to more limited communicational arrangements which confine these processes to elites, ‘experts’ or ‘distorted’ markets). ‘Media mobilization’ is thus typically targeted at areas like media law reform and advocacy, professional journalism institutions, financial aid to news organizations, developing business sustainability of media outlets, building or rebuilding infrastructure for media, reducing barriers to entering the sector, training journalists, competitions and awards, etc. (Howard, 2003; Kumar, 2004; Myers, 2008; Price et al., 2002).

It is generally the case that there is a link between the specific method and target of media mobilization, and the ultimate objective that is supposed to eventuate. An example is training journalists to do investigative reporting, which is then presumed to lead to improved and increased journalistic practice within the media. In turn, this outcome is then supposed to contribute to ‘good’ political and economic governance. Such an ultimate end result highlights once again normative underpinnings of much ‘media development’ activity – something that is especially discernible when seen in terms of a conceptualization of ‘media development’ that transcends narrow normative specifics (as argued earlier).

As indicated earlier, much thinking around ‘media development’ operates with a (broadly western-style) democratic agenda. This may be distinct from a (socioeconomic) development agenda, but both vantage points (democracy and development) may serve

as rationales for media mobilization, and they may often share similar assumptions about media effects.

To examine this, one can first deal with the democratic agenda. Giving credence to a particular perspective of democracy and media's role therein, the World Bank Institute has linked media freedom and media pluralism to democracy in research that found that high levels of perceived media independence are associated with lower levels of perceived corruption. The same research also found that high levels of perceived media freedom are correlated with more responsive public actors (World Bank, 2002: 182; see also Kornegay, 1995). Notwithstanding this, the mere existence of a diverse and plural media is no guarantee of an effective antidote to corrupt or despotic state actions (Berger, 2002: 31). The point is that assumptions that 'media development' will inevitably contribute to democracy are open to debate and question.

The same assessment applies to a related motivation for media mobilization. This motivation is based on reducing the potential for media to work against democratic values. Thus, the media's role in conflict prevention has also been a factor in some 'media development' rationales. After the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, donors perceived that the media could be a force in conflict or its resolution (Deutsche Welle, 2008; Howard, 2003: 8). A minor industry has subsequently arisen around developing peace journalism and journalism in conflict and post-conflict situations. But again, it can be hard to show general outcomes flowing from basic assumptions in this line of thinking.

Turning to the 'development' rationale, it has not always been perceived that 'development' requires 'media development'. For instance, development agencies have regarded media support as less of a priority in sub-Saharan Africa, especially where they concluded that 'conflict, disease and poverty' were of greater concern (Price et al., 2002: 53). In this way, 'media development' has often been marginalized within efforts to promote 'development'. It is in more recent years that groups like the World Bank have paid more attention to the development role of media. Today, 'media development' is increasingly assumed to be positive in terms of its relationship with development (Graves, 2007). This echoes early modernization communications thinking, where communication policy was seen as an integral component of development strategies (Berger, 1995; Boutros-Ghali, 2002; Lerner and Schramm, 1976; Schramm, 1964). In turn, that perspective implied that the appropriate instruments of mass communication (the media) must be strategically employed (Boutros-Ghali, 2002). Historically, this focus was not exclusively on independent journalism, but on co-opted reporting, social marketing, edutainment and the like, and modernization discourse tended to see media as a simple disseminator of innovations. More recent analysis, however, has developed a nuanced understanding that includes 'horizontal' communications such as community radio as a factor not just in promoting development, but in also defining its meaning. However, history also shows that it is also apparent that media (including the controversial practice of 'development journalism') do not necessarily deliver 'development', just as they do not intrinsically promote democracy.

Another body of thinking highlights the way that development is supported by a free and critical press that can limit corruption and hold government and elites accountable. In this way, and following Amartya Sen,¹ it is asserted that free media contribute to

productive economic growth and human development (Locksley, 2009; Stapenhurst, 2000; Stiglitz, 2002: 28; World Bank, 2002: 193). In other words, it is assumed that media's liberal watchdog role in democracy also translates simultaneously into a development role. This is complemented by a different democratic emphasis which sees especially community radio playing a role in empowering civil society. An example is research that examines cases of a dual role played by community radio (see, for example, Jallof, 2004, 2005, n.d.). Whichever the inflection of democratic significance, it is also the case that democracy does not always generate development. Whether integrated or exclusive, the emphases on democratization and development aspects of media mobilization should note that mass communication of any sort will not automatically result in either or both. Further, while much focus has been on what 'media development' might do for democracy and development, there is a case to focus attention on a connection the other way around. It may well be that these two phenomena do more to 'develop' the media than do many 'media mobilizations' (although the impact of the latter would only be dismissed by pure cynics).

The whole issue of the impact of media mobilization points to the major matter of monitoring and evaluation as to whether 'media development' interventions are, or can be, assessed for any particular chain of consequences. This has been a concern of many practitioners in the field – as well as a growing concern of donors (see Berger, 2001; Jallof, 2005; LaMay, 2007). In 2009, a group of mainly German NGOs set up a wiki on exactly this topic (www.mediaME-wiki.net). What makes for complications, however, is the fact that most media interventions do not easily lend themselves to simple 'return on investment' studies. The confusing conceptualization of 'media development' as an object does not help either.

Defining 'media' in 'media development'

The UNESCO framework reflects the structure of the organization's base, in that it implies that each nation-state should individually aspire to 'media development' – thereby underplaying global information flows, differences in language mix and market sizes and international divisions of communications labour. For the purposes of promoting a particular national media topography (and assumed role in society), the UNESCO model has its place. But even here, it is important to consider the global context of media-relevant law, policy, investment, trade, education and infrastructure such as satellites and undersea cables, hardware and software. For instance, a society's capacity to produce journalistic or other content for export is an important consideration in assessing its state of 'media development'. To take another case, a country's rating ought to lose 'media development' points if its political regime also blocks significant foreign websites (see Freedom House, 2009). However, for different purposes, other scales of impact may be relevant. For instance, Paneerselvan and Nair (2008: 6, 10) are strongly critical of the nation-state horizon, arguing that 'media development' should be assessed at the (lesser) level of 'spheres of influence' that are exercised by 'media development' organizations.

Part of the problem in UNESCO's having fixed nationally bounded blinkers to a definition of 'media development' is the vagueness of what constitutes the 'media' that are being developed. With an eye to changing technologies, the concept of media needs

defining in more general terms than media platforms as we know them. For a start, it should encompass any technology and genre which plays a mass communications role. And – as argued earlier – media can be assessed in terms of journalistic content as distinct from, say, the content of most ringtones. Accordingly, the spread of cellphones is not automatically coterminous with an actualized increase in production and reception of journalism on a mass communications scale. In short, without defining media, it is hard to say, for instance, how relevant cellphone penetration is to ‘media development’, whatever the spatial scale.

As hinted at earlier, in many of its forms, media mobilization (as distinct from ‘communications for development’ – as in www.communicationforsocialchange.org) is most often associated with interventions targeting, not the media more broadly, but specifically *journalism*. The parlance, however, seldom states this explicitly because most journalism until recently has not existed outside the institution of the mass media. However, this historical linkage obscures the way that ICTs are disrupting the dependence of journalism on the media.

For the purposes of this article, ‘media’ may be taken to refer to any channel which is used as a carrier of ‘journalism’ to multi-point destinations (Berger, 2002: 44). To date, within ‘media development’, this has tended to focus on traditional unidirectional mass media channels – newspapers, radio and television that are distributed using analogue technologies (Kumar, 2004; Miller, 2002, 2003; Price et al., 2002). More recently, some media mobilization (for instance by Dutch NGO Hivos – www.hivos.nl) has been directed to projects focused on citizen journalism via blogging. But the limits to deepening ICT density in developing countries means that such potential media have not displaced the traditional focus of ‘media development’ on print and broadcast institutions. What is less understandable, however, is that within ‘media development’ discourse and practice, traditional platforms are still often conceived as stand-alone media as per the era preceding digital convergence and multi-platform publishing.

Nonetheless, an ongoing drive towards ‘information societies’ strongly suggests the need for the inclusion of ‘new media’ to the mix. But because these ‘new media’ possess the potential to redefine media, journalism and the way these impact on democracy and development, and vice versa, traditional mobilization assumptions are challenged (see Inoguchi, 2002; Kalathil, 2008).

The existing emphasis on traditional news media and journalism by international media mobilization derives from assumptions that democratic potential is embedded in historical western experience (Berger, 2000; Howard, 2003; Kasoma, 1999; McConnell and Becker, 2002; Miller, 2003). It is the case that there has also been a complementary ‘media support’ thrust in the form of support for amateurs working in community radio, which is participatory rather than professional. However, new media practices contrast with both these targets of media mobilization. For example, citizen journalism and blogging challenge the status of institution-driven journalism, as well as the occupational ideology of professional journalists and journalism. At large, the internet decentralizes the privileged position of the media to interpose itself between source and user (Marshall and Burnett, 2003). It also alters the spatial horizon of community- or nationally based media (Lister, 2003).

All this has profound implications for the assumed democratic and/or developmental role of media (and journalism), and any associated mobilization strategies. For instance, should donors prioritize citizen media or NGO media which could empower grassroots and alternative 'journalists' to hold the powerful to account – or should they assist with specialized new media training and facilities for the 'professional' journalists working in traditional media organizations? Should involvement in broadcast liberalization be switched towards advocacy around telecommunications and internet law and policy? The options correlate with diverse ideological, strategic and pragmatic preferences.

A further point to make is that not only do new media provide new opportunities to promote democracy and/or development directly, some forms (as in *Craigslist* for instance) can also threaten the economic viability of traditional mass media outlets which have funded their journalism (through advertising).

Overall, what these observations point to is the importance of unbundling the meanings of media, and revising the concept of 'media development' to acknowledge the integration of ICT and media worlds, and also to disaggregate journalism from media, and propose a sub-category of 'journalism development', and related sub-categories like 'journalism mobilization' and 'journalism density'.

Conclusion

This article has argued that in its common usage, the conceptualization of 'media development' is marred by a conflation of means and ends, lack of definition and permeation by narrow normative views as regards essential characteristics. A better understanding requires the concepts of 'media density' and 'media mobilization'. Even then, however, the significance of media mobilization in terms of the ultimate goals being sought is based on premises which call out for monitoring and evaluation of impact. The paradigm also falls short as regards assuming old media, in national media systems, as the appropriate object for 'media mobilization'.

Thus, although a bandwagon of 'media development' appears to be gaining momentum, it can benefit from greater conceptual and analytical clarity. Indeed, such is essential if 'media development' interventions in practice are to more effectively assess media and make an impact thereon – and through this – make a difference to journalism, democracy and development within an increasingly integrated (albeit uneven) communications world.

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Notes

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1. Sen (1981) famously observed that no substantial famine has ever occurred in any country with a relatively free press.

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