HOW TO ASSESS YOUR MEDIA LANDSCAPE: A Toolkit Approach

global forum for media development
GFMD

This toolkit surveys some of the instruments available for assessing media development. It sets out advice around clarifying the purpose and focus of assessment, and how this impacts upon the issues around choosing, creating and using the best tools for assessing some aspect of the media landscape. It tests existing tools providing practical advice on assessment and problems of data availability, collection and analysis. It provides examples of different approaches to monitoring impact of media development.

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Introduction

The media development community has grown in stature over the past fifteen years. What started as a small community very much on the outer edge of the development community has seen its role in development become broadly accepted and understood. When issues of good governance and economic growth are discussed in the development community, the role of the media is increasingly seen as central to success. Post-conflict and peace building programs increasingly recognize the centrality of media development to their efforts.

This maturation of the sector can be seen in the increase in funding and programs by bilateral and multilateral donors and in the growing efforts to organize and coordinate the community of media development organizations. The increasing efforts at coordination and organization of the field stem from a growing recognition that the field must work harder to professionally present its methodologies, successes, and impact on the broader development agenda if it is to ensure its place in the development agenda over the long-run.

The recently established Global Forum for Media Development seeks to, among other goals, facilitate and promote improved monitoring and evaluation in the sector with the goal of better designing projects and demonstrating the effectiveness of media development projects in the larger development context. This paper presents an approach to developing a toolkit for monitoring and evaluation that will serve as a resource for media development practitioners. The paper itself does not constitute a fully developed toolkit and as such it does not offer a predetermined set of indicators. Rather, it provides guidance on data sources, existing tools, and analysis of data for either comprehensive assessment and evaluation or for analysis of specific subsectors of the media (e.g., media law, journalism).

However, there exists no real "toolkit" for conducting such work. Organizations and donors frequently "reinvent the wheel" for every new project and do not use existing and proven approaches. A "toolkit" that offers guidance on monitoring and evaluation and gathers successful M&E approaches used by others will help advance the field by highlighting best practices and demonstrating successful approaches to assessment, analysis, and monitoring and evaluation.

To be useful and effective, the toolkit must be able to deal with some of the issues that have troubled the sector. These include, including some discussed above:

- *Lack of quantitative data.* Can one quantify quality journalism or a good law? Can one agree on what many argue is actually the reflection of a normative view of the media. On the other hand, in areas where quantitative data makes sense it is often not available – comprehensive ratings of broadcast media, circulation figures of newspapers, advertising spending. In much of the world, this data is sporadic and often of questionable credibility. Any approach to evaluation must acknowledge this reality and develop creative approaches to data gathering and analysis.

- *Lack of comparable data.* Often, one can find data in one country that does not exist in another. One may have reliable audience figures while a neighboring country may not. Data collected one year may not be comparable in methodology to data collected in another year. Many project based assessments develop country specific methodologies and the results gathered cannot be compared across projects. This makes it difficult to develop a broader understanding of lessons learned.

- *Limited resources*. While donors and implementers recognize the importance of evaluation, sufficient funding for extensive research and evaluation is often lacking. As such many sector evaluations are done cheaply – limited human resources are applied to the task, precluding more expensive survey research, and forcing substantial desk research. Creative and cost-efficient methods must be developed and deployed to account for these resource issues.

- *Lack of Information Sharing Mechanisms*. Most media development organizations, both major international and smaller, local NGOs, survive by competing for donor funds. Much of the work they may do that could facilitate evaluation and assessment is not widely shared in the public domain. However, much of the research is available and most organizations are willing to share much of their own work. Organizations such as CIMA and GFMD can be a forum for exchanging this information and a toolkit can highlight some of the more successful approaches.

Given these difficulties, the evaluation and assessment approach outlined below is meant to be flexible and responsive – it must be able to work when large amounts of data are readily available or when such data is scarce. It must work in a print-dominant media sector or one where community radio prevails. It must be scaled from an in-depth assessment of the entire sector, to an assessment of only one area of the sector. The outline is meant to be a first step towards development of a toolkit that will provide practical advice on finding data and surrogate data sources, examining and understanding linkages between the components of a media sector, and complementing existing research with additional on-the-ground and/or desk research.

Assessing Your Media Landscape: Available Instruments, their Role and their Limitations
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This knowledge resource sets out some of the issues you should work through if yout intend to collect information about some aspect of the media. There is a lot of experience to draw from, and what follows below is a guide to some of what exists and how you can use it.

Your purposes will determine your assessment tools, and there is a large selection of both purposes and tools to choose from. Your primary aim may be to generate information for an investigative mission, or to brief lawyers and lobby for legal reform. Maybe, instead, it is to assess how officials are fulfilling an Access to Information law, or possibly you want to mobilise for a civil society campaign on how a state-owned broadcaster should act during an election. You might want to monitor progress over several years, and perhaps compare your situation to international benchmarks or other countries' progress.[1]

Related to your purpose is your scope. If your focus is more narrowly "mass media" rather than the broader "communications", you may not wish to focus on cellphones (because at this stage of their evolution, they are still mainly used as interpersonal devices). If your focus is "journalism" rather than "mass media", you are likely to ignore issues like regulating quotas of local content in music programming.

As well as discussing purpose and scope, this report surveys some of the instruments available. In short, it sets out advice around clarifying your focus, and how this impacts upon choosing, creating and using the best tools for assessing some aspect of the media landscape.

1. Surveying the survey tools

No need to reinvent wheels when you decide to do an assessment of media. On the other hand, it does help if you know the range of "wheels" that is on offer. And it helps even more if you know who manufactured them, what size they are, and for what purpose they were originally designed.

Maybe one, or two, models 'as is' are directly relevant to your purposes and your context – if so, you're in luck. But you may prefer to shrink some of them down to the features most relevant to you, or even expand upon features or draw from across several models. In this way, you craft your own system out of this raw material.

Very likely, you will find you need to thoughtfully adapt, rather than simply adopt, so as to suit the particular needs of your situation. For instance, concentration of private media ownership may or may not be highly germane to your context; it may be that state control is the bigger issue in assessing the democratic significance of media. To take another example: it could be that media literacy is your primary concern for

[1] See IFEX (2005): Campaigning for freedom of expression. A handbook for advocates. International Freedom of Expression Exchange.

emphasis and that you want to elaborate a tool for this. That's different from say, concerns about media that emanate from specifically taking up the viewpoint of children. From a very wide field, you need to zoom in carefully before you start imitating existing tools.

In looking at what systems already exist, you can also look at their performance in practice. That lets you see if you can milk the findings of people who have already deployed such pre-existing survey instruments. There's certainly no point in duplicating the data results generated by any of them – unless you think there's a need to update or that there's a likelihood of different findings being generated. Otherwise, consider drawing from the information that has already been gathered under these auspices (naturally, giving credit where it is due). It will save you a lot of time and money.

As an indication of what's happening "out there", Puddephat (2007:18) has listed 26 different initiatives that define indicators around media. Some are single-issue focused, others are more wide-ranging, and some are even more expansive (e.g. covering the full range of institutions relevant to transparency or corruption – not just the media). As a sample of some of these, , one can cite the well-known Reporters Sans Frontiers' "Worldwide Press Freedom Index", and Freedom House's "Annual Global Survey of Media Independence".

But there are also systems like the UNDP's "Guide to Measuring the Impact of Right to information Programmes" (and a homegrown South African version at www.opendemocracy.org.za, and Bridges.org's focus on e-readiness measurement. Another example is the International Standardization and Accreditation Services (ISAS) protocols for "Quality Management Systems: Requirements for Radio, TV Broadcasters and Internet-Content Producers". There are many, many more.

In deciding if you want to repeat or update a journey, or create a different vehicle altogether to traverse a different map, you may want to consider some of the "wheels" outlined below.

1.1 UNESCO

The recently-devised (2008) UNESCO indicators of media development is organised in five categories:

1. Convivial legal environment
2. Plural ownership
3. Democratic performance
4. Capacity issues (skill and supporting organisations)
5. Public access to media

Within each of these categories, there are more specific indicators that have been elaborated. Each also has a "means of verification" and a list of potential data sources. The UNESCO system arose largely from work by former Article 19 director Andrew Puddephat. He reviewed many other instruments, and presented them to a meeting of experts in Paris in 2007. The final result is intended to be a diagnostic tool, revealing national performance across several factors. Importantly, it is not required that every factor should be included in a review. You can be eclectic. That means, for example, that if your concern is media literacy, you can extract these particular indicators out of the overall tool.

The UNESCO schema is highly normative, in the sense of placing value on particular media dispensations (eg. public broadcasting). This means the universality of some aspects of the system does depend on the extent to which you share the same values. On the other hand, because the tool has the blessing of UNESCO, it does carry important political weight that has a bearing on the advocacy-potential of results that are generated by using this schema or at least parts of it.

1.2 Media Sustainability Index

Another instrument that has international resonance is the product of an NGO called IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board). This index has been applied consistently across Europe and Eurasia (starting in 2001, and continued annually since then, covering 21 countries), North Africa and the Middle East (18 countries in 2005), and Africa (37 countries in 2006-7).

IREX states that the index "has evolved into a key benchmark study to assess how media structures change over time and across borders". It argues that this therefore means the tool constitutes a comparative standard for all countries. However, the Africa study does also expand to embrace what it calls "uniquely African features, including the prevalence of radio—notably community radio".

The MSI assesses five "objectives" in shaping a successful media system:

1. Free speech and access to public information (legal and social norms).
2. Professional journalism.
3. Plurality of news sources.
4. Independent media are well managed, and allow for editorial independence.
5. Supporting institutions.

Each objective has some seven to nine indicators, "which determine how well a country meets that objective". The research method combines two features. First, a country is scored by a panel of experts drawn from local media, NGOs, professional associations, international donors and media-development implementers. Second, IREX staff score the countries independently. The two scores are then combined into a final score.

The MSI is highly normative, concentrating especially on conditions for privately-owned media. For instance, it includes as an indicator that "independent media do not receive government subsidies". Similarly, it upholds sources of newsprint and printing facilities being in private hands, and channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) being "private".

1.3 African Media Barometer

Formulated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, in partnership with the Media Institute of Southern Africa, the African Media Barometer draws from the standards set out in the Windhoek Declaration (1991) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression (2002). This tool covers four sectors:

1. Freedom of expression
2. Media landscape characterised by diversity, independence and sustainability
3. Broadcasting: transparent and independent regulation and true public broadcasting
4. High levels of professional standards.

Each of the four areas has approximately seven indicator areas. The research method is via national panels of up to 10 people – half of whom are directly involved in the media, and the others from civil society. The Barometer operates with a scale in terms of which each country is scored in terms of the extent to which it meets aspects of a given indicator. The scores for each indicator are given equal weight when added up and averaged.

Given the reference points of this tool in credible African declarations, it has the advantage of measuring performance against self-proclaimed continental standards. Its normative character is evident in the importance it attributes to broadcasting in African countries (It makes the topic a sector area in its own right and of equal weight to the other three somewhat broader categories.) The Barometer also includes the requirement that "the state broadcaster is transformed into a truly public broadcaster".

1.4 AMDI, STREAM and AMI

The origin of these tools was with the Commission for Africa initiated by the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The "African Media Development Initiative" (AMDI) was overseen by the BBC World Service Trust in partnership with two African universities. This project researched 17 African countries, answering three questions:

1. What are the key changes/developments in the media sector over the past five years?
2. How have media development activities contributed to the development of the media during this time?
3. What contributions are likely to make the greatest impact on the development of the media sector within sub-Saharan Africa in the future?

To answer these, AMDI looked at:

1. Extent of the "media sector", which it interpreted not only as covering television, radio, newspapers, but also as the Internet and mobile telephony.
2. Media support: production agencies, market research companies, training, and NGO activity.
3. Media legislation and regulatory reform.
4. Technology and equipment.
5. Professionalisation.
6. Local Content Production.

Research was done through accessing pre-existing data and through qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and experts in each country.

The "Strengthening African Media" (STREAM) was carried out parallel to AMDI, and overseen by the UN Economic Commission for Africa. The research method here was consultative conferences in the five different regions of the continent, drawing participants from 30 countries. It covered:

1. Media practice
2. Policy and legislation
3. Media ownership
4. Media training
5. Media support

Fusing the two approaches, the "African Media Initiative" (AMI) came up with three very broad ways to categorise the key features of the media landscape. In effect, they were: (a) Contextual politics (especially media freedom and policy), (b) Economics of media markets (including investment climate and technology), and (c) Capacity (professionalization, support groups, training).

These three initiatives (AMDI, Stream and AMI) were driven by concern to make a case for support for media development activities across Africa. This is why they attempt to provide a holistic focus – covering every essential base to ensure that progress in one area is not blocked by obstacles in another. In this attempt to be comprehensive, the three approaches differ from single-issue focus tools, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists which monitors statistics on journalists killed. They are also much broader than, say, Freedom House (**www.freedomhouse.org**) which looks at three wide areas: legal environment, political environment and economic environment – but from the particular and exclusive vantage point of what is relevant to media freedom.

2. Criteria for choosing

Many of the instruments listed above emerged in a pre-convergence era. This context means they may have some blindspots:

- They do not always transcend the idea of separate silos of media.
- Many are also narrow in the sense of ignoring cultural industries (like music or film), and intellectual property issues more broadly. For tools to study the latter, for example, you may need to go outside the "predictable" sources such as those cited in the section above, and look instead at resources like the "WIPO Guide on Surveying the Economic Contribution of the Copyright-Based Industries".[2]
- Many of the media instruments discussed above also date back to a period when "media" equated to (specialised) institutions, whereas today the actors involved in mass communication increasingly include numerous other players. These mass communicators span individuals, NGOs, public institutions and companies. Media is no longer the exclusive preserve of "the media", although it is of course still important to acknowledge the latter as institutions whose core (as distinct from incidental or secondary) business is mass communication.
- In addition, whereas the national unit of analysis still has much relevance, many communications issues today are best understood in terms of transnational,

[2] http://www.wipo.int/ebookshop/?lang=eng&cmd=display_pub&cat_id=1198&cart_id=671630-26373787

international and global connections that encompass technology, economics, policy regimes and content flows.

- Questions also arise today as to what constitutes "journalism" within the burgeoning "mass communication mix", given the passing of a period in which the practice was coterminous with fulltime "professional" journalists.

- All these fast-changing dynamics complicate the development and utilisation of indicators, meaning that caution is needed in adoption of one or more existing systems.

Drawing from Puddephat (2007:20), this is where the value of a "toolkit approach" comes in. The advantage of such an approach, in his view, is that it "offers an inclusive list of indicators and methods from which selections can be made according to the requirements of a particular programme or intervention". In addition, it "recognises that indicators and methodologies must be customised, using local expertise to fit the particularities of the national context". He adds that "indicators must be tailored to the correct level of engagement within each national context (e.g. the national media system, the individual media organisation, the professional group)".

The information that follows below offers some guidance as to how such adaptation can be done.

Puddephat himself has compiled a valuable comparison of 15 instruments in regard to what they cover (2007:42-3). His tabular representation enables you to see at a glance where there is overlap (for example, eight of them take on board defamation laws), and where there are gaps (only three look at access to printing and distribution facilities). The value of a multiple approach is highlighted in the fact that different tools on their own can produce rather different results. As Puddephat (2007:10) points out: "For example, five Middle Eastern and North African countries categorised as "near sustainability" by the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) are classified as "not free" by Freedom House; the Palestinian Territories are, according to MSI, "near sustainability" yet come second to bottom of the Freedom House scale, just above Libya."

2.1 Definition and scoping: where do you want to go?

A starting point for choosing amongst existing "wheels", or in wanting to design one's own, is to be very clear about what part of the landscape you wish to map. Many of the tools described in the section above fall short of properly scoping and defining their terrain. But there is a big difference between whether you are looking at "communication development" broadly, or more narrowly the development of the media industry. There is also a big distinction between looking at the latter ("media development"), and looking at "media for development" and "development media". The one area focuses on developing the media as an end in-itself, the others are focused on the role of (some) media in regard to being a means to an external end (eg. socio-economic development and/or HIV-Aids awareness and behaviour change).

In this context, what is particularly important for you is in deciding what constitutes "media", and why you want to look at it. Is it all aspects of content generation, or is it mainly the role of journalism or, say, of edutainment – and why? Does it include folk media (present in popular culture)? Should it encompass cellphones (at their current historical phase of evolution)? You need to start with the widest definition of media, and decide logically what and why you want to highlight within this.

2. Putting values in the driving seat.

A second point in choosing or redesigning a survey tool, is to be clear and upfront about the normative premises that you stand for. For example, perhaps your focus is on private radio station entrepreneurship, rather than, say, community participation in community radio. Different priorities reflect different beliefs about media and society.

All choices reflect values about what you regard as significant – so recognise that, state your orientation upfront, and give the reasons for that focus.

One technique to consider is distinguishing “media density” from “media development”. For instance, the first phrase can be relatively technically defined (eg. a common currency of the number of occupational journalists per 1000 population). Then normative interpretations of the second phrase (“development”) – for instance, how independent and professional they are – can follow from this.

In addition, one can use the less-loaded phrase “media assistance”, rather than “media development”, when talking about interventions in regard to changing the quantity and/or quality of the given “info-structure” and its character.

2.3 Surfacing assumptions about cause and effect.

A third element in toolkit design is to make a conceptual distinction between means and ends. The means is looking at the state of something in terms of its significance for something else. UNESCO for its part describes its five areas as “outcomes” of media development, and yet some of them are more properly means towards an outcome. It depends on whether you interpret “media development” as meaning interventions into the *environment* of media, or *direct impact* on the media as such. You need to be clear on the difference, even though they are interrelated.

To give an example on this issue, donor support for community media is often a means towards constructing a sector that in turn plays a particular role in society (eg. local democracy and development). The end goal is that role dispensation. One study therefore might focus on the resourcing available to community radio per se (the penultimate goal) , while another look at the shortfall between the ideal democratic roles it could play and its present capacity and orientation to do so (the ultimate goal). A third study could look at an enabling legislative environment for community radio – and while this assumes an ideal end goal (a destination), in most respects it is not an absolute end-in-itself, but first and foremost a means to the conceived ideal role of community radio in society. All these foci are absolutely legitimate. The point is simply to highlight the value of distinguishing the items in a wider chain of assumed cause and effect. You do not want an undifferentiated set of indicators, where the status of each in relation to the other is uneven or unclear. The inter-relationships (even if assumed) between means and ends, and those ends then serving as further means to further ends, need to be unpacked. In that way, you can prioritise your precise point of focus.

4. Utilitarian considerations

Fourthly, your project should be driven by what it defines as its own primary goals within the whole chain of impacts. In this regard, the credibility of your tool is critical if it is to have impact. That's why, at the very least, drawing from accepted international instruments like UNESCO's, can be very powerful. Utilising international standards is also a way to enable international comparisons and benchmarking. You should also take a medium-term time frame – can your instrument be valid over a period of time, to monitor progression or regression as to what you are looking at.

Affecting your conceptualisation here will be the extent to which you are looking at snapshot information, or trend information. For instance, rather than mapping HIV-Aids messaging in public broadcasting after a particular campaign, you want to examine the more ongoing themes over a year's output.

5. Distinctive indicators

Fifthly, as Puddephat (2007) advises, it is important to ensure that your indicators are separated out to address one key issue at a time, that they do not blur several elements in one category or conflate distinctions between different units of analysis. He also advises that indicators be structured to be gender-sensitive and pro-poor, so as to be able you to disaggregate findings along these axes.

6. Pragmatics

Sixthly, other issues that should affect your selection and design of indicators are the practicality of them. Puddephat (2007) suggests that quantitative measurements whenever possible are preferable, but he also qualifies this by saying that for this, measurement data must be sufficiently reliable in quality. He points out that for many indicators in many countries, data "doesn't exist, is inaccessible, is out of date, is inconsistent, or a combination of all of these". This situation sometimes explains why people resort to alternative methodologies based on panels of media professionals using qualitative assessments (although such findings can also be used in "triangulation" (see section 4 below) with quantitative data. One limitation of the panel or focus group approach is that the judgements are inevitably based on perceptions at a particular historical conjucture. This means that the findings are not easily generalisable. They can nevertheless assist in extrapolating broader principles, but they should not be mistaken as being tools for making other kinds of claims.

7. Think long-term

Seventh, sustainability (in the sense of repeating the exercise) is important, and that in turn relates to available budget now and in the future. Once you get to your destination, the question is: where to next? Will you want to revisit it again in a year's time? It helps if you can answer this question before you even begin, and develop contingency plans accordingly.

3. Implementing

In conducting an assessment of media development, it is helpful to "triangulate" (see below) quantitative and qualitative data in order to arrive at a fuller picture of the media reality you are focusing upon. As such, there is need to distinguish between the two assessment methodological designs and establish their relative strengths.

Qualitative research:

Most of the data produced by the media development assessment tools cited above is qualitative. There are instances in which assessors seek to "quantify" the responses. This can only be for ease of data presentation and interpretation, however. It allows for drawing comparisons, but does not indicate any statistical representation, nor does it show interval or ratio levels of measurement. While an interval level of measurement means that numbers assigned to research categories and/or indicators are meaningful as *numbers* and not as labels, ratio levels of measurement include an absolute zero point, as in when we measure numbers of radio and television stations and sets per country, etc.

In the absence of statistical information, the assessment of media development indicators tends to be based on nominal and ordinal levels of measurement, whereby numerals are only assigned to categories and indicators for the purpose of classification and rank-ordering. As a result, such scores do not represent the actual state of affairs. For example, the numerical measures of "media diversity" in the African Media Barometer do not represent the actual state of affairs on the ground. They represent people's perceptions. But the scores assist us to classify, rank and compare such perceptions over time. The perceptions may, or may not, be representative of the state of affairs.

The trustworthiness of qualitative assessments, then, lies within the concepts of *credibility*, *dependability* and *conformability*. These can be achieved by the following:

- Careful use, interpretation and examination of appropriate literature.
- Careful justification of the qualitative research methodologies employed.
- Careful structuring of the data analysis to ensure full and descriptive evaluation and assessment, particularly in relation to data of key significance (in Levy, 2006:383).

Qualitative data, for the most part, are good at helping us to assess the "thickness" of the description and interpretation of media reality. Such findings can assist us to locate the different perceptions and/or discursive practices associated with the respondents and how these colour their responses. In this way, qualitative assessments help us to develop keener understanding of the media landscape. So, where our research interest lies in developing a nuanced understanding of media reality, qualitative research of the type used in most of these assessment tools is certainly useful.

Quantitative research:

In most cases, quantitative data is credited with more believability than qualitative data. Quantitative research can answer the more positivistic assessment questions about "reliability", "validity" and "bias". In media research, this is often associated with establishing, for example, the *quantity* of media plurality as opposed to its *quality*. While quantitative research can easily adduce statistical evidence about how many media outlets a country has, qualitative research can establish whether the number of media outlets translates into real participation of people in media production and the associated expansion in freedom of expression, gender empowerment, poverty alleviation, and the like. It is often important to establish the quantitative nature of media reality before we can assess its professional and other aspects.

But as noted above, it can be a challenge to gather quantitative data in most of the developing countries, where bureaus of statistics are not sufficiently developed. Another problem has to do with little or no media research capacity. But mention must be made of the Pan-African Media Research Organisation (PAMRO) as well as the Steadman Research Group. At least in Africa, these can be used as a first port of call for media development research of a statistical nature.

4. Quality assurance

For purposes of quality assurance, there is a need for media assessments to be subjected to "external" critique by experts or people who are "disinterested" in the assessment project. Such experts or people might be located in academic or research institutions. In more specific terms, such quality assurance can be obtained via the following processes:

Peer review

Here, the assessment tools, the quality of the data and the results of the assessment need to be subjected to some "dispassionate" critique or review. This should be treated as part of the normal research validation process. Indeed, the reviewer reflections can become an integral part of the assessment results. Reviewers can be drawn from academic or research institutions.

Triangulation

The example of combining qualitative and quantitative research given above exemplifies what "triangulation" is all about. According to one writer:

> Because of the complicity in "a confused reality", it is difficult to study/investigate a phenomenon in its totality. In this complex reality, multiple methods … afford a partial solution…
>
> If various methods and techniques are used for measuring the same variables and these measuring instruments yield identical results, it will lead to a greater and deeper measure of belief in these instruments. (Grobbelaar, 2000: 91-92).

In the type of qualitative assessments undertaken by the various media development tools cited above, it is clear that triangulation with quantitative information could make for richer results. At the same time, one should not think that quantitative and qualitative findings can directly corroborate each other: they are only complimentary animals.

However, triangulation in a more corroborative way can occur within quantitative, and within qualitative, research.

Within quantitative research, triangulation would serve to further assist in reliability and validity. Here, reliability means that if identical investigations are repeated, similar research results will be obtained. Validity means that the assessment tools as well as assessment results and interpretation are in sync with the research aims and objectives. In quantitative assessment, it is easier to control for some intervening variables in a way that can ensure a greater degree of reliability and validity.

On the other hand, qualitative research, as noted above, is more interested in the thickness of description and interpretation. It is aimed at creating greater understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Triangulation with other qualitative research becomes even more important, at the level of extrapolation and principles uncovered (rather than generalisation).

To assess "media development", it might also be useful to contemplate triangulation at different levels, as suggested below:

Methodological triangulation: Here, both quantitative and qualitative research designs should be contemplated, in keeping with the overall research aim and objectives. An attempt at this was evident in the AMDI and STREAM research processes – a combination of literature review, personal interviews, case studies, consultative workshops, and the like.

Ethnographical triangulation: Here, the assessment effort must be targeted at different people in different discursive practices. More often, assessments of this type, especially those undertaken in Africa, have tended to focus on the same respondents. This has the danger of the "Hawthorne effect", with respondents knowing exactly how they ought to respond during focus group discussions. Why, for example, do certain categories of respondents repeatedly describe the media as tools for political repression? What is their discursive practice in society? What happens when such respondents get into positions of political power? How can such respondents' responses be checked against other readings arising from the "objective" reality of practice?

This "Hawthorne effect" tends to skew the results in favour of the "anti-establishment" discourse. It is thus important to cast the net even wider and draw in as many voices as possible as an attempt at "balancing" the assessment outcomes.

Geographical triangulation: As a result of the often logistically determined focus on the same respondents, it might be important for media development assessments to go beyond the line of rail and focus on other geographical localities, especially rural areas. Although this might be problematic in terms of logistics and costs, it is something worth investing in so as to draw in "ordinary" and poor people's voices and perspectives. This is particularly called for in an environment calling out for with rural-based community media initiatives.

Gender triangulation: It is usually men who speak whenever there are assessments of the type referred to above. There should be a deliberate effort to draw in women so that they can speak on issues that directly relate to them. This is a process of empowerment, in itself, which is a critical aspect of measuring media development. To what extent are women represented in media content? Who speaks for them? How are they represented?

These are legitimate questions which need to be factored into the design of any assessment tool.

5. Interpretation and report writing

Given the need for thick description and interpretation of mostly qualitative data produced using the assessment tools cited above, it is important to undertake a series of checks and balances in the interpretation of data and report-writing. These are:

- Checks by members of the group, i.e. asking respondents to comment on drafts, facts and their interpretations of those facts.
- Initiating independent audits of the assessment tools, data and interpretation. This can be outsourced to academic and research institutions.
- Having a number of interviewers carry out interviews, followed by interviewers discussing the meaning and interpretations of the data.
- Presenting the findings of the research study to the original respondents in a focus group meeting and then inviting respondents to comment and provide feedback and discussion in relation to the findings (Levy, 2006).

Here, the emphasis is on ensuring a greater degree of credibility, dependability and conformability (Levy, 2006).

6. Publicity and advocacy post-publication

It is clear that one of the purposes of most of the media development assessments is to influence media and communication policy, especially in developing countries. It is also meant to influence the way media is generally produced. This means that such assessments are in fact *action* research, with their main emphasis on the following:

- The people or organisations that are studied actually take part in the research process itself.
- Inclusion of ordinary and everyday knowledge.
- Empowerment of the subjects of research.
- Awareness creation.
- Linked to political realities or policy-making processes (Grobbelaar, 2000: 85; cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The published results of research need to be widely distributed to different stakeholders that might find them useful. One could go further and organise launch workshops at which the findings can also be discussed and interrogated. This, in and of itself, becomes another process of further validating the research findings with interested parties. More often, however, such assessments end up without being actively taken up further and serving as effective tools for policy and legislative reform.

An interesting idea might be to organise a dissemination workshop with parliamentarians, especially in developing countries, who might the research reports useful for their legislative function. The possibilities are limitless but it is important to plan for them well ahead.

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A Framework for an Assessment Toolkit
Developed by Mark Whitehouse, IREX

The proposed framework provides an organizing approach to examining a media sector by looking at 5 key areas internal to a media system: 1. the legal and regulatory framework; 2. the quality of journalism; 3. the availability of news and information to citizens; 4. the business of media; and 5. the supporting institutions.[3] This paper, as a first step towards generating a toolkit, discusses an approach for the legal and regulatory framework and the quality of journalism. In addition, the paper argues that three external factors should be examined – political, economic, and socio-demographic.

A. The Media System. For the purposes of this paper, a brief synopsis of the approach using some of the factors from the legal and regulatory system and the quality of journalism serves to illustrate how the toolkit will approach assessment. For each of the five components a complete toolkit would discuss core data that can be used, alternative data sources, and analysis. Core data refers to the data that can most directly address the topic. When discussing advertising, total advertising spending by sector can be considered core data. However, such data is often non-existent or of questionable reliability, as discussed above. Therefore, supplemental data should also be examined. Supplemental data includes existing studies of the subject and alternative or proxy indicators. Existing tools will also be discussed and any toolkit should provide a guide to existing tools that have proven successful for measuring the above five elements of a media system. Finally, the toolkit will discuss the approach to analyzing the data gathered. How should the data be analyzed to determine success of existing projects or point to potentially useful interventions for projects under design?

Summary Examples

I. The Legal and Regulatory System. The Media Sustainability Index uses nine indicators when analyzing the legal and regulatory system. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press methodology uses eight indicators while the African Media barometer uses seven indicators. These studies and their results should be examined and utilized in any sectoral assessment and they provide a guide for more in-depth research.

In general, when assessing the legal and regulatory system, one should examine constitutional and legislative protections of freedom of speech; the existence of specific laws protecting journalists (libel) as well as protecting the ability of journalists to obtain information (access to information); the laws that govern how licenses for broadcast media are allocated; laws affecting information technology (mobile and internet); how violence against journalists is treated under law and in practice; and how whether laws restrict the ability to enter into and practice the profession of journalism.

When examining these specific issues, it should also be understood that the researcher must go beyond the mere absence or existence of such laws. This tells

[3] These five areas are taken from the Media Sustainability Index (www.irex.org/msi) to serve as an organizing tool for looking at the sector.

you little. One must: 1. compare the laws against generally accepted international standards; 2. understand their effect in practice, which depending on how they are implemented can have effects quite different than intended; 3. determine the extent to which there is an independent judicial system protecting rights; 4. understand the extent to which the media community understands the laws and has access to appropriate legal counsel; ascertain the extent to which current practices are durable or transient and dependent on the current government.

The illustrative indicators below are not meant to be exhaustive but to provide on approach to an in-depth assessment of the legal and regulatory sector.

1. Constitutional Protections of Freedom of Speech. Does the constitution specifically guarantee freedom of speech or does it impose limits? Do other sections of the Constitution proscribe any freedoms otherwise guaranteed? Does a mechanism exist for enforcing guarantees and are they used?
Core Data: Constitution, existing analyses (MSI, FH, AMB), academic papers.
Supplemental Data: Determining whether constitutional guarantees are upheld can be a subjective issue. Depending on time and resources, one can research court cases, but more likely, one should first examine research such as the MSI, Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Report, or reports by Article 19, conduct interviews with key media and legal professionals in-country, conduct small focus groups with media professionals.

Analysis: Data must be examined carefully to determine the extent to which constitutional protections are real. While most constitutions do make reference to free speech rights, one must examine the extent to which rights guaranteed in one section can be proscribed by another section. Is there a legitimate mechanism of appeal? How has the constitution been used by the media community? Have they cited it in legal challenges and has it been successful? Is the current situation dependent on the government or leader of the day or has the treatment of constitutional rights been consistent across changes in government?

2. Laws Protect Freedom of Speech. Does the legislative and regulatory framework provide specific protections for freedom of speech? This includes libel law as an important factor. Is libel criminal or civil? Are penalties in line with economic factors? Is burden of proof on accuser or defendant? Are public figures subject to higher standards of proof? Libel law should be used when clear libelous publications occur, not as a tool to silence dissenting viewpoints or opinion.
Core *Data*: Libel law(s), court records of cases.

Supplemental data: MSI and FH, academic papers, focus groups, interviews.
Analysis: One must first analyze the existing legislation to determine whether libel law serves to protect or hinder speech. Is it criminal or civil? Are fines in line with economic conditions? Secondly, how is it used – is it a tool to silence media? Who is filing cases and how many are being filed. Is the threat of a suit enough to silence media?

3. Broadcast licensing is fair, transparent, and apolitical. The power to license broadcasters can be used most basically to regulate a limited public resource

(spectrum) or it can be used as a tool by governments to restrict speech by choosing who can receive licenses.

4.

Core Data: law(s) on broadcast industry; regulations on licensing, members of council/boards; appointment powers for council/board; decisions taken and appeals made; media coverage of actions of licensing body

Supplemental data: MSI and FH, interviews with stakeholders, analysis of licensing decisions.

Analysis: Is the law structured to ensure fair and transparent licensing? Can it be easily manipulated depending on the prevailing executive leadership – is there a history of this? Is the licensing body appointed to be non-partisan or reflect partisan balance? Is decision-making process transparent? Do the bylaws and procedures of the licensing body serve to promote independent decision-making? Are there examples of fair and/or unfair application of licensing process? Is the current situation amenable to change through a project?

5. <u>Access to information</u>. Media cannot fully play its role in providing information to citizens without access to government information. Is access a considered a right by constitutional or legislative principle? Is there a legal regime for determining access with the right to appeal? Or is access extralegal through contacts and leaks?

   Core data: Access to information law(s) and regulations

   Supplementary data: MSI, FH, Article 19 studies.

   Analysis: If a law exists, is it sufficient to international standards and is it actually used by media, civil society, and the public at larger? Have there been court tests? Can a project address the weaknesses in the law? Does the constitution proscribe or support legislation on access to information? Are costs for access to information prohibitive? Are journalists aware of their rights and procedures to obtain information?

6. <u>Commercial and tax law.</u> Most media are a business. It may be not for profit, may be privately or publicly held, or may be a state or public enterprise but they are all a business of some form. Therefore one must determine how commercial laws, regulations, and taxes treat media.

   Core data: commercial law, tax codes, business regulations

   Supplementary data: MSI, WAN studies for newspapers.

   Analysis: Are media treated as a special case or are they simply treated as any other business? Are they taxed at the same rate (e.g., VAT for newsprint) as other businesses? Are there special laws or regulations that govern not-for-profit enterprises? The existing framework needs to be understood in the context of the country's media sector to determine whether the media is singled out (for preferential or restrictive treatment).

7. Public/State Media. Most state media have some form of state or public media enterprises. State broadcasters are the norm in much of the world, as distinguished from a public service broadcaster which possesses true independence from government and serves the public in a non-partisan manner. In many countries the state/public broadcaster is a major, if not always dominant, player. Therefore, its treatment by law and regulation plays an important role in determining not only how it operates, but where other types of media (community, commercial, party) fit in the overall environment.

Core data: Public broadcasting law; funding regimes for state/public media

Supplementary data: MSI, FH, Article 19, AMB and other studies.

Analysis: Is state/public broadcasting governed under legislation. Does that legislation allow for editorial independence through an independent governing body, a firewall between government and editorial staff, a funding mechanism that is non-partisan and guaranteed? Are state/public media provided privileges not given to other media (state advertising, access to national and international event broadcasts, tax breaks, etc.)? If they are, do these privileges constitute a competitive advantage? Is the pay scale of state/public media in line with the larger media sector? While an examination of state and public media is prone to lapse into debates about the relative merits of private vs. public media, the analysis should avoid these debates.

8. Legal Protection for Journalists. Violence against journalists is far too prevalent around the world and too many cases are not solved. It is therefore crucial to determine the extent of violence, and intimidation, against journalists. Yet one must also determine the extent to which the legal system protects journalists, the judicial and law enforcement systems vigorously investigate and prosecute cases, and the extent to which journalists are aware of their rights.

Core data: cases of violence and intimidation, prosecution rates.

Supplementary data: MSI, FH, AMB, Article 19 studies, interviews with journalists.

Analysis: While the core step is determining the extent of violence against and intimidation of journalists, the analysis becomes most vital in determining the extent to which the state is seeking to protect journalists and investigate and prosecute those who kill, wound, or intimate journalists. Are there different elements within government operating at different levels of engagement? Are investigations or prosecutions politicized or pursued regardless of the politics? Are journalists aware of their rights?

Quality Journalism.

The Media Sustainability Index employs eight indicators to analyze the quality of journalism. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press, Nations in Transit, and Freedom in the World indices do not directly focus on the quality of journalism since their focus is most directly on freedoms and rights for media and journalists. The AMB employs eight indicators that deal most directly with the quality of journalism. These studies and their results should be examined and utilized in any sectoral assessment as they provide a guide for conducting more in-depth research.

In general, when assessing the quality of journalism, one must proceed cautiously as there are disputes about how one determines quality and whether certain normative standards are being applied that reveal the biases of the researcher. Further difficulties are presented by trying to determine the quality of the entire media sector which can be considered an average of, at a minimum in most countries, hundreds of media outlets. Therefore, one must consider whether to disaggregate any assessment – by medium, city, or even specific outlet (for instance state/public). However, the assessment must be transparent in how it is arriving at its conclusions.

Additionally, any assessment of the quality of journalism must be undertaken with an understanding of the sources of information for citizens. New media sources in particular should be considered. The proliferation of news sources makes assessment of quality increasingly difficult. The growth of mobile phones as a means of distribution of news, the growth of blogging, and the growth of on-line news present challenges to the researcher. In many countries, "informal" sources of news dissemination prove important – marketplaces, family structures, village elders, etc. One must not simply analyze the media which is easiest, which is usually print media.

The illustrative indicators below are not meant to be exhaustive but to provide one approach to an in-depth assessment of the quality of journalism.

1. Reporting is fair, objective, and well-sourced. Many consider this the fundamental of sound, professional reporting. Reporters should strive for objectivity, be fair by providing balance to reporting, and ensure that reporting is well-sourced and sourcing is transparent to the audience. While it represents an ideal, it applies equally to all who call themselves journalists whether in new media or in print or broadcast.

Core Data: Existing analyses (MSI, AMB), content analysis

Supplemental Data: Focus groups and surveys of media professionals, provided they are operating under clear definitions, can be used to determine how the media itself assesses its professionalism. This becomes important when extensive content analysis cannot be undertaken. Academic studies are sometimes undertaken utilizing content analysis and to the extent available and reliable they should be considered as a data source.

Analysis: If using existing indices such as the MSI or AMB, one should ensure that both the narrative report and scores are utilized and it is clearly understood that the numerical scores largely represent an average of the media sector. Narrative reports often discuss different media and this information can be integrated into an assessment. Content analysis can be undertaken although this too becomes more difficult, and expensive, when one is considering broadcast media and smaller media outside the capital city in most countries. Undertaking content analysis on rural community radio can quickly become expensive. Therefore one might consider small surveys or focus groups of media professionals, provided with indicators as a discussion point. The MSI and AMB have found that professionals are fairly candid in discussing strengths and weaknesses of journalism. However, selection of participants plays a key role to ensure adequate representation from different groups, factions, ethnic groups, as well as by gender.

2. Journalists follow ethical standards. As a profession one can argue that there does exist a basic and internationally accepted set of ethical standards for journalists, whether it be that adopted by the International Federation of Journalists or other formulations. The IFJ code calls for respect for truth, verifiable facts, respect for confidential sources, non-discrimination. Often, outlets themselves or unions, associations, or syndicates have specific codes of conduct, frequently parallel to IFJ's.

Core Data: code(s) of ethics/conduct, existing analyses (MSI, AMB, and others), decisions by self-regulatory bodies, media monitoring.

Supplemental Data: Focus groups and surveys of media professionals, provided they are operating under clear definitions, can be used to determine whether journalists themselves believe they are following ethical standards or specific codes of conduct. Media monitoring and content analysis at times can point to ethical lapses although they are harder to reveal.

Analysis: While the existence of codes of ethics or conduct is considered vital to understanding the ethical basis of the profession in a given country, one must also probe deeper to understand if the codes are implemented in practice, whether there are mechanisms for self-regulation, and whether journalists themselves attempt to follow the code. Are journalists aware of the code but find that low pay forces them to accept money for stories? Does editorial interference affect the ability of a journalist to follow ethical standards? Are self-regulatory bodies, if they exist, effective in policing ethical lapses?

3. Journalists and Editors Do Not Practice Self-censorship. Studies such as the MSI and AMB have shown that self-censorship remains a serious problem facing the profession in many countries throughout the world. The causes can vary. At times, it can be a matter of life or death for a journalist. Violence has a severe effect by sending a powerful message to journalists. Other times owners and editors make it clear there are political and business interests that are best not upset with the reporting produced by an outlet.

Core Data: Existing analyses (MSI, AMB), surveys of journalists and editors.

S*upplemental Data*: Focus groups can be helpful in having journalists and editors discuss why self-censorship happens, under what circumstances, and discuss ways in which the problem can be remedied. Targeted interviews can at times elicit more information as group settings may not always be the most appropriate mechanism to discuss the issue.

Analysis: An assessment should attempt to determine not just whether the problem exists, but where it exists, how it manifests itself, and whether it can be overcome. Is the problem geographically confined? Do journalists feel freer in large cities or in provincial towns? Is self-censorship operating at the level of journalist or at the level of editor? Why are journalists or editors engaging in self-censorship – fear of violence, fear of political reprisals, and loss of revenue? Finally, is the problem solvable or is it tied to larger issues such as unchecked violence, corruption, political interference? Are certain medium considered less susceptible to self-censorship? Often print media is freer to report because it has a smaller and often more elite audience than radio? Does self-censorship extend to bloggers and to journalists writing for on-line media?

4. <u>Key Events and Issues are Well-Covered</u>. Ethical standards, professionalism in reporting, and freedom from self-censorship do not serve the citizen well if media outlets are not able or willing to cover key issues and events. Often, media are inclined to cover political events rather than economic or they engage in protocol journalism and are not actually reporting the issues behind a press conference or ribbon-cutting, or state-visit by a foreign diplomat.

   Core Data: Content analysis, existing analyses (e.g., MSI, AMB).

   Supplemental Data: Focus groups, surveys and targeted interviews with media professionals. One can usually elicit honest answers about whether protocol journalism prevails, what issues are covered, and whether media have the capacity to cover major issues.

   Analysis: One can approach the analysis by taking several key events or issues and conducting data analysis to determine if and how they were covered. One can easily discover protocol journalism in the place of serious in-depth coverage. More difficult is to direct the analysis to find out why this exists, how it can be changed, and the extent of its existence. Are editors the source of the problem or is it the journalists themselves? Does a culture of a certain type of reporting exist that tends to lead media to avoid key issues? One must also be careful not to generalize limited data to the larger population, e.g. from city to country or print to radio.

5. <u>Specialized and Niche Reporting</u>. While it is important to cover key events and issues, if the media is to serve the public it also needs to produce news and information on a wide range of topics of concern to citizens. Education, corruption, municipal affairs, gender issues, religious news, etc. Are these stories being covered and are they being reported in a professional manner? What is the source of coverage? Is new media filling this niche?

   Core Data: Content analysis, media monitoring, existing analyses (e.g. MSI, AMB).

   Supplemental Data: Focus groups, surveys and targeted interviews with media professionals. One can usually elicit honest answers about the extent to which and professionalism with which specialized reporting is undertaken.

Analysis: One must examine whether such reporting is taking place and with what degree of professionalism? Are those undertaking niche reporting well-trained or do media outlets treat this as a place to put their less qualified reporters while the best reporters cover politics? Is investigative journalism practiced? What are the obstacles to specialized and niche reporting? Financial resources, training, editorial short-sightedness?

6. <u>Technical Means of News-Gathering and Distribution</u>. Reporters need both the skills and the equipment with which to gather and produce news stories. Do reporters have digital voice recorders, do television journalists have professional quality cameras, do reporters have access to the internet and know computer assisted reporting. While quality journalism can and does happen in environments of scarcity, the proper technology and equipment remains important to produce a professional product.

   Core Data: Surveys of media outlets on equipment, existing analyses (e.g. MSI, AMB).

   Supplemental Data Focus groups, surveys and targeted interviews with media professionals. There can often be a disconnect between the equipment one can see on a visit to a media outlet and the reality of what a reported is allowed to or trained to use effectively.

   Analysis: One must understand the environment in which the media work. Media need not be equipped to the highest international standards in a poverty stricken country. However, basic equipment such as DVRs, internet access for reporting, and computers should be considered basic essentials. One must also go beyond the mere presence of equipment to understand the extent to which it is utilized and the capacity of journalists to use the equipment. One must understand any discrepancies between media? Who is better resourced and why? Is it natural (rural media having fewer resources) or is it reflective of some discrimination or implied through favoritism to outlets (well-endowed state media, politically subservient media, etc.)?

7. <u>Pay Levels for Journalists are Sufficient to Discourage Corruption</u>. In many countries around the world journalists remain underpaid, and in some cases barely paid at all. This creates a temptation towards corruption – "pay for play," avoidance of topics, advertising masquerading as reporting, etc. A basic starting point in discouraging corruption within the profession is to ensure that journalists make fair wages for their work, within the context of their country.

   Core Data: Salary surveys, existing analyses (e.g., MSI, AMB)

   Supplemental Data: Surveys of journalists and focus groups with questions on perception of pay levels, prevalence of pay for play, etc.

   Analysis: One must have solid data on general pay scales in other industries and professions to compare to those of journalists. What does government pay, PR or marketing (a frequent employer of journalism graduates), teaching, etc. This should, as possible, include an understanding of benefits – a government job is often considered secure so equal salaries may not tell the entire story.

Additionally, there are issues of both reality where one can compare pay levels objectively and perception. What do journalist believe they should be paid? What is considered a living wage? Any assessment must see to arrive at an understanding of these factors through objective data and data on journalists own perceptions.

<u>2. External Factors.</u> Factors external to the media system itself play a significant role in determining the ability of media outlets, journalists, and associations to function professionally and sustainably. In many countries where media development projects take place, these external factors prove more important (and powerful) to the development of media than any media-focused project. In order to design development programs that will be effective, these conditions and their impact on potential interventions must be understood. The toolkit will provide a variety of means of examining these external factors, provide information on sources of data, discuss analysis of the data, provide alternative sources of data (focus groups, surveys, etc.).

- **The economy** can constrain or provide opportunity for the media. Income and expected income growth determines what media citizens might use. Are the able to obtain internet access? Are mobile phones affordable and is SMS cheap enough to use? Are data networks coming down in price?

  Advertising, or often lack of, determines how media might survive. Income disparities can determine whether there is a corresponding disparity in access to news and information.

  An assessment of the system should take into account factors such as:
  - per capita GNP (particularly looking at year on year changes)
  - income disparities (rich vs. poor, urban vs. rural, ethnic and religious, etc.)
  - size of the private vs. the government sector
  - structure of the economy (manufacturing, services, natural resources)
  - employment rates
  - the nature of economic regulation
  - international trade
  - physical infrastructure
  - citizen access to technology

- **The political system** plays perhaps the most vital role in the media sector and its ability to develop and sustain itself. Stable political systems can provide more opportunity for media to develop as businesses. Political conflict can lead to disruption in lives, markets, and the social fabric which can limit media's ability to play a major role. However, stability can also be the result of repression and conflict can provide openings and demands for information that entrepreneurial media can fill. An assessment of the media must examine these factors and others, including,
  - Are elections free and fair?
  - Is there any meaningful division of powers between legislative, executive, and judiciary?
  - Is the judiciary independent?
  - Do stable political parties exist?
  - Is the political system inclusive of all groups in society?

    - Is the state centralized or decentralized?
    - Do regional governments based on ethnic divisions exist and are they granted real autonomy?
    - Has the country undergone peaceful transitions of power?

- **Socio-demographic factors** must be examined to understand the media context. Most countries have societal diversity of varying types – class, religion, ethnicity, urban/rural, etc. - that can have a substantive impact on governance and societal cohesion. Other statistics on health, education, literacy point to the nature of society and its current and future prospects for development. Questions an assessment should look at include:
    - Basic demographic characteristics (average age, rural vs. urban, life expectancy, etc.)
    - Ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity
    - Education and literacy
    - Health (maternal and child health, fertility, communicable diseases, healthcare system)

3. A Holistic Analysis. While any assessment looks at specific sectors and factors in the development of media, one must also ensure that the analysis is holistic. Interrelationships need to be explored, e.g. how does the economic viability of media affect the professionalism of the journalism produced? Where can a donor intervention have impact? Does the political system allow for interventions and probable success in key areas?

Monitoring Impact: The Spheres of Influence Approach Developed by Panos South Asia

Media as Public Sphere

Having a vibrant media scene is a necessary prerequisite to human development and good governance. But, the time has come for us, media practitioners and support organisations, to accept and recognise that this is too complex to bring about on our own. It would be prudent to recognise the limitations of our sector, and create appropriate evaluation and impact assessment tools. The existing tools and methodologies are devised to give a macro picture of the overall environments but fail to clearly demarcate the roles played by various actors: state, judiciary, executive, civil society and media. Media is just one contributing factor, albeit an important one at that. Hence, it is imperative to track the spheres of influence wielded by the sector so that support organisations are not misled into tracking and measuring overall environments while attempting to quantify the impact that media support organisations have in the process of change.

German philosopher Jurgen Habermas propounded the theory of *Public Sphere* as an area in social life where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. It is "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, reach a common judgement."[4]

He envisaged Public Sphere as "a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk"[5]. The Public Sphere mediates between the 'private sphere' and the 'Sphere of Public Authority' where " the private sphere comprised civil society in the narrower sense … the realm of commodity exchange and of social labour". The Sphere of Public Authority on the other hand deals " with the state ,or realm of the police , and the ruling class". The Public Sphere criss-crosses both these realms and "through the vehicle of public opinion puts the state in touch with the needs of society"[6]

However, this theory fails to recognise multiple public spheres; those which form separated though connected entities based on belief, faith, socio-economic status, issues, language, gender and common experience. These entities operate subtly to form several spheres within. Even Habermas after considerable deliberation, concedes: "The Public Sphere, simultaneously pre-structured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but also over the control of

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[4] Hauser Gerard. Vernacular Dialogue and The Rhetoricality of Public Opinion, Communication Monographs, June 1998.

[5] Fraser Nancy, Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy, Duke University Press.

[6] Habermas, Jurgen, The Stuctural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeoise society, MIT Press, 1989.

communication flows that affect behaviour while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible"[7]

It is this spectrum of public spheres, where free wheeling ideas collide and coalesce bringing forth debate and discussion that truly reflect in a vibrant, plural media of a region. While the burden of realising the developmental goals lies mainly with the state apparatus and other deliverable institutions, these *multiple spheres* influence societal and political change thus bestowing media with the role of an eminent catalyst.
In a sector like Media, which is in itself of intrinsic value as a development indicator, what we need to track needs to be turned on its head. Given its prime value, its instrumentalist role is but purely a corollary. This change of approach is of vital importance to enable better distribution of support and assistance for the media development sector.

Several theories offered have close to Utopian goals which seem further and further away as we work towards it. The need of the hour is to scale down expectations given the truth that the impact of media related programmes take well beyond project completion to percolate and manifest. No amount of number crunching will lead to direct correlation between cause and effect attribution. The goal post needs to be realigned with media development organisations accepting humbly that

1. they can only be co-contributors to an effect
2. they can continue working towards creating more space for the *multiple spheres*
3. programme completion is the beginning of a transformation process and its impact can be assessed only with the lapse of time.

Limitations of Enabling Environments

Ironically, media is also seen as shrinking in several developed economies with ideal legal and constitutional enablers in place. It is visible not only in the number of voices that are heard but also in wordage. From *The Guardian* and *The Observer* in the United Kingdom, *La Monde* in France, *La Republica* and *La Stampa* in Italy to *De Morgen* in Belgium broadsheets have become smaller Berliners. *The Independent* and *The Times* in England have also changed to a compact format. Though managements claim that content and journalistic values remain unchanged, the space crunch, without doubt will manifest in cuts in wordage and result in more compacted space for ideas and discourse. The story is essentially the same in the Unites States; *The New York Times*[8] paints a bleak present and an uncertain future for the media sector. *The Christian Science Monitor*, the respected century old publication has announced plans to cease publishing a weekday paper. *Time Inc* and *Gannett* together will lay off nearly 3,600 jobs. *The Los Angeles Times* newsroom today stands at approximately half the size it was in 2001.

Impact measurement models which base themselves heavily on the nation state and borders also lose credibility in a world where borders become a metaphorical construct with internet and satellite footprints making communication an almost open space sans

[7] Habermas, Jurgen, Further Reflections on the Public Sphere, MIT Press, 1992.

[8] The Media Equation: Mourning Old Media's Decline; David Carr; The New York Times; 29 October 2008

walls. This creates a fresh crop of problems taken in tandem with the shrinkage of traditional media space in developed countries as explained above.

Even Google Chief Executive Eric Schmidt concedes that the traditional media space is fast shrinking. In his address to a recent conference of American magazines, he laments that if great brands of journalism-the trusted news sources readers have relied on-were to vanish, then the Web itself would quickly become a 'cesspool' of useless information[9]; the time is imminent for us, media and media development organisations to rethink our strategies to measure our influence and our existence.

Intrinsic Value *Vs* Instrumentality

As pointed out earlier, media is an intrinsic value and its value as an instrument or vehicle is purely coincidental. It is in this fulcrum of faith that we are at variance with others. And, to embrace this, one has to leave behind the nation-state perspective and look closely at the rippling eddies created by the functioning of small institutes in opening up space for plural debate and discourse. The catalytic role of media and media organisations in facilitating change as opposed to the role of agency often thrust upon it is another point we contest.

The need of the hour is to scale down impact assessment from global feel-good indicators like poverty reduction to achievable ones like spreading awareness in a bid to help ordinary men and women make informed choices. "At its heart, development - if it is to be sustainable - must be a process that allows people to be their agents of change, to act individually and collectively using their own ingenuity and accessing ideas and knowledge in the search for ways to fulfil their full potential."[10]

Out of these challenges and the urge to have a home-grown understanding of our existence and worth, Panos South Asia over the past two years has been at work to document its Spheres of Influence. With no tangible deliverables and the diffused impact gestating and permeating over long periods of time, we decided to look at three frames of reference to gauge impact:

1. A decade of our existence
2. Themes where we have had a sustained engagement for over five years
3. Specific Programmes

Humbled by the fact that total and direct attributions to change is completely out of scope, we track and document our reach within the media, our ability to bring multiple voices into the open, our ability to work in tandem with Civil Society actors, our efforts to bring academia to render subjects in depth and Media on to common platforms for jointly put out informed narratives on our select five thematic areas.

With our spheres of engagement being multiple, PSA is looking to measure our spheres of influence within five categories

a) Media

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[9] The Media Equation: Mourning Old Media's Decline; David Carr; The New York Times; 29 October 2008

[10] *The Case for Communication in sustainable development*; Panos London;2007

b) Communities whose voices are articulated through PSA's programmes
c) Civil society partners
d) Academia
e) State Actors/Policy makers

With newer technologies entering the media sector, PSA integrated web and New Media into our programmatic content. It now straddles Print, Television, Radio and New media. So, the widening reach of the organization and the difference its activities make to these various sectors is also charted.

We learnt from experience that a bottom-down or top-up approach will not yield desired results in opening up more space for debate. However well the journalists imbibe and put to use the training and empowerment that Panos programmes infuse, it will not reach the desired impact of opening up more space for diverse voices on issues until and unless the gatekeepers - the editors and owners are sensitized to the issue and allow it.

With programmes targeting all three tiers of media from cub reporters through mid career journalists to editors/publishers and owners impact measurement of particular thematic areas have been made possible. Output monitoring, quantum and quality of space before and after the engagement for the issues discussed, responses etc in print media/ viewership / listenership, timing/repeats in broadcast etc, have been documented to measure impact. Career advancement of participants who have benefited from PSA's engagements have also been tracked as the higher up the ladder they move, the more space they get for decision making and bringing forth more debate on the topics. This way we look at it from the media and media organizations' perspective.

Our programmes work on a multi-pronged approach of training programmes, fellowships and Gatekeepers' retreats for editors and owners. To make the monitoring and evaluation model flexible to incorporate the impact of different components that different thematic programmes use to reach their set goals, several options have been provided.

For programmes like Public Hearings and symposia where state actors who are the final makers of policy changes, Civil Society organisations and activists who lobby for the change and Media which facilitates open debate thus catalysing the change are brought together.

For Fellowship programmes however, it is an engagement between Expert advisors and Journalists that Panos South Asia mediates and facilitates. So, for thematic areas we look at the quality and response to outputs, testimonials from fellows on their experience, monitoring of the fellows' progress through the project cycle,
Our Thematic Areas also coalesce into each other organically. For example outputs on access to treatment in regions under strife cannot be restricted to Conflict or Public Health.

From there, we move on to look at the impact of our partnerships with five groups as to how they help create more space for the multiple Public Spheres

- Our engagement and influence on media.
- On groups and communities whose voices find space in the public sphere, thanks to PSA's programmes.

- On Civil Society partners, like minded organisations who help us plan, develop and implement our vision thereby becoming stake holders.
- Academia who helps clarify issues, guide and give more teeth to arguments that gets placed in the public domain.
- With state actors like the policy makers who finally make the 'change'.(Though in this process, PSA humbly claims to be one of the contributors to the cause, as it would be pure bombast to claim the change is solely due to our interventions or programmes.)

In its decade long engagement, PSA has engaged with 38 languages across the region. We then went on to map and document the language impact with specific focus on the different types of media we engage with: Print, Radio, Television and Web media.

While Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes have life during the project cycle, PSA strongly believes that impact assessment in the areas we deal in can be fruitful only after the lapse of a certain period of time. Immediate impact assessment not only negates the imperative need for long term investment; it also defeats the basic purpose.

So for a particular programme, we will go by the popular mandate of monitoring through the project cycle and evaluating on completion but impact assessment will be done after allowing enough time for the permeation to take effect.

To monitor fellowships in print programmes, we do look at the number of outputs, the languages in which they are published, with clearly documented data on circulation figures and readership. To make the quantum we deal with more credible, we take ten percent of the readership /circulation as our minimum assured readership while standard readings even by the Advertising sector take it as fifty percent. Mapping it on a bar graph showing languages, circulation, readership and the minimum assured readership gives the quantitative analysis picture of the programme.
We also gauge efficacy by tracking the advisory panel to participant ratio in each of the programmes to ensure that it does not get spread across thinly and retains programmatic intensity. When it comes to new technology communication initiatives like Radio and New media, the ratio of technical trainer to content trainer to participant is tracked.

However, for impact assessment of the same fellowship programme, with the lapse of time, there is more data to work with as in
1. increased journalistic expertise translating into higher quality media outputs
2. increase in space/ time for debate on the topics in mainstream media
3. these leading to better public awareness and increased involvement in the Public spheres
4. awards/ recognition for the outputs,
5. career advancement of the Journalists
6. our engagement outputs as a source for other actors
7. legislative/ policy changes

For training workshops also all these come into play along with regular questionnaires and follow-ups. Testimonials from stakeholders at various points on the project graph also give key pointers to the impact. Interviews with stakeholders and detailed desk review of project documentation worked towards closing gaps.

As all our projects fall within a well worked-out framework of five thematic areas, we look at overall programmatic impact of the various components like training, workshops, fellowships, media retreats, facilitating international coverage, exchange tours etc.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Impact Assessment

PSA's monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment distinguish clear phases in and after the project cycle. Our approach to Monitoring and Evaluation has strong roots in existing models and practices that are in use across the Panos network. However, it is in impact assessment that we differ conceptually from models in use. The difference is in the scales of measurement, the timelines and the ultimate goals. We staunchly believe in the catalytic role of media as opposed to being an agent in eradicating poverty or removing illiteracy. The impact we map is measurable and scaled down; the focus is on Media as the beneficiary and we look at impact after a certain period of time has lapsed after project completion. The analytical data available post-evaluation of a programme becomes our baseline to track impact.

ACTIVITY	TIMING	PURPOSE	RESPONSIBILTY
Monitoring	Throughout the project cycle	Stated objectives as per log frame on track; time lines adhered to	Programme Officers reviewed by M and E Officer
Evaluation	Mid-cycle and on completion	Mid-course corrections to challenges by change in strategy and methodology; Stated objectives, outputs achieved;	Senior Management and M and E Officer in discussion with stakeholders; External Evaluators
Impact assessment	At least two years after project completion	Track Spheres of Influence of the programmes and the organisation. Map intended and unintended outcomes that flow from a programme.	M and E team in discussion with stakeholders and beneficiaries

Monitoring

- This objective process has life through the project cycle from clearing the concept to the final report and tracks whether the

1. Why
2. What
3. How

are being followed as was conceived in the detailed Log Frame

- A participatory start-up workshop to determine details of activities, resources and sustainability helps.
- Systematic documentation and follow-up of activities
- Assess verifiable indicators in relation to achievements, constantly reverting to the project purpose and results

Evaluation

- Has both Qualitative and Quantitative components where the number of activities, outputs as well as their quality is assessed.
- Looks at challenges and effects mid-course corrections so as to fulfil the stated objectives by even changing tools, if needs be.

In media where external factors play a key role, the circumstances at the beginning of a programme is most likely to change by the time the programme is implemented.

- Assimilate the best practices into a feedback mechanism to facilitate shared learning and add value for future programmes and the network.
- Take stock of the challenges, their cause and course and record it to prevent recurrence in future programmes.
- Looks at efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.
- Evaluation Report serves as the baseline for the Impact Assessment which in a sector like Media and Communication takes time to permeate to even show up diffused results.

Impact Assessment

- Taking the Evaluation Report as the baseline, track the pathway of change to which our programmes have been co-contributors by assessing as many of the following as is relevant to the programme:

1. promoting access to information and resources
2. raise public debate on thematic issues
3. the defiance and departure from the dominant narrative
4. media's efforts to defy any form of censorship thus rendering media a site for democratic dialogue

5. questions raised in the Parliament and State legislature and legislative changes brought about by the outputs of our engagement

6. policy changes at local/ state / national level which have been effected

a. where no policy existed and new policies got framed

b. where clauses which gives more teeth and relevance to policy has been included

c. at the policy implementation level

7. change on the ground

8. bringing in multiple voices, especially those often unheard, into the public domain

9. bridging gaps between the grassroots level and policy makers

10. building awareness on peoples' rights

11. encourage and empower initiatives that use media for empowering economically and socially weaker sections of society

12. career advancement of our fellows and participants, thereby opening up more decisive space for the issues in question

13. reviews/ letters to the editor/follow-up articles and studies/republished/ reprinted

14. citations / awards/ recognition for fellows for their work.

15. growing partnerships encouraging linkages between media, academia and civil society fraternities.

Analysis of this data will help arrive at a doable, realistic Impact Assessment of how the engagements with stakeholders like media, academia, civil society organisations, and activists lead to increased visibility for the organisation and its activities. These Spheres of Influence in turn translate into growing credibility for the organisation to engage in its catalyst mission of empowering media to herald change.

Conclusions

This report firstly lists several “models” of media development assessment tools.

Each of these tools has specified criteria and indicators for “measuring” media development, but it is clear that all aspire to be as comprehensive and cohesive as possible. In any case, the focus has tended to be on assessing the totality of the cultural circuitry of media production, regulation, consumption and representation.

On this aspect, the report concludes that there is no need to reinvent wheels when you decide to do an assessment of media. On the other hand, it does help if you know the range of “wheels” that is on offer. And it helps even more if you know who manufactured them, what size they are, and for what purpose they were originally designed. To this end, in choosing criteria for any assessment tool, this report recommends the need for a clear decision about the scope of the assessment; an open declaration of value positions; clarity about the cause-effect aspects of the assessment; clarification of utilitarian concerns; inclusion of distinctive indicators of measurement; practicality of the assessment tool; and longevity of time-frame.

Secondly, the report addresses the question of implementing an assessment exercise. Here, it tackles the need for triangulating qualitative and quantitative assessment approaches, highlighting why each of these methodological approaches is important to the task of assessing the complexity of media development. Although most media development assessments tend towards the qualitative approach, this study calls for a purposive triangulation that incorporates aspects of methodological, ethnographical, geographical and gender triangulation. This is aimed at enhancing the assessment tool’s representativeness, credibility, dependability and conformability.

Thirdly, as a way of further enhancing data quality assurance, the report focuses on the need for a more ethnographic process of interpreting the results of the assessment, including ensuring that the final assessment product is “owned” by the various stakeholders involved in the assessment process. Associated with this collectivist process of data interpretation and report-writing is the need for developing and elaborating clear post-publication publicity and advocacy plans and activities. Such post-publication planning should not be seen as instrumentalist; it is an organic part of validating the findings of the assessment exercise.

It is clear that assessing media development is much more than just a research activity; it is both a technocratic process of enquiry and a conscious act of intervention in remedying the problems brought to light as a result of the assessment exercise.

This is a first step in a GFMD project to develop a practical toolkit and guide to media assessments and test it in one or more countries. The toolkit will continue with expanded versions of up to 30 issues relating to the five factors (for a full and comprehensive assessment) and will:

1. Expand on importance of each issue in terms of a professional and independent media sector, e.g. why libel law is a vital protection against unscrupulous and unprofessional journalists but how and why it can be abused by governments to silence dissenting voices.

2. Discuss linkages of each issue to others, providing avenues for exploration, e.g. How does libel relate to an independent judiciary? How does licensing relate to socio-demographic characteristics (a multiethnic society may be better suited for community radio but does licensing allow this?)

3. Provide explanations of data sources and their strengths and weaknesses, utility and cost.

4. Discuss how to link an in-depth assessment with a tool such as the IREX MSI or Freedom House Freedom of the Press Report.

5. Discuss how to undertake a limited assessment or an assessment of one sub-sector (e.g., radio).

6. Discuss how to take an assessment and determine the ability to implement a program to address the findings, e.g. where there is the most need may not be where one can have to greatest impact.

7. Discuss how to develop an ongoing monitoring framework from an initial assessment.

8. Discuss how one can determine links between projects and change in a media sector.

We encourage your feedback sent to:

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