Chapter 16

Policy recommendations

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While it is clear that news media has the potential to fulfill the three ideal roles we have discussed throughout this volume, and thereby to strengthen the democratic public sphere, certain important contextual constraints severely limit their capacity to act as watchdogs, agenda-setters and gate-keepers. Throughout the volume contributors have identified a series of challenges which can be categorized as those related to the role of the state, problems arising from market failures, limited institutional capacity in the journalistic profession, the weakness of civil society organizations, and lack of public access and literacy. Each of these, in turn, suggests a series of alternative policy interventions.

Several major donors are active in media development. They include the leading bilateral and multilateral donor organizations as well as private foundations. Despite an upsurge of interest in the field, some common challenges often bedevil media assistance initiatives around the world. What follows sums up the main policy recommendations. We are not providing a detailed blue-print but rather identifying a menu of alternatives that multilateral agencies, governments, donors, professional journalism bodies and NGOs could consider when designing their policies for media development and reform. The points below will provide, we hope, applicable suggestions to shape efforts to improve democratic governance around the world.

1. Utilize needs diagnostics and media performance indicators

One of the greatest identifiable weaknesses in much of the existing work on media reforms is the lack of a holistic approach by most donors. The primacy of the overall enabling environment is not receiving the attention it deserves. The evidence suggests slow progress in the areas of legal and regulatory reform, yet this is the heart of the matter. Above all, economic stability and sustainability of independent media remain major problems. There is a common theme to most media development projects: journalism training. Yet most of the training is episodic and unsustainable, apart from ignoring the structural constraints on the quality of journalism. There is also a severe lack of donor co-ordination, just as there are conflicting donor ideologies. As a result, there is a distorted dispersal of efforts globally. In the field, intermediaries are underdeveloped, local partners are insufficiently involved. There are few established monitoring and evaluation tools. In addition, there is, overall, a lack of research, especially that focusing on developing countries. In the light of these challenges, we
recommend the application of systematic media audits and indicators which are sensitive to each particular context prior to any policy intervention or the implementation of any program.

**Incorporate media indicators and audits into governance diagnostics and needs analysis**

Technical experts who lead work on governance reform need to identify and assess the key governance challenges in any country before appropriate interventions are designed. This diagnostic work can be informed by a set of disaggregated indicators, such as Country Profiles, or Quality of Governance Assessment Frameworks. What is crucial is that indicators for assessing the state of the media system need to be incorporated prior to any strategic interventions. UNESCO has led a process that has resulted in a comprehensive set of media indicators that, if applied, should highlight where interventions might be most needed. Puddephatt discusses the UNESCO indicators in chapter 2. He suggests that media indicators should have the following categories: Framework for regulation and control; Plurality and diversity of media, fair market, transparent ownership; media as platform for democratic discourse; professional capacity building; and infrastructure. Unless media system indicators are incorporated into governance diagnostics at country level, an institutional view of the news media will not be integrated into how governance reform work is actually done around the world. What we are proposing is a *condition sine qua non*.

2. **Reform the role of the state**

In this volume, many chapters illustrate the institutional constraints on the news media arising from the nature of the political history of the country. Since political institutions and media institutions are interdependent, a nation’s political history influences its contemporary media system. For instance, Dragomir documents how the communist past of the transitional societies in Central and Eastern Europe has an impact on the media systems there, shaping journalism ethics and the intensity of political interference. In the case of Latin America, the media were not nationalized and most are still mainly privately owned; but the legacy of military dictatorships continues. In Asia, the media systems in former one-party dictatorships still continue to be characterized by a high level of state ownership and the overwhelming influence of ruling parties. Finally, in Africa, the legacy of one party dictatorships and military rule means that state ownership of the media remains strong, the private sector is weak, and ethnicity remains a factor.

Several contributions in this volume attest to the impact of the political system, and its past, on the nature of the news media; the former imposes constraints on the latter. Autocracies try to control the media and curb critical reporting, Norris and Inglehart report, in order to promote support for the
government and its ideology. Autocratic states restrict the news media through censorship, state ownership of the media, legal restrictions on freedom of expression and publication, criminal prosecution of journalists, and even violence. Authoritarian regimes also restrict the news media through regulations that require licenses for media outlets and journalists, libel laws, content laws, taxation, official secrets acts and so on. And as Price, Al Marashi, and Stremlau point out, the news media in post-conflict states often face particular difficulties. In such countries, very often the media are in the hands of a few powerful groups intent on using the media to polarize the public. They give the example of Iraq, where private media reflect political and ethnic divisions, and are designed to increase the power of their owners. Finally, the regional surveys in this volume give details regarding the constraints imposed by the media by the state, region by region. All of these findings give rise to a range of recommendations for reforming the state, in particular by strengthening the framework of civil liberties, by reforming state broadcasting, and by establishing effective and independent broadcasting regulatory agencies.

*Expand the framework of civil liberties and remove legal curbs on the media*

Any overarching constitutional principles, laws or administrative procedures that inhibit the independence of the press should be reformed in order to strengthen universal human rights, especially fundamental freedoms of expression and publication. Efforts should be directed towards respecting the rights of journalists and revoking punitive legislation against the independent media. Some governments use control of official advertising to muzzle the press; they also use punitive taxation, or licenses for the importation of newsprint. There are countries where governments control the printing presses that all newspapers and magazines have to use; if a publication is out of favor with the government it will simply not get printed. Every effort should be made to make these control devices inoperable.

*Turn state broadcasters into Public Service Broadcasters*

As different authors in the study report again and again, state control of the media, especially broadcasting, inhibits the capacity of the news media to be watchdogs, agenda-setters and gatekeepers. The constant push ought to be to convert state-controlled broadcasters into genuine Public Service Broadcasters. Again, Buckley and colleagues have captured some of the best practice available regarding how to create and secure public service broadcasters.\(^{10}\) They suggest that public service broadcasting should be editorially independent of government and protected against political and commercial interference. Public service broadcasting should be required to serve the public interest. Public service broadcasting should provide a wide range of programming to educate, inform, and
entertain the public, while taking into account ethnic, cultural, religious, and regional diversity. Public service broadcasting should be governed by an independent governing board (with transparent, fair, and independent process of appointing members of that board, members required to serve the public interest at all times). Lastly, public service broadcasting should be financed through public funding through specific mechanisms that protect its independence.

*Ensure the independence of broadcasting regulatory bodies.*

Now, while broadcasting regulation is unavoidable, what is crucial is that bodies overseeing this process must be truly independent. A World Bank report has gathered global good practice on how to secure the independence of broadcast regulators: 11 Broadcast regulation should be the responsibility of an independent body with powers and duties determined by law and whose principal duty is to further the public interest, not political or economic interests. The process of appointing the members of that regulatory body should be open and transparent. The regulatory body should operate in an open and transparent manner, and should be required to include public participation. The decision making process of the regulatory body should be transparent. The regulatory body should be subject to judicial oversight and should be formally accountable to the public. And the regulatory body should be required to publish an annual report. While the principles are widely recognized, the challenge in many states remains to make these effective in practice and not merely on paper.

### 3. Address problems of market failure

With the state posing such a huge challenge to the capacity of the news media to fulfill their ideal roles, it is tempting to think that liberalized and competitive media markets would be the perfect solution. As Coronel shows in this volume, liberal markets and competition can be an asset to watchdog reporting, because state influence can be curbed; but they can also be an obstacle because commercial pressures often make the media reluctant to expose the misdeeds of the powerful and hold them to account. Several of the reports in this volume, for example by Moeller, Dragomir, and Semetko, indicate that profit oriented news outlets tend to lack a public service agenda. In particular, Waisboard’s case study on Latin America shows how a strong co-dependence of state, market, and the press results in severe challenges to the ability of the news media to be watchdogs, agenda-setters and gate-keepers. According to him unregulated influence of governments and markets, coupled with the close proximity between official and business interests, have historically undermined the media’s role in democracy. As a result, ownership structures limit the spectrum of possible issues that the news media can address. Investigative journalism is not likely to uncover corporate corruption, since the major economic players
also own the media. Above all, editorial partisanship is the norm rather than the exception. Finally, on this issue, it is important to note that the market can be a constraint where the advertising industry is not sufficiently developed, as few media outlets can survive financially outside state control. This is often the case in Africa. The reasons can range from the limited size of the domestic economy to the absence of critical advertising infrastructure, like independently audited circulation figures, independently determined audience ratings, and so on. These challenges also suggest a range of interventions which can be designed to counterbalance and address the underlying causes of market failures.

Ensure that media systems are plural and diverse

If there is one overarching object of policy it is this: to make media systems as plural and as diverse as possible, and there is a broad consensus that external diversity should be achieved through an appropriate regulatory environment encouraging a wide range of media ownership, outlets, contents, interests, and political perspectives. Nevertheless there are different philosophies about the most effective way to achieve this goal, and, in particular, the most appropriate role of markets and the state in this process. Both excessive state ownership and also excessive ownership concentration in the private sector can threaten the news media’s plurality and diversity, and these should be the target of legal reform. It is advisable for donors to support small independent media, as outlined in the 2008 Inaugural Report of the Center for International Media Assistance, to offset the potentially negative effects of political and economic pressures on the mainstream media.

A World Bank report contains good practice suggestions on the regulation of private broadcasting. Introduce positive content obligations (requiring certain materials to be included in broadcasts) to increase the diversity of content and material available to the public. Introduce special content rules during elections (e.g., equal time for all parties). Do not introduce restrictions on broadcast content beyond those that apply to all forms of expression. Promote codes of conduct and self-regulation. Introduce sanctions for breaches of content rules that are proportionate to the harm done. Ensure equitable frequency distribution between public service, commercial, and community broadcasters. Introduce must carry rules for cable and satellite networks, providing for the inclusion of public service and community broadcasters. Promote public access channels. Again, while commonly recognized, implementing these principles in countries where a few conglomerates own and control a large sector of the media market remains difficult in practice. Yet without them, ideas of gate-keeping
balanced reporting and of independent watchdog scrutiny of corporate governance are not likely to be realized.

*Strengthen media markets, media industries and support media infrastructure*

It is important to realize that the media sector in developing countries has major economic potential. It can be a massive creator of jobs and a generator of wealth. In the European Union, the content production industry accounts for five percent of the GDP, and employs four million people. Film productions have a significant economic impact in the Philippines and in India. In 2006, The Economist reported that the Nigerian film industry was the second biggest employer in the country. Moreover, the viability, diversity and independence of the sector are crucial requirements for a free, plural and independent media system. The media sector needs to be regarded as an important development sector. The kind of economic development initiatives directed towards other economic and social development sectors need to be directed to the media sector as well. In that regard, it is important to commission sector studies and develop plans of action for sector development and support institutions that will strengthen the entire sector, especially Audited Circulation Bureaus for newspapers and magazines, and Audience Ratings Systems for broadcasting.

In addition, the African Media Development Initiative has a number of recommendations that are not only sensible but of general applicability: The Initiative suggests that efforts should be made to: Tailor funds and bridge the finance gap that may exist because the return on investment for media technology or media outlets typically exceeds the usual lending cycle of banks. Improve the utilization of existing finance schemes by increasing awareness of existing funding opportunities among the media sector. Facilitate the funding of equipment. Create mechanisms for media outlets to share technical facilities. Identify opportunities to collectively purchase equipment. Support equipment and skill upgrades.

4. **Build the institutional capacity of the journalistic profession**

The ideal roles of the news media as watchdogs, agenda-setters and gate-keepers/public forum have implications for the values, norms and professional practices of journalists. They also have implications for their standards of training, accreditation, organizational routines and the nature of their professional associations. For instance, it is implied that the news media have obligations to society; and that professional journalists have to be truthful, accurate, fair, and objective. Yet in many countries journalists fall far short of these standards. Most of the chapters in this volume describe deviations from the norm. The broader political culture in a country also tends to shape the norms,
rules and professional practices of journalists. The prevalence of political bias is widely reported on these pages. Also widely reported are sensationalism, a failure to focus on the public interest, treating the news as a commodity, bribe-taking by journalists, and so on. To build institutional capacity, the following interventions should be considered.

Prioritize institutional not individual capacity-building

For the democratic governance agenda, the most appropriate way to view the news media is the institutional perspective. The media system in each country should be regarded as one of the core institutions affecting governance, like an independent judiciary, free and fair elections, and parliaments, and so on. This insight led political philosophers to refer to the free press at the Fourth Estate of the Realm, that is, a co-participant in governance. Those working on governance reform around the world need to ask: what kind of media systems will help to deliver democratic governance? An institutional view of the media requires a holistic approach to media development, not piecemeal work concentrating mainly on the short-term efforts, such as ad hoc workshops training individual journalists. This is the conclusion of all the leading surveys on the state of media development. Price and his colleagues call for a real focus on the enabling environment of the news media. Buckley and co-authors maintain, rightly, that it is not sufficient for reform efforts to focus on policies to extend access to information without addressing issues of media independence, pluralism, accessibility, and capacity. Finally, the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) strongly recommends a holistic approach the media development, saying: ‘Change will happen faster if all the factors – professional development, economic sustainability, legal-enabling environment, and media literacy – are addressed simultaneously.’

Support sustainable professional development programs and expand institutional capacity

Journalists need support in at least three areas: Professional skills, journalism ethics, and management skills. But what the lessons from actual interventions suggest – and there have been many of those – is that short-term, ad hoc initiatives have not produced desired results. Professional development programs are more effective when they are sustained, especially via existing platforms of learning. More lasting solutions arise from building the institutional capacity of journalism education in each environment; it is also preferable to support professional associations able to promote ethical standards and public interest journalism on a permanent basis. The role of independent press councils, for self-regulation, is also important to set professional standards of accreditation, to establish agreed ethical codes, and to protect and defend independent journalism from outside pressures.
5. Expand civil society organizations

The capacity of the news media to be effective watchdogs, agenda-setters and gatekeepers depends crucially on the vibrancy of associational life in a particular society. Organized groups help to inform and mobilize the news media on specific issues. And when the news media cover an issue or expose official wrong-doing, it is up to NGOs and others to organize the public, unleash a storm of protests, and insist on redress. It is, on many levels, a symbiotic relationship. Coronel illustrates this in her report on the ousting of Philippine President Joseph Estrada. The first coverage of his corruption was initiated by the independent, nonprofit Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. After the revelations had been made public, citizens groups, the Church, political parties, and other groups organized protests that eventually forced Estrada out of office. In addition, as Coronel and Waisboard both report, NGOs increasingly provide non-commercial alternatives to news media. Above all, there is a growing trend towards NGOs setting up media watchdog groups or observatories. For instance, Media Watch Global was founded in 2002 during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre to ‘promote the right of citizens around the world to be properly informed’. Media Observatories have spread all over Africa. The self-regulatory bodies are committed to uphold press freedom and journalism ethics. Media watch groups have been founded by civil society groups in many more parts of the world, including the Middle East, Iraq, India, United Kingdom, and the United States. Where there is no vibrant civil society, the news media will not be as effective as they might otherwise be.

Encourage links between news media and the rest of civil society

Better cooperation between the news media and the rest of civil society is crucial. For one thing, the news media need the active support of groups in civil society in order to strengthen the commitment of each political community to free, diverse and independent media. For quite another, non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, and social movements cannot be effective without the active support of free, diverse and independent news media. In addition, the growing trend whereby NGOs set up media watchdog groups or observatories deserves support and scaling up. For it is a good way of holding the news media themselves accountable; it is also an excellent way of encouraging the news media to focus on the public interest.

6. Expand public access and build media literacy

Moreover widespread public access is an essential condition for an effective media. From the point of view of governance, the question of media infrastructure is of crucial importance when one thinks about access to the media or media penetration of a national territory. This matters in at least
two ways. First, the capacity of the government to have the means to communicate with all parts of the territory it governs has always been seen as of fundamental importance with regards to both state effectiveness and nation-building. Nations are, after all, ‘imagined communities’ and the news media play a crucial role in creating that sense of community. This role becomes obvious in post-conflict environments. The United Nations and other agencies often support the development of mass communication systems in peace building efforts in order to restore the sense of one national community able to communicate with itself.

Access to the news media matters in a second way: it is of fundamental importance to citizenship, especially competent citizenship. A segment of the population without access to the news media might as well live in the Dark Ages. As Puddephatt notes in this volume, UNESCO considers access to media – to gain information and for one’s voice to be heard – a vital part of human development. Formal media freedoms have little meaning if citizens cannot make use of the media. Not surprisingly, media scholars agree. For instance, Norris and Zinnbauer identify widespread access to mass communication as one of the two conditions under which media can strengthen good governance and development. Norris and Inglehart, in this volume, argue that access to alternative media sources can undermine the hold of autocracies because the public is exposed to a wider variety of information and ideas. They note that in some of the poorest countries in the world, between a quarter and a third of the population has no access to the news media.

These days, the problem of access to the media is often discussed in terms of the Internet and new ICTs. Nonetheless, access is a constraint with regard to both new and traditional media. Development assistance projects target both. A good recent example is from Pakistan. In October 2005, an earthquake in Pakistan destroyed newspaper offices and killed journalists, reducing the capacity of local media to respond to the disaster. Pakistanis first learned about the disaster from private television and radio stations – but neither was available in the affected areas. The 3.5 million people affected by the earthquake had no means of finding out what happened or how to get help. To re-establish some degree of media network, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority issued short-term licenses for local radio, disregarding its usually lengthy licensing process and even making military frequencies available to non-commercial broadcasters. Internews, an international media development organization, provided support to build an emergency broadcast sector, providing equipment, content, and training as well as distributing about 10,000 free radio sets among the affected population. The use of radio as
primary source of information rose from 28 percent shortly after the disaster to 70 percent four months later. Television and newspapers remained below 25 percent.

In addition to lack of access, public apathy can be a game-changing constraint. Where the public does not care about what its government is doing, the coverage of corruption, repressive laws, restrictions on freedom of expression, transparency and openness in government, journalists can be overly exposed and isolated crusaders can be attacked with impunity by the powerful. For instance, polling citizens in about twenty countries, a 2008 World Public Opinion Survey found that majorities in all the nations surveyed support the general principle of press freedom. Yet in countries like Jordan, Egypt and Indonesia, the majority of citizens supported the idea of governments being able to curb news coverage that might be deemed politically destabilizing. The report notes: ‘In many countries people want more media freedom than they have now, but in many Muslim countries and Russia, there is substantial support for regulation of news that the government thinks could be politically destabilizing.’31 Tettey, in this volume, mentions an incident that illustrates the power of public support for the news media. Because the Kenyan newspaper, The Standard, was reporting possible corrupt behavior by officials in government, security forces raided the offices of the newspaper in March 2006. Thousands of citizens and several civil society organizations mobilized in support of the newspaper. Many went to the premises to show support. The public response led to a parliamentary hearing and international press coverage. The government owned up to the raid and backed off subsequently. The point is this: without public support for a free and independent news media, life for brave independent journalists can be lonely and exceedingly dangerous. Addressing these challenges also provides many opportunities for effective policy interventions.

Expand public access to the new media and rights to information

Access gaps which remain need to be closed, not simply the digital divide in information and communication technologies, which has received extensive attention, but also the skills and resources which are necessary to give widespread access to traditional broadcast media as well. Recent years have witnessed important technological innovations that have reduced some of the technological hurdles to information access in poorer societies, by-passing some of the obstacles. This includes the availability of wind-up radios, solar power batteries, wireless connectivity (WiFi, WiMax), $100 rugged laptops, internet cafes, community telephone and Internet centers, and cell phones with data services, email, and text messaging.32 All these development may help to close access gaps. At the same time, some observers suggest that the core inequalities in information poverty have persisted and may even
have deepened.\textsuperscript{33} Post-industrial societies and emerging economies that invested heavily in advanced digital technologies have reaped substantial gains in productivity. This may encourage them to build on their success and expand this sector of the economy still further. Moreover it still remains the case that, beyond isolated pockets of innovation, many of the poorest societies in the world continue to lack the basic infrastructure and resources to connect their rural populations to global communication networks and markets.

\textit{Support media literacy as part of building citizenship skills}

With regard to the general public, efforts are in their infancy around the world designed to promote media literacy. According to UNESCO, this process means ‘critical knowledge and analytical tools, empowering media consumers to function as autonomous and rational citizens, and enabling them to critically make use of media.’\textsuperscript{34} These efforts need to be supported and scaled up. As Price and Krug argue, having citizens that are media literate is part of the enabling environment for a free and independent media.\textsuperscript{35} The reasons are obvious. Citizens need to appreciate the value of a media system that is free, diverse and independent. They also need to need to be able to assess mediated information.

\textbf{Conclusions}

In short, the ideals of journalism can be, and often are, challenged, especially in states governed by autocratic regimes and by societies in transition. More often, however, there is a broad agreement on what general role the media should play in strengthening democratic governance, but chapters have documented the many ways that journalistic practices fail to meet these ideals. None of the potential steps we have identified provide automatic or simple solutions. But certainly broadening the range of interventions beyond the investment in occasional journalism training workshops and similar short-term initiatives, so that media reforms becomes mainstream to all work on democratic governance, would be a step in the right direction. The evidence suggests that, in reality, the performance of media systems often fall far short of lofty aspirations, with important consequences for the workings of the public sphere. The report identifies the most effective strategic interventions designed to overcome these constraints. These include policies directed at strengthening the journalistic profession, notably institutional capacity building, such as press councils, press freedom advocacy NGOs, and organizations concerned with journalistic training and accreditation. Other important reforms seek to overcome market failures, including developing a regulatory legal framework for media systems to ensure pluralism of ownership and diversity of contents. Lastly, policies also address the role of the state, including deregulation shifting state-run to public service broadcasting, overseen by independent
broadcasting regulatory bodies, and the protection of constitutional principles of freedom of the press, speech, and expression. While country contexts vary, it is our firm conviction that efforts of the kind we have described above will not only strengthen the news media in a durable way, they will also make a contribution to the overarching objectives of the democratic governance reform agenda: making states that are effective, responsive, inclusive, and accountable.
Figure 16.1: Challenges and opportunities facing the news media

![Diagram showing the roles and challenges of news media in relation to governance and poverty reduction.](image-url)
We would like to thank Anne-Katrin Arnold, CommGAP research consultant, for her help in researching this chapter.


20 This statement is attributed to Thomas Carlyle, in The French Revolution (1837), building upon the idea of three estates (church, nobility and commoners) developed by Edmund Burke. Moreover, Jeremy Bentham argued that in a system of representative government, newspaper editors are as important as the Prime Minister. Jeremy Bentham. 1822/1990. Securities Against Misrule and Other Constitutional Writings for Tripolis and Greece, ed. Peter Schofield. Oxford: Clarendon.


The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism was co-founded by Sheila Coronel.

There appears to be little systematic knowledge regarding media watch groups. This issue warrants further investigation, since it raises questions of the watch groups’ own bias and accountability.


Wi-MAX is important for development because it is a new 802.16 IEEE standard designed for point-to-point and point-to-multipoint wireless broadband access that is cheaper, smaller, simpler and easier to use than any existing broadband option (such as DSL, cable, fiber, 3G wireless) and it also bypasses the existing wired infrastructure and legacy service providers (i.e. the telephone and cable companies).
