

## ***Chapter 9***

### **Principles for media assistance**

*These principles were prepared jointly by Sina Odugbemi from the World Bank's Communication for Governance and Accountability Programme (CommGAP) and James Deane from the BBC World Service Trust (BBC Media Action) and presented for discussion (and subsequent revision) to the Seminar on Trends in Support of Accountability: Media Assistance Today on 7-8 June 2011 and at the 15th Plenary Meeting of the OECD/DAC Network on Governance on 9 June 2011.*

“If it were left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter”. (Thomas Jefferson)

## Context

For much of modern democratic history, the media has been considered one of the most powerful and central forces for accountability. It receives special protection within most democratic constitutions expressly because an informed citizenry and a “fourth estate” capable of acting as a check on executive power are considered to be critical to good governance. Box 9.1 provides a useful and succinct contextual framing of accountability and its link to information and the media.

Within the context of aid effectiveness and democratic governance agendas, few question the importance of a free, professional and plural media in contributing to good governance (BBC World Service Trust, 2009). Nevertheless, few within the development community accord the media the same importance as other national accountability institutions. The media is mentioned (once) within the *Accra Agenda for Action* on aid effectiveness within the context of helping to contribute to mutual accountability.<sup>1</sup>

### Box 9.1. Political accountability and information deficiencies

“The idea of political accountability has been at the center of the development debate in recent years. The hope is that once democratic institutions reflect the will of the majority, effective development policies focusing on the poor will be implemented. Economic theory supports these beliefs. Becker (1983) shows that when political competition is fully secured, efficient policies will arise. Yet developing democratic institutions that depend on the will of the general population has been particularly difficult to achieve in many countries. These problems have often been linked to information deficiencies, i.e. voters’ unresponsiveness to policies (e.g. Grossman and Helpman, 1996) in theory; media shortcomings (Besley and Burgess, 2002) and lack of accountable local institutions (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2009) in practice. These problems have often been linked to information deficiencies, i.e. voters’ unresponsiveness to policies (e.g. Grossman and Helpman, 1996) in theory; media shortcomings (Besley and Burgess, 2002) and lack of accountable local institutions (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2009) in practice.”

*Source:* Aker, J.C., P. Collier and P. Vicente (2011), “Is Information Power? Using Cell Phones During an Election in Mozambique”, paper presented at School of Business and Economics, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, 20 May 2011, available at [www.pedrovicente.org/cell.pdf](http://www.pedrovicente.org/cell.pdf).

Several surveys suggest that the issue ranks low on the list of governance priorities within development agencies. Outside of the United States and the World Bank, only Sweden has a full-time staff member focused on support to media within the context of democratic governance and Norway has one half-time professional. That constitutes the entirety of specialist capacity within the OECD DAC system. Neither UNDP nor the European Commission has any clear capacity on the issue of media support within the governance agenda at the international level.<sup>2</sup>

Many DAC members have indicated that the issue should be a priority for domestic accountability, but many also lack understanding, capacity and resources to give effective support to the media as an accountability mechanism. Funding is allocated to media work, but is often not institutionalised or integrated into an overarching policy structure,<sup>3</sup> and may therefore not be efficiently used.

## Media and accountability in the democratic public sphere

Good governance depends on a functioning national public sphere – the space between government and citizens, where citizens come together (even virtually), share information, and deliberate on public issues. The media provides news and information to the public, brings issues to the public agenda and facilitates public debate and discussion. It serves as a watchdog for the public interest and holds state and non-state actors accountable. The media is crucial for good governance: it creates the conditions for inclusive policy dialogue, as well as providing a platform for broad-based participation in actual policy processes.

While the media is one of many domestic accountability mechanisms, it has the unique ability to enhance dramatically the visibility and effectiveness of other accountability mechanisms within society (Box 9.2).<sup>4</sup>

### Box 9.2. Using the media to enhance accountability mechanisms

As part of an anti-corruption programme, Brazil's federal government audited the expenditure of federal funds by randomly-selected municipalities. Results of these audits were made publicly available and covered by the media. Researchers found that citizens used this information to punish politicians who were performing badly. This effect was more pronounced in areas where local media disseminated the audit results.

*Source:* Ferraz, F. and C. Finan (2008), "Exposing Corrupt Politicians: The Effects of Brazil's Publicly Released Audits on Electoral Outcomes." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 123, N<sup>o</sup>. 2, pp. 703-45.

## **The media, domestic accountability, and the role of development assistance**

The GOVNET has selected the media, alongside parliaments and political parties, as one of three key strands requiring greater clarity and focus in donor support to domestic accountability. As investment grows in other domestic accountability initiatives (many of which – such as budget monitoring, access to information, aid transparency – are informational in character), a key challenge is to create more productive linkages with efforts supporting the domestic accountability role of the media.

Media development promotes voice, accountability and transparency through supporting the media's editorial independence, financial sustainability, professional capacity, and a lively civil society. Interventions range from supporting legislation to safeguard media freedom to equipping a small radio station with laptops and transmitters. Historically, media development has focused on journalism training, but donors increasingly understand that the media are part of a country's political economy and therefore require broader, more substantial, and longer-term support. Support to the media in developing countries is most effective if it is long-term, aims at financial sustainability beyond the donor intervention, involves local as well as international partners, and sees the media as part of a larger system of domestic accountability. The most effective media interventions are often based on existing platforms and initiatives – these have the advantage of having existing audiences, infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation frameworks and known reach. Interventions do not need to be new to have an impact on accountability.

## **Evidence**

### ***Politics and corruption***

A substantial literature exists in the disciplines of economics, political science, communication research and others on the impact of the media on accountability. The media has been shown to play a role in fighting both systemic and petty corruption (Box 9.3). Media coverage of corruption can lead to investigations, trials, resignations, and government policies. It can also influence the social climate in a society towards more openness and less tolerance of corrupt behaviour.

Journalists in free media systems have fewer constraints on their reporting and more incentives to actively investigate the misconduct of public officials. This is reflected in empirical evidence showing that countries that score high on the Press Freedom World Wide Index or that

have high coverage of information and communications technologies and high newspaper circulation also score lower on international corruption indices (Stapenhurst, 2000; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Bandyopadhyay, 2006). Evidence also shows the causal direction of this relationship: more press freedom leads to less corruption, there is no evidence that more corruption leads to less press freedom (Ahrend, 2002).

On a project level, studies have shown that citizens use the media as a channel for accountability to monitor the delivery of public services. Once a grievance has been made public, public outrage and increased public monitoring will motivate public authorities to correct it. For example, media coverage has been shown to level prices for school lunches (Ahrend, 2002), increase the portion of public funding that actually reached intended programmes (Reinikka and Svensson, 2005), and curb corruption in public sectors Franken (*et al.*, 2005). By using adequate statistical controls, these studies were able to ascertain that media was indeed the main factor contributing to improved domestic accountability.

#### Box 9.3. The power of the media as measured by the corrupt

“Which of the democratic checks and balances – opposition parties, the judiciary, a free press – is the most forceful? Peru has the full set of democratic institutions. In the 1990s, the secret-police chief Montesinos systematically undermined them all with bribes. We quantify the checks using the bribe prices. Montesinos paid television-channel owners about 100 times what he paid judges and politicians. One single television channel's bribe was five times larger than the total of the opposition politicians' bribes. By revealed preference, the strongest check on the government's power was the news media.”

*Source:* McMillan, J. and P. Zoido (2004), “How to Subvert Democracy: Montesinos in Peru”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 18, N° 4, pp. 69-92.

### ***Service delivery***

Most governance actors acknowledge that citizens need information about public services if they are to hold government accountable for their provision. Access to information movements, budget monitoring initiatives and aid transparency efforts are just some initiatives that have focused on enhancing accountability by ensuring that citizens have better access to information on the services or initiatives that are designed to benefit them.

Politicians have been shown to be more responsive to citizen needs if citizens have access to information on political decisions. This effect is particularly strong in clearly-defined media markets, where elected officials tend to act more in the interest of their constituents, attend more committee

hearings, and cast their vote less frequently according to their party's agenda (Snyder and Strömberg, 2008).

The media improve domestic accountability by putting issues on the agenda that directly concern the interests of citizens and public institutions (Box 9.4). This forces governments to take note of and respond to these interests. The relationship between a free media and government responsiveness has been demonstrated in the areas of public spending on education and health (Petrova, 2008), prevention of famine and public food distribution (Sen, 1981), and relief spending (Besley and Burgess, 2002). Disasters that are covered by the national media are more likely to receive foreign aid and receive more money than those not covered (Eisensee and Strömberg, 2007; van Belle, 2010).

#### **Box 9.4. When a radio programme turned the lights on in Angola**

In Angola, the neighbourhood of Ilha da Madeira in Hoji-Ya-Henda now has light and electricity after 30 years. This is a direct result of the *100 Dívidas* radio programme broadcast on Radio Ecclesia – Angola's only independent radio station. Supported by the BBC World Service Trust as part of a multi-country, DFID-funded governance and transparency project, *100 Dívidas* has helped the radio station focus on the concerns of the poor, mainly service delivery (water, health, roads and bureaucracy). Most of the issues explored in the programme spring from specific local complaints, but have widespread resonance as many people are affected by them. It is the first programme on Radio Ecclesia to derive content directly from the input of audience members, who feed in through SMS, emails or hand-written letters.

### ***Political participation***

The relationship between politics, the media and interpersonal communication is complex and has been substantially researched over several decades. Early evidence indicated a particularly significant role for radio in providing a critical platform for political debate and informing the electorate, as well as affecting government resource allocation and responsiveness.

More recently, there has been substantial research into the impact of the media on political participation in developing economies. Findings are consistent with earlier studies: in a wide variety of contexts, the media have a key role to play in informing individuals; providing an inclusive and critical platform for public dialogue and debate; stimulating interpersonal communication and ultimately ensuring that policy making benefits a greater number of people (Snyder and Strömberg, 2004; Leeson, 2008;

Olper and Swinnen, 2009). Research has also shown that the larger the share of uninformed voters in the electorate, the higher the likelihood that politicians will manipulate policies to increase their chances to get re-elected, even of those policies are not in the public's interest in the long term (Shi and Svensson, 2002).

There is a particularly strong body of evidence from both developed and less developed countries that shows that people exposed to and engaging with high quality media that cover political issues are better informed, more civically engaged and more likely to vote (see de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; Aker *et al.*, 2010; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996 and many others).

## Challenges

### *Lack of systematic evidence*

Although there is a substantial amount of research on the role of the media in domestic accountability, it is scattered and inconsistent. Studies use vastly different definitions and measurements of accountability and interpret results inconsistently. Anecdotes of successful media interventions outnumber rigorous studies with strong empirical measures.

The research also lacks an overarching theoretical framework to enhance our systematic understanding of the role of the media in accountability. Donor organisations are increasingly seeing the need to construct such a framework. In its publication *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform*, the World Bank situates the interaction between the media and accountability within the framework of a democratic public sphere. DFID and AusAID are in the process of commissioning a systematic review of effective approaches by non-government organisations (including the media) for improving service delivery in developing countries. The aim is to strengthen the international community's capacity for evidence-based policy making when enhancing accountability.<sup>5</sup>

### *Lack of institutional support structures*

The US Department of State and USAID have spent more than half a billion dollars on media development in the past five years. Their combined budgets for 2010 saw USD 140.7 million allocated to media support – a 36% increase over 2009 spending and an even more dramatic rise from the USD 68.9 million spent five years earlier (Mottaz, 2010).

Figures are available for expenditure on media support outside of the US, though comparative figures are not available for 2010. OECD reporting from 2005 through to 2007, however, indicated an increase in donor

assistance to the media sector – up from USD 47.9 million to USD 81.7 million over two years.<sup>6</sup> While consolidated figures are not available, EU mechanisms also provide considerable financial support to the media.

Despite this substantial level of investment, there are few institutional focal points (outside of the US) within key donor organisations attempting to make sense of the media's role in development, let alone as an accountability mechanism. The lack of an institutional home for these issues will continue to undermine efforts to better understand, measure and strengthen the role of the media as a domestic accountability mechanism.

### *Keeping pace with a shifting media landscape*

Social media and mobile technologies are increasingly shaping the way people interact with politics and represent an increasingly important accountability mechanism. New information and communication technologies (ICT) have added channels and platforms for citizens to hold their government accountable.

A more limited body of evidence exists on ICT (mostly focusing on European and American contexts), but given the pace of change and the rate of Internet/mobile proliferation in many developing economies, building an evidence base remains very much a work in progress. However, a growing list of initiatives illustrates the possibilities and potentials of using social media and mobile technologies to increase domestic accountability.<sup>7</sup> Donors need to be aware that new technologies and mobile applications change the rules of the game completely and constantly.

## **Strategic principles for media assistance**

1. **Incorporate media assistance into a larger framework of development aid.** Access to information is crucial for domestic accountability. Media institutions in particular provide tools and channels for accountability that can complement and enhance other accountability mechanisms, but also add new instruments that may be at least as powerful and efficient as the more commonly supported accountability measures. A weak and/or highly constrained media can undermine domestic accountability. The risk of not considering and supporting the media as part of broader accountability programmes is significant.
2. **Incorporate media indicators and audits into governance diagnostics and needs analysis.** The state of the media is inseparable from the state of governance in general. For instance,



the UNESCO standard media development indicators (UNESCO, 2008) could usefully be incorporated into governance needs assessments to more effectively guide interventions for improving media as an accountability mechanism.

3. **Co-operate with media development CSOs and determine media objectives and outcomes, not methodologies.** Given a lack of specific expertise on media development within the majority of donor organisations and local media beneficiaries, there is a strong argument for developing media support strategies and specific interventions in partnership with media development CSOs. Some donors are already taking this approach. Media development organisations, along with local partners, are often best positioned to assess context and needs and to develop effective interventions to address these. While there is a clear need to ensure that media strategies complement overarching accountability objectives, there is a strong argument for providing CSO implementers with substantial scope – and the ability to propose creative solutions – as opposed to highly prescriptive requirements.
4. **Focus on building public demand for inclusive policy dialogue.** The *Accra Agenda for Action* calls for “broadening country-level policy dialogue on development” (OECD, 2005/2008). One concern is a paucity of “evidence from which to systematically assess progress in implementing these commitments”. There is clear potential for media support that enables and fosters policy dialogue to contribute to this goal; research incorporated into such support can assist in building a body of evidence and understanding of effective strategies for stimulating policy dialogue.
5. **Support independent, sustainable, and capable local media in developing countries.** Local media in developing countries often enjoy significant reach and audience interest, but lack the resources, skills and support to better understand the needs of populations and effectively hold government to account. In supporting these organisations to improve their watchdog role, donors can effectively enhance non-media accountability interventions, build people’s demand for domestic accountability, and strengthen local media as an accountability institution.
6. **Foster ownership as a central component of support.** The nature of productive relationships between the media and audiences is one that engenders a sense of ownership. Where people see the media acting on their behalf and critically – enabling them to engage

directly with issues and politicians – there exists a clear sense of trust and ownership of media programmes.

7. **Promote citizen access to the media and mobile technologies as well as citizens' media literacy.** The media can only be an effective accountability mechanism only if citizens are able to use them. This includes access to media products and infrastructure as well as the ability to make sense of information.
8. **Encourage links between media institutions and the rest of civil society.** Media and civil society organisations together can form a formidable coalition for accountability and good governance. Donors should consider joining support for several accountability mechanisms, including media support, in appropriate situations.
9. **Support systematic research on the effects of media and information access on domestic accountability.** As outlined in this discussion paper, there is empirical evidence of the media's impact on domestic accountability, but it is not integrated into a larger theoretical framework. Research, including monitoring and evaluation, should be part of any media support project, but should also be supported in its own right to advance our understanding of the role of the media in domestic accountability in different political, economic, and social contexts.
10. **Learn about and harness new technologies.** Internet and mobile-focused support is not appropriate in all contexts. Needs analyses must properly assess media and communications environments to determine the most appropriate media platforms for supporting accountability. Where interventions do focus on new technologies, research should be incorporated to build a body of policy-relevant evidence to guide subsequent support.

## Notes

1. The word “media” was inserted, within the context of mutual accountability, only a few weeks before Accra as a result of advocacy by the BBC World Service Trust.
2. UNESCO does have such capacity but has not been significantly involved in the DAC.
3. It is notable that the most recent and perhaps most useful published analysis of European spending on support to media was commissioned from the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States.

4. According to the World Bank *Social Accountability Sourcebook*, “a common element of almost all successful social accountability initiatives is the strategic use of and support to both traditional and modern forms of media.” (World Bank, 2006)
5. Information from the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation website, at [www.3ieimpact.org/systematicreviews/3ie-ausaid-dfid.php](http://www.3ieimpact.org/systematicreviews/3ie-ausaid-dfid.php), accessed 18 September 2012.
6. These figures are indicative only: it is not clear what form communications spending or spending specifically earmarked as ODA for radio, television and print media actually takes, and there is no clear OECD definition of this area of support (Myers, 2009).
7. The Technology for Transparency Network initiative catalogues accountability projects that use mobile technology and social media as accountability tools (<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org>).

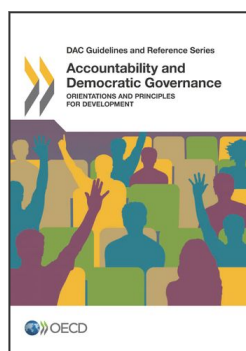
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