Why the Media Matter:
Ensuring the World's Poorest People Have a Say

In October 2005, James Deane, the Consortium's managing director, strategy, spoke at the Global Forum for Media Development, which took place in Amman, Jordan. In this excerpt, edited specially for* Mazi*, he discusses fast-moving global trends shaping today's media landscape— and the role of media in helping people improve their lives.

A rich, complex set of factors provides the background to the Global Forum for Media Development, factors that imply a rapidly developing, starkly different series of challenges to the role of the media in development in the 21st century than those that existed in the 20th.

This paper focuses on the role of media in development, rather than simply the development of the media. The role of media in development—their role in providing people with access to information that enables them to make sense of their lives, their role in covering issues relevant to those living in poverty and those at the margins at society, their role in reasonably reflecting the perspectives of such people in their coverage—have been concerns among development organisations for years.

It has not always been a preoccupation shared by much of the media itself.

The Global Forum provides an opportunity to reflect on why the media matter in the 21st century and why the role they play matters most to the almost three billion people on our planet who live on less than $2 a day.

This paper will outline some of the background to the Global Forum, particularly on four issues:

- Why the role of the media will be critical in determining success or failure in halving the number of people living in poverty by 2015;
- Why, perversely, media and communication support features so poorly in current development strategies;
- How recent transformations in the communication landscape raise profound new questions about the role of the media in society, questions responding to which media and media-support organisations themselves—rather than governments or even civil society—should answer; and
- A proposal on how the debate on the role of media in development can be reframed to overcome old debates and divisions on the issue.

Not Message, But Voice: Why the Media Matters

In 2000, the World Bank [i]carried out the largest-ever survey to determine what people living in poverty said they wanted and needed most. The most common response was that people's first priority was not money. Instead, what they needed is a voice—a say—in decisions that affect them.

Most debates over the role of the media in development focus on strategies to secure media coverage of poverty-related issues. This is critical, but the extent of coverage is not the only factor. The extent to which the perspectives of those living in poverty are reflected in the media is becoming equally important. It is important because it is what people living in poverty say they need most if they are to improve their lives. It is important too because nearly all current mainstream development strategies depend increasingly on it.

Nearly all current development strategies are rooted in two central assumptions: the first is ownership; the second is accountability. The role of the media is critical in supporting both.

A revolution is taking place in development assistance and development strategies. Gone are the days of a "thousand flowers blooming" in development assistance, in which hundreds of donors, thousands of organisations and millions of people were involved in a multiplicity of sometimes small, sometimes giant development projects.

The global development effort is now increasingly structured around meeting the Millennium Development Goals (Box 1). Nearly all governments—the United States is a major exception—have committed themselves to meeting eight Millennium Development Goals, a set of targets adopted in 2000. These goals are based on international development targets that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) drew up to create a coherent framework out of the many global conferences on development of the 1980s and 1990s.

UN International Development Goals By 2015:		
1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Reduce by one half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
		Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
2	Achieve universal primary education	Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling
3	Promote gender equality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015
4	Reduce child mortality	Reduce by two thirds the mortality rates for infants and children under five
5	Improve maternal health	Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio
6	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
		Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7	Ensure environmental sustainability	Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, reverse the loss of environmental resources
		Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
		Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020
8	Develop a global partnership for development	Open trading system, special needs of least developed countries (LDCs), debt, employment, access to medicines, ICTs

Box 1: The Millennium Development Goals

Adoption of the goals—halving the number of people living on less than a dollar a day is the first—was one major milestone in development assistance. Another milestone is creation of the methodologies and strategies to achieve these goals.

Donors, led principally by the World Bank, have committed themselves to work much more closely together according to a set of frameworks developed by developing countries themselves. Originally conceived as Comprehensive Development Frameworks by former World Bank President Jim Wolfensohn, in the late 1990s, they evolved into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process. PRSPs, which are meant to be created by developing countries themselves, are designed to form a framework within which all bilateral donors agree to work.

Just One Example: PRSPs

The central principle underpinning the PRSP is country ownership. "Too many capacity building efforts have floundered in the past because they have not been rooted in local ownership," the World Bank's Wolfensohn said in 1999, referring to the PRSPs.

PRSPs are an essential condition for poor countries to qualify for debt relief, but they are also designed to be the mechanism that ensures the perspectives of poor people, together with those of civil society organisations and the broader public in society, are taken into account in the design of development strategies. PRSPs were, in other words, conceived as a product both of government policy and of public discourse, discourse that could be a central pillar on which ownership rested. Without such ownership, argued Wolfensohn, PRSPs would fail.

There is increasing agreement that PRSPs have suffered from lack of ownership and are consequently failing.   PRSPs encompass most areas of government concerned with poverty—health service provision, education, social services and safety nets, housing and so on.

It is difficult to imagine a more fundamental process affecting more people on the planet.

PRSPs have been subject to criticism on many accounts: That macro-economic policy is not open for discussion; and that World Bank advisers continue to shape policy for governments are only two examples. But PRSPs have been weakened above all by a lack of ownership, and lack of public discourse has undermined that ownership. Such dialogue cannot happen without an engaged, informed, proactive media. Public dialogue has, by common consent and even in the World Bank's own analysis, been hopelessly insufficient. This deficiency has led the Bank to respond by making media and communication an increasing priority.

Analysis of media treatment of PRSPs—the extent to which they have been reported in the media, the extent to which media have provided a forum for public debate, the extent to which those who have most to win or lose from a public debate have their perspectives aired in the media—has repeatedly shown a ludicrously low or poor level of coverage.[ii] [iii]

In general, analysis suggests:

- Very low level of awareness of PRSP processes within media of PRSP countries;
- Disengaged and formulaic reporting—when it occurs at all;
- Lack of technical skills among journalists to report on economic development and issues specific to sectors such as health, education and agriculture;
- Poor relationships between government and journalists hindering investigative and strong coverage of PRSP related issues;
- Lack of interaction between NGOs/CSOs and media that, if it did occur, might lead to enhanced media understanding and engagement;
- Media outlets are increasingly demanding payment in exchange for coverage of development issues;
- Urban bias of media; and
- Failure to adjust strategies that engage media to new media environments.

PRSPs are the central, strategic mechanism agreed by the development community for meeting the central Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015. They are failing because of a lack of ownership. The media are vital to the kind of public dialogue that can foster ownership. The media are not and have not played that role.

Progress towards meeting the MDGs is faltering –or perhaps in more real terms, millions of people are dying unnecessarily—because this system is simply not working.

This is how the media matter to meeting just one MDG. Similar arguments can be made with many of the other MDGs—on HIV/AIDS, food security and livelihoods, education and so on. The CFSC Consortium's Bellagio meeting on Communication and the MDGs, held with donor and multilateral organisations in 2004, articulated some of these arguments. For more detail, see Annex 2.

An Assumption of Accountability

Some of the reasons why media struggle to cover poverty related issues are below. Yet there is a second assumption underpinning global development policy—accountability.

The importance of a government being held to account by its people is a given. It is at the core of most media debates. It is at the heart of much development policy and has been for many years. Amartya Sen wrote that famines don't occur in democracies, in large part because the media provide an early-warning system and a mechanism for ensuring pressure for government action. The importance of the media for these and many other reasons is clear.

The importance of the media is, in development terms, becoming ever more critical. Most development strategies are becoming more coherent and organised. They are also rapidly and heavily placing spending in the hands of government. One of the central conclusions of the report of the Commission for Africa[iv] was that, because so many conditions were imposed on development assistance, developing country governments felt more accountable to western donors than they did to their own citizens.

The *Commission for Africa Report*, and much current development policy thinking and practice, is intent on changing this. Development assistance over the next few years will, it is proposed, increase substantially. Debt reduction is becoming real. Some progress may even be made in reforming the terms of trade in favour of developing countries at the Doha Round in Hong Kong in December 2005. These steps could transform the prospects of millions of people living in poverty.

All of the above observations are based on a central assumption—that governments will act in the best interests of their citizens.

In essence, it is proposed that very substantial increases in development assistance and other income be made available to developing countries over the next decade, and that those countries should be less accountable to donors for how the money is spent. They should set their own priorities, as they think best, in the interests of their own people.

While few pretend that this is the end of conditionality, the assumption, the hope, perhaps the prayer, is that governments, if they are not to be held to account by donors, will be held to account by their citizens.

The importance of an independent, informed, engaged media in helping inform citizens so that they can hold their governments accountable is central. If media fail to hold government to account, perhaps the last, best hope for making a real change to the lives of three billion people on our planet is lost.

If this strategy of the big push" for making poverty history fails now, the opportunity is likely to be lost for generations. The stakes could hardly be higher.

If Media are So Important, Why Aren't They a Higher Priority?

There is little or no data available on how much development organisations collectively spend on support to media institutions in developing countries. There is indeed a panoply of types of media support, including to media in conflict , emergency and post-emergency situations, media freedom programmes, training and capacity building efforts, media in the context of good governance programmes, media as a contributors to strategies that combat HIV/AIDS and other issues, public dialogue initiatives, support to community media and many others. Given this it may seem odd to criticize development institutions for a failing to support the media.

Nevertheless, a Consortium-sponsored meeting of bilateral and multilateral development agencies held in Bellagio, Italy, in 2004[1] concluded that media and communication support strategies "remain a low priority on development agendas, undermining achievement of the MDGs." In general, support to the sector is incoherent, non-strategic and woefully short of the level of priority that the analysis presented in this and other papers implies is needed.

Most donors are simply not well equipped to support independent media and are, arguably, becoming less so. There are many reasons for this.

First, most bilateral, and many multilateral donors, have undergone rapid decentralisation. Decisions on funding are made at the country level on the assumption that decision-making should be as close to the problem as possible. This is clearly sensible, but for a sector like media, with little overall institutional support, commitment to media support ends up depending heavily on the individual interests of programme officers in donor country desks.
Plus, there's rapid staff turnover within development agencies. For a sector that is so fast-moving, complex and desperately requiring strategic consistency and urgency, such turnover is an acute constraint to effective action. For these reasons, among others, donor support to media is becoming increasingly fragmented, inconsistent, non-strategic—and indeed ineffective.

Second, donors are increasingly channelling funds through governments in the form of budget support. As previous experience has repeatedly demonstrated, it makes no sense to channel

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[1] See Annex 2 for a full declaration from this meeting sponsored by the CFSC Consortium.

support for media that promote public accountability of governments through the same governments who are meant to become more accountable. No government anywhere could be trusted with such a task. Yet most donors are less and less equipped to provide substantial media support outside such a government structure.

Third, even when donors are able to provide funds directly to media-support agencies, either internationally or nationally, they are open to accusations that support to the media sector in any given country is motivated -- not out of a desire to foster greater accountability in that country, or greater participation -- but to further the donor nation's policy agendas.

Fourth, while most donors work in the name of international cooperation, many of their donor policies are designed to foster competition between like-minded organisations. Particularly in the media and communication sphere, where cooperation among agencies for a collective and more coherent agenda and set of strategies is badly needed, donor policies ensure that organisations working in this arena are forced to compete with each other, sometimes unnecessarily.

Fifth, donors have increasingly moved to evaluation mechanisms like results-based management. These have tended to insist that quantitative indicators within short time frames are used to assess impact. Many media support initiatives, particularly those aimed at empowering people living in poverty, take time to show results, and the results—while often compelling—are less amenable to quantitative evaluation.

Number crunching does not mix well with much media support.

Sixth, development agendas are notorious for embracing fads and fashions. Even when donors commit themselves to a support policy in an area like media, interest is often lost as some new crisis or issue emerges. Donors are in general becoming more strategic and coherent in their development assistance, but the media have been particularly prone to a lack of strategic thinking, engagement and follow through. All the current evidence suggests that such inconsistencies are continuing, creating disastrous consequences in the future.

Seventh, most development institutions—governmental and non governmental—are often more preoccupied with using the media to publicise what they do or say, or using the media to advocate for the issues which most concern them, than with supporting media to increase coverage of poverty-related issues.

Eighth, the funding process itself can be difficult. Media-support organisations seek (or at least should seek) to develop strategies according to the stated needs and assessments of their partners, stakeholders, boards and, above all, those they are seeking to support. They then need to find ways of articulating their strategic priorities so that they resonate with the strategic priorities of donor organisations. Donors, in turn, should set priorities for funding, and therefore have to develop their own strategic priorities and find those best suited to implement them. Few media-support organisations see themselves mainly as implementers of donor funding, but donors are often forced to see them as such. Such dynamics can cause frustration and incoherence.

Ninth, as we discuss below, donors can find media support contentious and difficult. It is one of the most political elements of development, and donor and other agencies retain memories of bitter and difficult debates in the past on supporting media development.

Finally and most obviously, the value and importance of media and communication in underpinning other development strategies remains largely unrecognised and consequently the status of this field is marginal within most development agencies.

How can these challenges be addressed?

First: What's needed is a much more concerted, coordinated and effective advocacy strategy by media organisations aimed at donors. However, while this can be fostered and articulated by media support agencies, the needs and agendas need to be developed as much as possible from within developing countries. One example of such an approach is the Partnership for Communication in Africa. This initiative links some media-support organisations with organisations in Africa with the goal of framing an Africa-driven dialogue and donor advocacy strategy on the role of communication and media in Africa.

Second, the evidence base for the impact of media support should be urgently developed in the media sector.

The state of the media now

It is not only donors who need to examine their policies and practice in this domain. The extent to which the media can, or are willing to, play the role outlined at the beginning of the paper is perhaps the central question facing the Global Forum for Media Development.

Even a superficial trawl of media trends globally suggests there is much to provide hope, and much to suggest despair.

To focus particularly on developing countries, the point of departure is the recognition of a media revolution. The recent changes in the structure, content and character of the media have had a far more profound effect in information terms than the changes in new technologies. The "other information revolution" is rapid liberalisation, particularly of print and radio. Trends are inconsistent and obviously vary from country to country, but perhaps the most important trends shaping the media landscape over the last five years have been threefold[v]:

First, liberalisation and commercialisation of media over the last decade in many parts of the world has led to a much more democratic, dynamic, crowded and complex media landscape. This opens up new spaces for public dialogue and civic engagement, particularly in radio. Such liberalisation has also created more commercial, advertising-driven media where information and power within developing countries create a growing separation between rich and poor, urban and rural.

Second, growing concentration of media ownership—at the global, regional and national levels—is squeezing out independent media players and threatening to replace government-controlled concentration of media power with commercially and politically-oriented ownership.

Third, developing countries are increasingly, not decreasingly, reliant on powerful northern news providers, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Reuters and Cable News Network (CNN), for their international news and information, particularly on stories of globalisation, trade and international politics. In newly democratic countries in the South, and particularly within civil society, there is a renewed and growing frustration at the Southern media's dependence on what are perceived to be biased, or at least fundamentally Northern-centric, news organisations for international coverage and the setting of news agendas. There are major exceptions to this trend, of course.

This other information revolution, occurring over the past decade, is complex and sometimes contradictory. New freedoms, a blossoming of public dialogue and debate, a resurgent community radio movement, a proliferation of channels and titles across all media, a dynamic interplay between old and new technologies, and the sometimes rapid, sometimes agonizingly slow loosening of government control over information have all characterized this revolution.

Despite this, when viewed from the perspective of development, a growing crisis may be emerging, a crisis marked by a collapse—or sometimes stillbirth—of public interest media. A new competitive market among media has brought innovation, dynamism and often greatly enhanced democratic debate leading to profound social change.

But while the proliferation of media in the wake of liberalisation in many countries was initially marked by an upsurge of public discourse on a wide range of issues, evidence is growing that, as competition intensifies, content is increasingly being shaped by the demands of advertisers and sponsors who pay for the newly liberalised media. Pressure to remain profitable can result in increasingly urban-biased, consumer-oriented media with diminishing interest in, or concern for, people living in poverty.

Communication for development organisations and practitioners are beginning to adjust to the new environment.   DJs are becoming as important as journalists in bringing development issues to public attention. Indeed, journalism as a profession is dramatically changing and concepts such as "development journalism" are under siege in some countries. Journalists who themselves want to explore and investigate development stories—particularly those from outside the capitals—are finding it more and more difficult to get either resources or attention from their editors.

Never a rewarding and always a difficult profession, investigative journalism may become less attractive, particularly when such investigation focuses on the unglamorous poor. There is little incentive and decreasing inclination among many journalists to focus on development issues since this is an unwise career move. With no paying market for poverty-related content, and particularly for politically sensitive reporting, incentives for journalists, editors, publishers and owners to prioritise it are also declining.

Worldwide, journalists continue to risk their lives in the pursuit of truth, in the interests of the public. Increasingly they lose their lives. But in environments that are politically and economically hostile, how long can journalists be expected to operate as crusaders when they have limited support in their newsrooms and face constant danger? Journalism training is also under pressure, particularly with a public interest remit. Journalism schools in some developing countries are finding that graduates are as often snapped up by public relations and advertising companies as they are by news organisations.

The former state monopoly broadcasters and media organisations that retain the greatest capacity to reach rural and marginalised populations face intense competition from commercial organisations as governments reduce budgets. As a consequence, some are in crisis. In addition to shifts to more commercial and consumer-oriented content, there are reports of cutting language services, particularly of minority languages, and of transmitter capacity. In this sense, the digital divide exists in a much broader, deeper and perhaps more fundamental information division between urban and rural, rich and poor.

Many development agencies have responded to the new commercialised media market by actively entering it, and some of the most consistent customers for some radio stations are development organisations and donors. Income from development organisations—in the form of payment for spots or sponsorship of programs—is critical for some stations. Fears are growing that an artificial market is being created and that the public are receiving information determined by whichever organisation—development or otherwise—has the most money, rather than based on any news or public interest criteria.

A Way Forward
The issues explored here are not new. Any discussion on the role of the media in relation to development needs to acknowledge that debates in the past over this issue have sometimes been bitter, acrimonious and destructive. The roles, responsibilities and, as many interpreted it, obligations of the media in covering issues of social concern was the focus of the *MacBride Report* of 1980. The events leading up to and following publication of that report formed a debate that came to be known as the New World Information and Communication Order, hosted by UNESCO.

The NWICO debate was seen by many in developing countries as the dawn of an era designed to bring about media that can reflect their own, rather than Western, values, priorities and identities. The debate surrounding the report was seen by most media organisations, particularly those in the West, as a concerted effort by many governments to muzzle a free press in the name of the poor.

The intense and bitter arguments over the perceived dangers were a powerful spur to advocates of media freedom organisations, and the episode was instrumental in prompting the departure from UNESCO of the U.S. and U.K. governments. The legacy of this debate arguably continues to overshadow more current discourse-on the role of media in development. There were clear echoes of the New World Order debates during the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society.

However, in acknowledging this debate, this paper also proposes how to move beyond it.

In 2003, a symposium was held[2] in Bellagio, Italy, with media freedom organisations and social advocacy organisations to explore how constructive dialogue on these types of issues could be framed. While some issues continued to divide participants at the meeting, some degree of agreement was reached. A statement from this meeting can be found in Annex 1. One extract may be useful to highlight here:

> Freedom of expression, as expressed in Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental right which underpins all other human rights, and enables them to be expressed and realised. The eradication of poverty is essential to the realisation for all peoples of the aspirations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.   People living in poverty face particular obstacles to achieving freedom of expression and access to the media which are associated with the conditions of poverty.... The interests and concerns of people living in poverty are not sufficiently exposed in the media.

Media freedom is the fundamental, non-negotiable foundation of any debate on the role of the media in development.

This paper has sought to set out a series of problems linking the role of media to development policy.

Unless media are able to play the role of guardian of the public interest;, unless that public is seen as the whole population of developing countries and not just those who comprise a market for advertisers, and unless those who have most to win or lose from development debates are listened to, people will die.

They will die, as they are dying now, not in the hundreds or thousands but in the hundreds of millions.

This is a heavy responsibility to place on the media, and it is arguably both misplaced and unfair. Is it the responsibility of the media to assume such a critical role? Should it be assumed that the media should have to pay any attention, let alone adapt themselves, because of how governments choose to structure their development strategies? Surely the media exist in their own right and have the right to determine what their responsibilities are.

Opinions may differ on these questions but there surely rests, at a minimum, a responsibility on those in the media to debate these issues. This responsibility would be to contest and disagree with this paper, to explore strategies that can be formulated and to begin defining

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[2] The Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty was organised by the Panos Institute, London and the Communication for Social Change Consortium, and was hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation.

steps that recognize the enormity of the implications of their responsibilities as news gatherers to spotlight development issues.

Yet, such issues are rarely discussed in international forums.

There are good reasons for this. There are venues internationally where such issues are raised, such the United Nations-organised World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS) held in 2003, and again in November 2005.

However, these types of summits are not ideal for such discussions since these meetings are driven by, and oriented around, government interests. The place and the space should be defined by the media and by those concerned with supporting free, independent and genuinely plural media. That place may be Jordan, and that space may be the Global Forum for Media Development. Very few other opportunities currently exist to confront, discuss and develop responses to these issues.

The need for dialogue is urgent. Its outcome could hardly be more important. These issues need to be confronted. If not us, who? If not here, where? If not now, when?

ANNEX 1

Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty

Statement

The Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty came together to explore the links between and develop a better understanding of current media trends and poverty. This meeting was in part an attempt to bridge differences in approach among organisations involved in media freedom, media pluralism and social advocacy. While we have differences in perspective, we agreed on the following points.

We are particularly concerned that in the World Summit on the Information Society some of the measures being considered run counter to freedom of expression; that insufficient attention is being paid to the crucial role of the media, and to the importance of poverty reduction; and that there is inadequate mapping of development objectives against the proposed actions.

We believe that urgent attention needs to be brought to bear on issues of media and poverty in ways that are rooted in the principle of freedom of expression.

1. Freedom of expression, as expressed in Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental right which underpins all other human rights, and enables them to be expressed and realised. The eradication of poverty is essential to the realisation for all peoples of the aspirations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

2. People living in poverty face particular obstacles to achieving freedom of expression and access to the media which are associated with the conditions of poverty. These obstacles include economic, social, educational, logistical, and political factors. Economic obstacles include the cost of equipment for production, distribution and reception, and the costs of licences and operation; social obstacles include gender and language; educational obstacles include literacy and language; logistical obstacles include transport, physical access and electricity; political obstacles include repression and lack of will of many states to allow democratic expression and to give voice to the most marginalised groups, as well as censorship by government, commercial and social interests.

3. The interests and concerns of people living in poverty are not sufficiently exposed in the media. Economic and market pressures on the media are tending to deprioritise journalistic investigation and reporting on issues of social and public concern. Because the poor often do not constitute a viable market, issues of concern to them are increasingly and particularly marginalised. New strategies, which address these issues and reinforce freedom of expression, need to be devised. Threats to media freedom and freedom of expression continue to come from undue political influence but we are also concerned about issues of economic control and pressure.

4. **We recognise that these obstacles need to be overcome in the interests of society as a whole, and not only because in many societies poor people are the majority. When people do not have a voice in the public arena, or access to information on issues that affect their lives, and where their concerns are not reasonably reflected in the media, development tends to be undermined and catastrophes such as famines are less likely to be averted. Lack of access to communication undermines the capacity of the poor to participate in democratic processes. Frustration and alienation over lack of means of expression lead to disaffection with the political process resulting in apathy or violence.**

5. **Realisation of freedom of expression for people living in poverty requires: media pluralism and diversity, including diversity of forms of ownership; more equitable access to communication; support for cultural and linguistic diversity; and promotion of participation in democratic decision-making processes.**

6. Action points

   i. **There is a growing number of initiatives taken by the media, by people living in poverty and by other actors to address poverty reduction, including issues of voice, content and access to information and communication. These should be encouraged and actively supported. Best practices should be publicised and exchanged.**

   ii. **Access for the disadvantaged to information and communication should be an integral part of any strategy to reduce poverty. Such a strategy should include participatory media.**

   iii. **Community media should be specifically encouraged, including through access to licences and spectrum allocation. Frequencies should be allocated in a balanced way amongst community, commercial and public service media. Broadcast licensing should be administered by independent and transparent regulatory bodies.**

   iv. **There is a need for increased resources, better coordination and targeting of training programmes; including training journalists in poverty related issues.**

   v. **Involvement of media in education, and the development of media literacy, should be promoted.**

   vi. **Public service broadcasting mandates should include obligations to provide information and education to address issues of poverty; and to ensure that public service broadcasters provide universal service.**

   vii. **National communication policies should be developed that address access to communication for people living in poverty. Such policies should be developed and implemented in a transparent and participatory manner.**

   viii. **Professional standards and ethics of journalism, as defined by journalists themselves, should be supported and encouraged. The journalistic ethic should include sensitivity to issues of poverty.**

ix.   **Journalists should be provided with living standards and working conditions which enable them to realise these professional standards.**

x.   **South-South and South-North exchanges between media and journalists should be encouraged, including personnel, training, equipment and content.**

xi.   **Support should be provided for civil society organisations in working with the media.**

xii.   **Mechanisms should be encouraged for making newspapers more affordable and more available to the disadvantaged, including measures to cut the price of newsprint and equipment.**

xiii.   **The use of ICTs to provide the media with more diversity of information sources should be promoted; together with combinations of traditional and new information technologies to facilitate better access to communication for people living in poverty.**

xiv.   **Resources should be provided, including by public authorities, to address shortcomings in communication access for those living in poverty and to remove cost and other barriers, in ways that do not compromise freedom of expression.**

xv.   **More research needs to be undertaken on the implications of current media trends for poverty reduction.**

5th October, 2003

This statement was agreed by:

Steve Buckley, President
AMARC – The World Association of Community Broadcasters

John Barker, Director of Africa Programme
Article XIX

Professor Cees Hamelink
Centre for Communication and Human Rights

Lindsay Ross, Executive Director
Commonwealth Press Union

Alfonso Gumucio, Managing Director
Communication for Social Change Consortium

Sean O'Siochru, Coordinator
Communication Rights in the Information Society

Mahfuz Anam, Editor in chief,
Daily Star, Bangladesh

Jean Paul Marthoz, International Media Director
Human Rights Watch

Mario Lubetkin, Secretary General
Inter Press Service

Luckson Chipare, Executive Director
Media Institute of Southern Africa

Wafula Oguttu, Editor in Chief
The Monitor Group, Uganda

James Deane, Executive Director and Conference convenor
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Damian Tambini, Executive Director,
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Denise Gray-Felder, Vice President
The Rockefeller Foundation and CEO, the Communication for Social Change Consortium

Gerolf Weigel, Head, ICT for Development Division
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Mogens Schmidt, Director, Division of Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace
UNESCO

Ronald Koven, European Representative
World Press Freedom Committee

Guillaume Chenevière, Chairman
World Radio and Television Council

All participants attended the meeting as representatives of their organisations, and the statement represents a consensus of all who participated. However, this statement has not been through a formal approval process by all of these organisations and therefore signatories should be taken to have approved this in their personal capacity.

This meeting was organised by the Panos Institute, London, in association with the Communication for Social Change Consortium and the Rockefeller Foundation. Financial support was kindly provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. The meeting was one of series of "Frati Dialogues on Media and Social Change" organised at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Conference Centre in Italy. The meeting built on work carried out at the Global Knowledge Media Forum, a joint activity between Panos and the Global Knowledge Partnership.

Conference organiser/rapporteur: Kitty Warnock, Director, Communication for Development Programme, Panos Institute, London

Bellagio Statement on the Role of Communication in Meeting the Millennium Development Goals

November 8 - 11, 2004

Preamble

In November, 2004 a group of representatives from bilateral, multilateral and nongovernmental organisations met at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Conference Centre, Italy, to explore how communication strategies could support the Millennium Development Goals.   The meeting was organised by the Communication for Social Change Consortium with the support of the Department for International Development (DFID), UK. This statement was developed and adopted at the meeting along with a set of Action Points (see separate document).

Rationale

In 2000, the world committed to the Millennium Declaration, and to meeting eight Millennium Development Goals by 2005. In 2004, prospects for achieving these goals are already in doubt.

To a large degree, success in achieving them rests on participation and ownership. Communication is fundamental to helping people change the societies in which they live, particularly communication strategies which both inform and amplify the voices of those with most at stake and which address the structural impediments to achieving these goals. However, such strategies remain a low priority on development agendas, undermining achievement of the MDGs.

For example:

- The principal strategy for meeting the primary MDG of halving poverty by 2015 is the implementation of poverty reduction strategies. Despite an emphasis in the PRSP process on participation, poor public understanding, limited public debate and low levels of country ownership threaten successful implementation of this strategy. Similar problems threaten sector wide approaches and budget support programmes.

- The goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 will not be met unless rural poverty is addressed. Knowledge, communication and participation are essential to this process. Rural people need to be able to collectively identify and articulate their aspirations, to analyse the options available from rural service providers and to take action. Rural service

providers face obstacles to engaging with rural people to identify their priorities and options, as well as to support the articulation of these issues to policy makers. Development agencies and international donors need information about rural poverty for policy development and implementation. Inclusive communication strategies can facilitate the participation and sharing of knowledge between these various stakeholders.

- The goal of containing HIV/AIDS by 2015, and allied efforts to increase access to anti retroviral drugs, will not be reached unless more priority is given to communication. Successful HIV/AIDS strategies depend on communication to help people construct a social environment in which behaviour change becomes possible. Through dialogue and discussion, they can convert stigma to support. Where less than 10% of people know their HIV status, communication is needed to ensure that ARVs reach and benefit those who need them. Strategies which place the voices of those affected by HIV/AIDS at the core are essential to effect community based demand for prevention and treatment.

- The goal of reducing child mortality is challenged by increasing, rather than decreasing child mortality rates. The global effort to eliminate polio, for example, has been undermined by anti immunization campaigns. Communication strategies that engage dialogue on the issues are critical to successful responses to this challenge. The development of new vaccines is likely to face a similar challenge, rooted in distrust, poor public understanding and lack of public debate if not introduced with appropriate communication.

- High priority on the Development Cooperation agenda is given to enhancing democracy, enlarging participation and strengthening of human rights for poor people. To reach this goal the importance of a two way development communication where the poor populations are given possibilities to share information and have a channel to voice their needs cannot be overestimated.

Several development agencies are reconsidering and reprioritising communication strategies in response to these and many similar challenges. A Communication for Development Congress, initiated by the World Bank, is planned in 2005. At the same time, communication strategies in many development agencies are fragile, fragmented and unstrategic.

New strategic thinking around meeting the MDGs is now taking place, and communication should be central to this thinking.

Principles

In this context, effective communication can no longer be seen as information dissemination alone. If communication practitioners create and nurture forums for

public discussion, they can build support for the MDGs and produce social energy to achieve them. Communication is a two-way process rooted in principles of ownership, participation and voice. These principles were reaffirmed at the United Nations' Roundtable on Communication for Development held in Rome, Italy in 2004.

The changing and complex information and communication environment reinforces this emphasis and creates new communication opportunities, especially if information and communication technologies are used to support people-centred development. Attempts to achieve the MDGs should be based on core principles of development thinking, such as equity, gender sensitivity, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity. Such principles must be reflected in funding and practice of the communication strategies used by development agencies to meet the MDGs.

Agencies represented were:

Communication for Social Change Consortium, Department for International Development, UK, Food and Agriculture Organisation, FEMNET, Finnish Development Cooperation Agency, Netherlands Foreign Ministry,, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Swiss Development Cooperation, Unesco, Unicef, US Mission to the UN (Rome), World Bank, World Bank Institute

This statement was developed by representatives from these agencies but has not been subject to formal approval processes and should not necessarily be taken to reflect the formal policy of each of these agencies.

[i] Narayan, Deepa with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher and Sarah Koch-Schulte. 2000. *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* New York, N.Y.: Published for the World Bank, Oxford University Press
[ii] Warnock, Kitty, *Reducing Poverty: Is the World Bank's strategy working,* Panos 2002
[iii] Mozammel Masud and Odugbemi, Sina, *With the Support of Multitudes: Using Strategic Communication to Fight Poverty through PRSPs*, World Bank/DFID, 2005
[iv] Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa, www.commissionforafrica.org, 2005
[v] These arguments have been substantially expanded by this author and others in the Global Civil Society Yearbook 2002 published by the London School of Economics (www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook) and updated more recently in *The other information revolution: media and empowerment in developing countries,* by James Deane with Fackson Banda, Kunda Dixit, Njonjo Mue and Silvio Waisbord in *Communicating in the Information Society, Ed Bruce Girard and Sean O'Siochru,* UNRISD, 2003, full text available at www.unrisd.org. Some of this section is drawn directly from previous articles published by the author.