REFLECTION PAPERS / DEBATES

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Spheres of Influence

Media as Public Sphere

Summary

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

Key words: Media, Spheres of Influence, State, Civil Society, Impact

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OGLEDI / RASPRAVE

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Sfere utjecaja

Mediji kao javna sfera

Sažetak

Imati uzbudljivu medijsku scenu je potreban preduvjet za ljudski razvoj i dobro upravljanje. Ali, došlo je vrijeme da mi, medijski praktičari i organizacije za potporu, prihvatimo i priznamo da je to previše složeno da bismo to sami postigli. Bilo bi mudro priznati ograničenja našeg sektora, i stvoriti prikladnu procjenu i sredstva za ocjenu djelovanja. Postojeća sredstva i metodologije su stvorena da daju makro sliku sveukupnih sredina ali jasno ne razgraničuju uloge koje igraju razni akteri : država, sudstvo, izvršna vlast, civilno društvo i mediji. Mediji su samo jedan čimbenik koji tome pridonosi, i to jako važan. Stoga je nužno pratiti sfere utjecaja koje naš sektor koristi kako se organizacije za potporu ne bi pogrešno navele na praćenje i mjerenje sveukupnih sredina dok pokušavaju kvantificirati utjecaj koji organizacije za potporu medija imaju u procesu promjene.

Ključne riječi: mediji, sfere utjecaja, država, civilno društvo, djelovanje

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German philosopher Jurgen Habermas propounded the theory of *Public Sphere* as an area in social life where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. It is "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, reach a common judgement."[1]

The Public Sphere mediates between the 'private sphere' and the 'Sphere of Public Authority' where "the private sphere comprised civil society in the narrower sense ... the realm of commodity exchange and of social labour".[2] The Sphere of Public Authority on the other hand deals "with the state, or realm of the police , and the ruling class". The Public Sphere criss-crosses both these realms and "through the vehicle of public opinion puts the state in touch with the needs of society".[3]

However, this theory fails to recognise multiple public spheres; those which form separated though connected entities based on belief, faith, socio-economic status, issues, language, gender and common experience. These entities operate subtlyto form several spheres within. Even Habermas after considerable deliberation, concedes: "The Public Sphere, simultaneously pre-structured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but also over the control of communication flows that affect behaviour while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible".[4]

It is this spectrum of public spheres, where freewheeling ideas collide and coalesce bringing forth debate and discussion that truly reflect in a vibrant, plural media of a region. While the burden of realising the developmental goals lies mainly with the state apparatus and other deliverable institutions, these *multiple spheres* influence societal and political change thus bestowing media with the role of an eminent catalyst.

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

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

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

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

Media Development Vs Media *for* Development

Media is, was and remains a catalyst. Hence, media organisations' role is that of enabling and empowering the catalyst to bring forth the *multiple public spheres* into the open. How do we evaluate the work of these media organisations that strive to bring these multiple public spheres to a common arena? In the past decade, there have been any number of attempts to create an effective evaluation and impact of communication initiatives. But, none of them recognised the intrinsic value of media development as all narratives dovetailed media development into a utilitarian idea of media *for* development. The tussle between quantitative and qualitative evaluation continues with new models often ending-up with modifications within the paradigm of *Communications for Development*, without making the key quantum jump of looking at media development itself as a fullfledged developmental activity. The fulcrum of most arguments continues to be the generalised state of affairs in a particular sector, country or region in which media operates. None of them offer the crucial insights that are imperative to justify and sustain the existence and toil of smaller media development organisations. And this divide between media for development and media development is not really captured by the indicators developed by various reputable institutions. The indicators for physical infrastructure are vastly different from the indicators for conceptual infrastructure.

UNESCO's5 recent media development indicators clearly prove the point that the measurements are of physical and legalistic infrastructure rather than the conceptual world of media, dialogue and discourse.

It defines indicators of media development in line with its priority areas such as:

- promotion of freedom of expression and media pluralism
- development of community media
- human resource development (capacity building of media
- professionals and institutional capacity building)

The paper is structured around five media development categories:

- Category 1: A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media

- Category 2: Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership
- Category 3: Media as a platform for democratic discourse
- Category 4: Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpins the freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity
- Category 5: Infrastructural capacity is sufficient to support independent and
- pluralistic media.

The paper's Introduction concludes "It is an integral part of this analysis that the categories are taken together to create a holistic picture of the media environment." These indicators are circumscribed by the notion of a Westphalian nation-state. And, all these indicators offer only a glimpse of the state of the media of particular countries. While it helps to know what the Human Development Indicators and the levels of press freedom are for the country and the region, they do not in any way offer a sense of how media support organisations are reaching out and widening their spheres of influence in making media inclusive and more democratic. These indicators only affirm what we already know through other data and indices. So by pursuing the same wheel, we end up validating things that we already know.

The extant work is without doubt valuable; it helps analyse and learn postfacto. But it falls within the conformist narrative of numbers, regulating and pricing rather than organic accountability and enriching. They either come back with too generalised a picture to enable necessary conclusions or impose indicators beyond the scope of an individual organisation. While the first approach gives a bird's eye view of broad ground reality, the second approach often spins beyond measurable scope.

In a sector like Media, which is in itself of intrinsic value as a development indicator, what we need to track needs to be turned on its head. Given its prime value, its instrumentalist role is but purely a corollary. This change of approach is of vital importance to enable better distribution of support and assistance for the media development sector. Several theories offered have close to Utopian goals which seem further and further away as we work towards it. The need of the hour is to scale down expectations given the truth that the impact of media related programmes take well beyond project completion to percolate and

manifest. No amount of number crunching will lead to direct correlation between cause and effect attribution. The goal post needs to be realigned with media development organisations accepting humbly that:

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

Plural Media Vs Proliferation of Media

A positive and enabling environment does not automatically transpose itself into a vibrant, plural media scene. It may on the other hand, bring forth proliferation which may articulate either the dominant narrative or a particular stream of thought. There is enough empirical evidence to support this argument. Regions where data on 'enabling environment' have near perfect scores like North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the media is fast declining.

In sharp contrast to this, there is accelerated plural growth clearly discernible in countries which do not score high on the enabling environment graph like India, Pakistan or Nepal. The misconception that the South is a problem and North its solution, is also fast losing relevance. The American media's weak knee reaction to the Iraq War and the South Asian media's strong critique of issues of national and international importance, whether it is the Indo-US nuclear deal or the global financial crisis are clear examples which enlighten this point.

Freedom House 6 categorises countries as *free, partly free* and *not free* on the basis of indicators like the existing legal, political and economic environment. As per the lists, India is 35 on the list and Nepal is 58. Both the countries have been categorised as *partly free*. Pakistan and Sri Lanka are at 63 while Bangladesh comes further down at 66. All three countries are categorised not free. The Reporters sans Frontiers' Annual Press Freedom Index of 2005 lists Nepal among the worst ten countries with regard to Press Freedom.

This collection of data details the existing media environment, but fails to focus on the quality and quantum of work done by the media and media development organisations under severe strife and constraints. It does not reflect how Nepal which was near the bottom of the pile as per 2005 surveys could in the same year, spark a successful People's Revolution to mark the country's transition from an authoritarian monarchy to a republic. Nor does such data shine light on the efficacy and impact of the media which stood firm in difficult times to reinvent itself to effect such an unprecedented political and societal transition of a country.

February 1st 2005 saw King Gyanendra declare himself absolute ruler in Nepal after dismissing the government and declaring a State of Emergency. Despite ordinances, media gags, arrests and constant harassment, the Nepali media stood up as one to take on the palace onslaught. Radio in Nepal is the most popular medium of news dissemination even in the remotest corners of this Himalayan country. Censoring and silencing could not prevent media from finding newer and more innovative ways to get news across to the people and the world outside. A People's Movement followed; weeks of violent protests spearheaded by the media and the people of Nepal forced the King to issue an ordinance to return power to the people in late April 2006. The movement, however, would not settle for half measures and carried on the struggle till the King stepped down and democracy and press freedom were completely restored.

Moving across to Pakistan, classified *not free* by Freedom House and ranked 136 by the *Human Development Report7* it was the Media which began and saw through the heroic struggle to restore the independence of the Judiciary while also carefully orchestrating the shift from a military dictatorship to a democratic process. No current narrative on media impact studies give insights into these dynamics which are imperative to understand the ways in which media interventions effect varied paths of change. We believe the problem is largely created by the macro nation-state perspective employed by the studies. This leads to overlooking such big chunks of visible impact like the abovementioned crucial changes in political processes.

Limitations of Enabling Environments

Ironically, Media is also seen as shrinking in several developed economies with ideal legal and constitutional enablers in place. It is visible not only in the number of voices that are heard but also in wordage. From *The Guardian* and *The Observer* in the United Kingdom, *Le Monde* in France, *La Republica* and *La Stampa* in Italy to *De Morgen* in Belgium, broadsheets have become smaller Berliners. *The Independent* and *The Times* in England have also changed to a compact format.

Though managements claim that content and journalistic values remain unchanged, the space crunch, without doubt will manifest in cuts in wordage and result in more compacted space for ideas and discourseThe story is essentially the same in the United States; *The New York Times* paints a bleak present and an uncertain future for the media sector. *The Christian*

Science Monitor, the respected century-old publication, has announced plans to cease publishing a weekday paper. Time Inc and Gannett together will lay off nearly 3,600 jobs. *The Los Angeles Times* newsroom today stands at approximately halfthe size it was in 2001.

Impact measurement models which base themselves heavily on the nation-state and borders also lose credibility in a world where borders become a metaphorical construct with internet and satellite footprints making communication an almost open space sans walls. This creates a fresh crop of problems taken in tandem with the shrinkage of traditional media space in developed countries as explained above.

Even Google Chief Executive Eric Schmidt concedes that the traditional media space is fast shrinking. In his address to a recent conference of American magazines, he laments that if great brands of journalism – the trusted news sources readers have relied on – were to vanish, then the Web itself would quickly become a 'cesspool' of useless information9; the time is imminent for us, media and media development organisations to rethink our strategies to measure our influence and our existence.

The Panos South Asia Approach

The Panos Network, comprising eight Institutes, embarked on a journey nearly a decade ago to explore ways to arrive at a common structure and approach to our Monitoring and Evaluation practices. The goal was to make it easier to discuss issues and share experiences thereby enriching the synergy and the added value of the Panos family. This, we presumed, would lead to more efficacy and better tools, standardised yet flexible enough to weave in the stated vision of individual institutes. It was also envisioned to strengthen our capability to advocate and influence development thinking and also facilitate fundraising.

The first milestone in this organic exercise was a 26-page manual titled *Development Information Monitoring and Evaluation (DIME)* which was brought out by Panos London in 2002 with inputs from other Panos Institutes.

Panos London moved on to emphasise the need to rigorously firm up arguments and shore up evidence to convince donors as funding for communication initiatives was slowly but steadily eroding. Two publications espoused this cause: *The Case for Communication in Sustainable Development* and *At the Heart of Change* in 2007.

The Panos Network has agreed that an approach focussing on the Theory of Change would be appropriate to carry forward the work done collectively till date. It also underpins the stance that strengthening of media is in itself a self-evident development activity. There is also broad consensus that we do not expect to directly bring about measurable change at the grassroots level.

The latest Network M and E model delineates Debate as the central pillar of the shared Monitoring and Evaluation process. "Generating Debate" as a concept is part of the vision and mission of all the institutes; hence it becomes a focus which will be broad enough and not restrictive. Annual plans have been drawn up for the five year period up to 2013 with Debate as the theme of focus. This also becomes the common minimum programme that every Panos Institute has undertaken to fulfil.

The Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) Alliance Impact Assessment Study 2006-200810 brought to light that the ten partners were engaged in project evaluations of their own through the

project cycles, but a serious engagement with impact assessment was lacking. Discussions brought forth the multiple challenges and difficulties with impact assessment as it stands today. The milieu in which PANOS SOUTH ASIA communication initiatives posit themselves make their impact assessment a daunting task, especially within short time spans.

The other difficulty is that the evidence data that is available for the communication sector, more so for the media sector, is weak. Fast-changing technologies and modes of delivery also make the little available data dated and redundant, at times. The sector is grappling with various impact assessment models, all of which have been from a purely econometrist perspective.

Reality shows that the impact of development can be achieved only after a certain time lapse and that too, in no absolute terms cannot be irreversible, unless sustained effort goes into it.

We at Panos South Asia, while agreeing to fulfil the common minimum M and E programme of the Network M and E model also felt that it would work as a minimum requirement. However, it would still not show the efficacy and influence that an organisation like ours has in its area of operation. The need to go further was also rooted in the fact that unlike the other Panos Institutes we dealt only with media and are made up of media practitioners. Time was truly ripe to rethink the whole issue.

Intrinsic Value Vs Instrumentality

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

The need of the hour is to scale down impact assessment from global feel-good indicators like poverty reduction to achievable ones like spreading awareness in a bid to help ordinary men and women make informed choices. "At its heart, development – if it is to be sustainable –

must be a process that allows people to be their agents of change, to act individually and collectively using their own ingenuity and accessing ideas and knowledge in the search for ways to fulfil their full potential."11

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

- A decade of our existence
- Themes where we have had a sustained engagement for over five years
- Specific Programmes

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

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

- Media
- Communities whose voices are articulated through PSA's
- programmes
- Civil Society partners
- Academia
- State Actors / Policy makers

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

We learnt from experience that a bottom-down or top-up approach will not yield desired results in opening up more space for debate. However well the journalists imbibe and put to use the training

and empowerment that Panos programmes infuse, it will not reach the desired impact of opening up more space for diverse voices on issues until and unless the gatekeepers – the editors and owners are sensitised to the issue and allow it.

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

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

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

For Fellowship programmes however, it is an engagement between expert advisors and journalists that Panos South Asia mediates and facilitates. So, for thematic areas we look at the quality and response to outputs, testimonials from fellows on their experience, monitoring of the fellows' progress through the project cycle.

Our Thematic Areas also coalesce into each other organically. For example, outputs on access to treatment in regions under strife cannot be restricted to Conflict or Public Health. From there, we move on to look at the impact of our partnerships with five groups as to how they help create more space for the multiple Public Spheres:

• Our engagement and influence on media

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

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

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

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

To monitor fellowships in print programmes, we do look at the number of outputs, the languages in which they are published, with clearly documented dana on circulation figures and readership. To make the quantum we deal with more credible, we take 10 percent of the readership / circulation as our minimum assured readership while standard readings even by the Advertising sector take it as 50 percent. Mapping it on a bar graph showing languages, circulation, readership and the minimum assured readership gives the quantitative analysis picture of the programme.

We also gauge efficacy by tracking the advisory panel to participant ratio in each of the programmes to ensure that it does not get spread across thinly and retains programmatic intensity. When it comes to new technology communication PANOS SOUTH ASIA initiatives like Radio

and New Media, the ratio of technical trainer to content trainer to participant is tracked.

However, for impact assessment of the same fellowship programme, with the lapse of time, there is more data to work with as in:

- increased journalistic expertise translating into higher quality media outputs
- increase in space/ time for debate on the topics in mainstream media
- these leading to better public awareness and increased involvement in the public spheres
- awards/ recognition for the outputs
- career advancement of the journalists
- our engagement outputs as a source for other actors
- legislative/ policy changes.

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

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

Monitoring , Evaluation , Impact Assessment

PSA's monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment distinguish clear phases in and after the project cycle. Our approach to Monitoring and Evaluation has strong roots in existing models and practices that are in use across the Panos Network.

However, it is in impact assessment that we differ conceptually from models in use. The difference is in the scales of measurement, the timelines and the ultimate goals. We staunchly believe in the catalytic role of media as opposed to being an agent in eradicating poverty or removing illiteracy. The impact we map is measurable and scaled down; the focus is

on Media as the beneficiary and we look at impact after a certain period of time has lapsed after project completion. The analytical data available post-evaluation of a programme becomes our baseline to track impact.

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

Monitoring

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

1. Why
2. What
3. How

are being followed as was conceived in the detailed Log Frame

- A participatory start-up workshop to determine details of activities, resources and sustainability helps.
- Systematic documentation and follow-up of activities.

- A ssess verifiable indicators in relation to achievements, constantly
- reverting to the project purpose and results.

Evaluation

- Has both Qualitative and Quantitative components where the number of activities, outputs as well as their quality is assessed.
- Looks at challenges and effects mid-course corrections so as to fulfil the stated objectives by even changing tools, if needs be.
- In media where external factors play a key role, the circumstances at the beginning of a programme are most likely to change by the time the programme is implemented.
- A ssimilate the best practices into a feedback mechanism to facilitate sharedlearning and add value for future programmes and the network.
- Take stock of the challenges, their cause and course and record it to prevent recurrence in future programmes.
- Looks at efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.
- Evaluation Report serves as the baseline for the Impact Assessment which in a sector like Media and Communication takes time to permeate to even show up diffused results.

Impact Assessment

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

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

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

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

    a. where no policy existed and new policies got framed

    b. where clauses which give more teeth and relevance to policy have been included

    c. at the policy implementation level

- change on the ground

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

- bridging gaps between the grassroots level and policy makers

- building awareness on peoples' rights

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

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

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

- citations / awards/ recognition for fellows for their work

- growing partnerships encouraging linkages between Media, Academia and Civil Society fraternities.

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