CREATING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEWS MEDIA[1]

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

I have the honour to speak on the subject of 'creating international support for the development of the news media in Africa.' Needless to say, this is a tall order. But this is not to suggest that we are completely devoid of suggestions. Rather, it is to indicate the enormity of the task of creating *any* support for the development of news-media in Africa. Any talk of developing African media institutions is tied up in ideology – a set of strongly held beliefs about what the nature and role of the media should be.

This has precedents in history. Take, for example, the promulgation of the New Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Africans had long been dissatisfied with what they saw as their negative image portrayed in the major news agencies of the world (Bourgault 1994: 175). In the late 1970s, UNESCO took up the debate on behalf of the Third World. Within the heated political context of the time, the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) was created by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)[2] in 1979. PANA's aims were 'to rectify the distorted image of Africa created by the international news agencies and to let the voice of Africa be heard on the international news scene' (in Bourgault 1994: 175).

The NWICO has since been watered down, largely due to the overbearing influence of the USA (Fourie and Oosthuizen 2001:416). In fact, Western

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[2] The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had its name changed to the African Union (AU) in July 2002. It consists of 54 independent African states and now has an African Parliament headquartered in South Africa.

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opposition to the 'group rights' inherent in NWICO led the USA and Britain to withdraw their membership from UNESCO (Traber 1993). We could argue that the NWICO was, in part, an attempt at building international support for the Third World media.

We might want to go further back in time and ask why it was that Great Britain developed a state-supported broadcasting infrastructure in its colonies. The answer lies somewhere in the documents prepared by the British Colonial Office. In 1949 the desire to take speedy counter measures against the spread of communism was reason enough for Great Britain to earmark funds for the development of broadcasting services. Communism was seen as a catalyst for the rising tide of 'African nationalism'. Such publishers as Dr. Nandi Azikiwe and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah were having their resonance outside Nigeria and Ghana. Charles Jeffries, Under Secretary of State in the Colonial Office, was to urge the British administration to set aside a substantial sum of money for the development of state broadcasting in the colonies (Armour 1984: 362).

The point I wish to underscore is that ideological imperatives -- on both sides -- do determine the direction of any international mechanisms instituted to support the development of the media in Africa. At the core of this is a potential ideological-definitional problem that 'media development' will have to contend with. Is 'media development' defined in terms of strengthening and supporting the emergence of highly commercialised media, such as we find in America? Or is it going to be defined in terms of evolving and strengthening a strong public-service media system, such as we find in most of Europe? Or, indeed, is 'media development' going to be defined in terms of a 'hybrid' media system, such as we see in Africa?

Why, then, is there this renewed vigour and clamouring for building international support for the media in Africa? Has the African media, once again, become implicated in some ideological warfare? I believe the reasons are more complex than the historical precedents I have referred to. I believe that these very reasons -- to be found in the dynamics of the interface

between global and local processes -- present opportunities for creating international support for African media development.

2.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

2.1   The globalisation of democratisation

The 1990s, following the collapse of state socialism and the consolidation of capitalism worldwide, marked a dramatic intensification of public awareness of democratisation. This is particularly evident in the way most African systems of government changed from authoritarian to liberal forms of democracy. This would seem to agree with Hyden and Okigbo (2002) who place the media in Africa in what they call 'the two waves of democracy'. The 'first wave' refers to the colonial period. In other words, Hyden and Okigbo see the African-nationalist struggles for independence from colonial rule as an agenda for democratisation. This initial wave was effaced soon after independence, giving way to a 'second wave' of post-colonialism that itself becomes implicated in Samuel P. Huntington's 'third wave' (Huntington 1991: 21-25). Huntington's 'third wave' -- this global movement towards democratisation – became a reality in most of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. Indeed, some scholars refer to this process as Africa's 'second liberation' to underscore the betrayed hopes surrounding the liberation from colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s (Diamond 1999: ix).

Along with the embracing of democratic forms of governance were other opportunities in which we can locate the impulses towards creating international support for the news-media in Africa. What are these?

2.2   Liberalisation: deregulation of the media landscape

The 1990s saw the unfolding of the process of liberalisation from Nigeria to South Africa, with corresponding deregulatory policy and legislative changes. The discourse of liberalisation led many countries in Africa to promulgate liberal-economic media and information policies. The emergence of a

multiplicity of privately owned commercial broadcast and print media channels during this period was attributable to this liberalism, which stressed the pre-eminence of private capital over state capital (Bourgault 1995: 224).

For example, in 1993, the new Zambian government, elected into office in 1991, passed the *Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (Licensing) Regulations* to liberalise the broadcasting sector for private investment (Banda 2006: 461). The same was true of Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, etc. (Banda 2003).

Indeed, in the case of South Africa, the fall of apartheid in 1994 saw South Africa embark on an "expansionist-capitalist" agenda (Banda 2003:190) in which it liberalised the media market. While there was an in-flow of foreign direct investment into the country, there was also an out-flow of media investment *from* South Africa, with Naspers' MultiChoice Africa championing this movement of private media capital (in Banda 2006).

The point to underscore is that there was a rekindling of African private media capital, largely as a consequence of the liberal-economic policies adopted across Africa, presenting further opportunities to grow media as businesses and to inject pluralism into the local media spaces. While this was more pronounced in some countries, it was less so in others.

2.3   The privatisation and commercialisation of state media

Along with this political and economic liberalisation was a tendency towards the restructuring of the state-owned broadcasting systems inherited from the colonialist masters in line with the public-service ethos. In this regard, two options presented themselves: privatisation and/or commercialisation. Most countries preferred the latter to the former. For example, Zambia opted to commercialise its state media system. Privatising the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) would entail loss of political control over the

airwaves. A related issue here was the setting up of 'independent' broadcasting regulatory authorities (Banda 2003). In this regard, the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) in Zambia and the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) are examples. However, the 'independence' of these bodies has remained a contested issue, with the intensity of 'independence' varying from country to country. For example, South Africa's ICASA is much freer than Zimbabwe's BAZ.

2.4   A communitarian agenda for the democratisation of the media

Communitarian forms of democratisation would emphasise the utopian social or 'community' potential of democracy. This would seek to privilege a deeper, more participatory form of democracy in which communities influence the news-media agenda. As an element of democratisation, its popularity in Africa occurred at the height of the transnationalisation of civil society in the 1990s. For example, the international broadcasting policy campaign of the World Association for Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), headquartered in Montréal, legitimated community radio broadcasting as an alternative medium distinct from state and commercial broadcasting in Africa. It was such transnational networks that carried forth the ideology and practice of communitarian communication (Banda 2006: 463-465).

However, the emergence of communitarian forms of media, such as community radio broadcasting, was not without its problems. Services were concentrated along the line of rail, excluding the majority of the rural poor. The programming was more entertainment-based than developmental (Bourgault 1995: 103; Banda 2003). Other problems included little funding, too few volunteers, lack of training, etc. After all, most such community radio initiatives were set up with the promise of donor funding in mind.

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2.5   The re-regulation of the media

Some countries, such as Zimbabwe, experienced a reversal in the liberalisation process and re-regulated the media industry through a series of heavy policy and legislative measures, something not unknown in Huntington's 'third wave'. This was also evident, albeit in more subtle ways, in several other countries through the harassment of journalists and the withdrawal of state advertising from privately owned media institutions.

2.6   Global agenda against terrorism

The overtly ideological aspects of creating international support for the development of African news-media may be located in the so-called war on terror. As part of this 'war', the USA and Britain seek to promote some form of democracy in the Arab world, including Africa, in a bid to stem the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Clearly, any such strategy against international terror will include some action steps aimed at re-orienting African media institutions so that they can become more receptive to liberal 'democratic' impulses. This ideological agenda, whatever our own idiosyncratic appropriation of it, coincides with the other opportunities I have just outlined. The point to underscore is that Western funding of any media-development initiative will thus be influenced by this ideological positioning.

As a consequence of these opportunities, there is already evidence of an emerging international media development movement.

3.0 MEDIA DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

3.1   The African context since 1990

At least within the context of Africa, it would not be far-fetched to argue that the beginnings of an international support mechanism for the media is traceable to Windhoek, Namibia. In 1991, UNESCO called for a gathering of media practitioners and press freedom organisations in Namibia on May 3. This conference culminated in the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press. The Declaration is a significant historical document because it set the background for the proclamation by the UN General Assembly of May 3 as 'World Press Freedom Day' (Barker 2001:16). The Declaration repudiated state ownership of media institutions and justified the doctrine of media liberalisation and privatisation.

Beyond the Windhoek Declaration, there is clear evidence of African *ideological* (if not practical) engagement with the discourse of media development in various documents. For example, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, in Article 9, echoes the rights in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has elaborated this in its Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa. The declaration is important because it elaborates in considerable detail what is meant by freedom of expression. This includes a number of other points of particular relevance for the development of broadcasting services in Africa, such as (i) the need to encourage the development of private broadcasting, (ii) the need to transform state or government broadcasters into genuine public broadcasters, and (iii) the need for independent broadcasting regulatory bodies. These points are, in turn, reinforced by the African Charter on Broadcasting, adopted in 2001 on the tenth anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration (Article 19 2006).

Clearly, there is fertile ground for creating international support for media development here.

3.2   The global context for media development

The establishment of the Commission for Africa (CFA) in early 2004 by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, marked a milestone in British engagement with Africa. Although the Commission's preoccupation was with much more than media issues, it was clear that there was some attention paid to the potential role of media in the development of the continent. While there is, in some quarters, unrelenting criticism of the Commission's 11 March 2005 report, my concern with it here is that it ignited much of the debate we are having about creating international support for the development of the media in Africa. Out of that have emerged a number of initiatives that are performing specific tasks to keep alive the discourse of media development. I shall make mention of some of these initiatives, without providing much detail, partly because they are just unfolding, and partly because I am not privy to much data about them.

3.2.1 The Global Forum for Media Development

The American based Internews, in conjunction with several media-support organisations in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia, organised the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) held in Amman, Jordan, towards the end of 2005. The gathering was attended by many of the well-established media support organisations in Africa, including some media owners and practitioners.

One key recommendation emerging from the Amman conference was the possible formation of an African Forum for Media Development (GFMD). While the principle of a continental forum was generally welcome, at least this was evident during the STREAM consultative workshop held in June 2006 in Johannesburg, there was some uncertainty about its workability.

The point to underscore is that the GFMD is serving to further animate the notion of a global or international support mechanism for media in the Third World.

3.2.2 The African Media Development Initiative (AMDI)

The AMDI was instigated by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service Trust, in association with three African universities, including Rhodes University of South Africa and Amadu Bello University of Nigeria. The main activity underpinning the initiative is a research project aimed at (i) collecting media statistics in 17 African countries in order to determine what changes have occurred in the media landscape between 2000 and 2005; and (ii) conducting in-depth interviews with key informants (media owners, government officials, NGO leaders, religious authorities, etc.) about their perceptions of media development in each of the 17 countries.

To take the example of Zambia, where I have been involved as an AMDI researcher, a review of media development initiatives between 2000 and 2005 reveals the following:

- There is a diversity of media development initiatives in Zambia -- some of these are originated and financially supported by the media themselves while others are a partnership between media support organisations and donors.
- There is a need for the involvement of multiple actors in any media development initiative, as evidenced in the success of a multi-stakeholder campaign for legislative reforms and the withdrawal of value added tax (VAT) on the cover price of newspapers and magazines.
- Media development activities need to have an inbuilt sustainability plan in order to have a lasting impact.
- Donor support needs to have less conditionality and promote the recipient's independence and innovativeness.
- Culture must be built into any media development initiative for such an initiative to have resonance among the beneficiaries.

- Commercial interests are increasingly seen as an important part of any media development initiative, particularly if they can be persuaded to invest in the media sector (Banda 2006).

As findings from across Africa are being integrated, it is becoming increasingly clear that the AMDI research project will prove to be an invaluable part of any argument for developing the media in Africa.

3.2.3 The STREAM (Strengthening African Media) Consultative Process

Another process underway is the STREAM consultation which emerged with a meeting in March 2006 of some experts in Addis Ababa at the invitation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). This process, like the AMDI research, was supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The key recommendation emerging out of that meeting was to 'root' the consultation process within the different geographic and linguistic regions of Africa. To that end, four (4) consultations were planned. The first such consultative forum was held in June 2006 in South Africa under the auspices of the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA).

The STREAM process reinforced most of the findings of the AMDI research about the arguments for media development. For example, media owners were agreed on the centrality of the following issues:

- Africa's constitutional and legal regimes are generally not supportive of media development, although there are signs of change for the better in some countries.
- There is continuing state interest in the performance of private-sector media (e.g. the closing down of *The Swazi Observer, etc.*).
- There is also advertiser influence on the editorial content of private media, with the result that the quality of editorial content stands

compromised, in some cases (from both private and state business concerns).

- There is increased competition for the existing small media markets in most of the sub-region.
- There is also increased competition for the available government advertising (while this is a growing problem for some countries, such as Swaziland, it does not appear to be so for other countries, such as Botswana).
- There is a lack of training for journalists, with the result that reporting of specialised issues, such as gender, HIV/AIDS, etc. suffers from a lack of depth.
- There is also a high turn-over of staff, given the fact that the media institutions do not generally remunerate them well.
- There is a tendency towards profit-maximisation by the private-sector media.
- The increasing 'commercialisation'/'corporatisation' of state/public media is posing undue competition for the private media.
- There is a transnationalisation of South African media moguls throughout Africa, such as MultiChoice Africa, posing a challenge for local media (MISA 2006).

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From what I have discussed, it is clear that this is the most propitious moment for harnessing international support for media development. The 1990s have opened up opportunities for greater engagement with the international community, not least because there are democratic impulses evident throughout Africa (notwithstanding some reversals in Zimbabwe and some conflict-ridden countries). There are clear signs of business opportunities, as a consequence of liberalised markets, notwithstanding the distortions within those markets. Along with this liberalised environment are signs of pluralism in the media landscape, notwithstanding the sustainability problems most private media are facing.

At the international level, there is an ideological commitment to creating 'democratic' media that can diffuse the threat of international terrorism. This ideological commitment seems to be seeping through to Africa, regardless of the protestations people may have about the intentions of the originators of this anti-terror ideology.

Over and above these opportunities, there is evidence of organic African movements which can serve as a fulcrum around which to create further international support for the development of the media in Africa. Examples of such movements are the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA), the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), etc. These organisations are already part of the unfolding regional and continental media development processes.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to recommend the following:

1. Recognise, and give articulation to, the complementarities of the unfolding media development initiatives, regardless of who is the initiator;
2. Coalesce these initiatives, at some point, into an identifiably African-driven and led media development initiative;
3. Establish a partnership with any global media development initiative, without, however, sacrificing the 'individuality' of the African initiative; and
4. Build a truly global media development initiative that can mobilise financial and other resources to contribute towards resolving some of the challenges facing the media in Africa.

I know these recommendations are general, but they map out the parametres within which to create an international support mechanism for developing the media in Africa.

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