

Polis – Food or free press?

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Time for another guest post from a POLIS Summer School student – this time, Sofia Diogo Mateus from Portugal reflects on what the media can offer Africa.

When you think of the needs of Africa, everything that comes to mind is food, peace and specially health-related infrastructures and provisions. You don't usually think of free press. Well, free press might have a lot to do with it.

Creating a forum for free speech, for debate, where people can be heard and make their needs known is far more important than one can imagine. It is about EMPOWERING the African people. It is about giving them the tools to take control of their future and to build it. Teaching African people how to do it for themselves, to make their voices heard and help them fight for their needs.

It is clear that Africa needs a lot more than just free press. And it is clear that it needs "western" help. But it does not need our patronising attitude. It needs us to help them understand their flaws and to help them make up for them. And it also needs our applause/admiration when it succeeds its mission. The media has an extraordinary opportunity to be a part of it. Like the POLIS report (The role of media in building African society – recommended reading!) would state it is about "putting journalism at the heart of the debate". By giving people the possibility to actively pursue their beliefs and their necessities, we are helping construct a better society, one where the people are the heart of the state. Isn't that what it is all about?

by Sofia Diogo Mateus

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