



MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE

A Guide



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The media are one of the principal agents of globalisation. Their importance and power are growing, seemingly unstopably. The World Bank recently came upon the governance-media niche indirectly through the economy. Its President gave the following explanation for this in 1999: *«What became very clear to me (...) was that the issue of corruption and the issue of press freedom, while they may have political impact, are in fact essential issues in terms of economic development... Any movement for equity, social justice and corruption needs a free press for it to work.»* That was how the World Bank convinced itself that the fight against corruption, the aspiration to greater transparency in the management and functioning of the apparatus of State, and the need to account to the people have become democratic requirements, indispensable for economic development but difficult to achieve without the intermediation of the media.

Having realised this, SDC regards this brochure as a document for discussion and orientation on the place of the media in international development cooperation. It is seeking to establish a framework in order to stimulate activities within this domain.

This publication is part of a rather broader discussion by SDC on access to information as one of the key components of governance. (See the publication *«Information and Governance»*, SDC 2004 on this issue).

SDC is already very much involved in the media domain. Of particular note are:

- Major programmes for media training and support in Africa, Central Asia, the Caucasus and in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Support over a number of years for UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC), for which Switzerland was one of the initiating countries.
- A major contribution to the debate within the United Nations on the new world order for information.
- Support for regulatory bodies.
- The creation of several community radio stations in Africa.
- Making experts available to governments to consider ways of introducing media pluralism.
- Support for a number of Swiss NGOs for media operations at times of crisis.
- An initial discussion document appeared in 1999: *«New information and communication technologies – implications for development cooperation»*.
- The co-presidency of SDC, until 2004, of the Global Knowledge Partnership, an important think tank on the digital divide.

The media, which had long been on the margins of the principal trend of development activities, have now become more strategically important for SDC.

Media contribution to governance and democracy

In Switzerland, freedom of expression is regarded as the foremost of the individual freedoms. Without it, all the other freedoms would be unable to endure for long. It is the essential basis of the democratic State. Freedom of the press in the broad sense (written and audiovisual press) and more generally freedom of communication (including the new media) are the corollaries of freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is a right embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) and also in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19).

Where the rule of law does not exist, or exists only partially, the media, no matter how imper-

fect they may be, should nevertheless be encouraged. It is often they who pave the way for freedom and democracy. Freedom of expression, in all countries and in all cultures, is an ideal that never exists in its pure state; in reality it is approached more or less well through fragile consensus, delicate compromise, setbacks and temporary victories.

The media, the principal vehicle for freedom of expression, are therefore at the very heart of the problem of governance: they navigate within legal frameworks, more or less sympathetic to freedom of expression; they organise themselves in defence of their credibility (codes of ethics, self-regulation); they make more or less proper use of their margin of freedom to address a society on the move, and they take part in campaigns in support of governance.

The pre-eminence of freedom of expression among other individual freedoms is not without a degree of ambiguity for the media. A newspaper that publishes full pages on human rights (possibly in collaboration with NGOs) might also remain silent on certain issues, or may be corrupt. A national radio station may stir up local conflicts, in the belief that it is providing information in the general interest. Conversely, local radio stations save lives every day by defusing conflicts about which the outside world knows nothing. Because of this, international cooperation makes more and more use of the media in projects to prevent conflict and to inform in a period of political crisis or natural disaster.

Despite these ambiguities, SDC is working on the media to realise the objectives of participation, gender balanced development, transparency, respect for the rule of law and the emergence of a civil society.

Some preliminary points

We distinguish between:

- **Governance through** the media: use of the media for targeted campaigns concerning human rights, the fight against corruption, information in times of conflict, political crises or natural disasters, etc.
- **Governance for** the media: framework conditions for media activity.
- **Governance in** the media: internal rules that the professionals impose on themselves.

Understanding Governance: as of today, there is no international consensus on the definition of governance. The SDC Governance Division hence subscribes to the following definition, inspired by UNDP's.

Governance addresses the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of either the world or an individual country's affairs at all levels. **Governance** is a concept encompassing the complex mechanisms, resources, processes and institutions by which citizens, legal entities, gender and social groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and duties. **Governance** transcends the State to include as well the private sector, civil society and international organisations in overall development process at global, national, regional and local levels.

In the related policies, promoting Governance aims at creating an enabling environment to ensure the full respect of the rule of law, human rights protection, gender equality, a shared and accountable use of power, and macro-economic stability, all geared towards human development and according to the principle of subsidiarity.



What mission?

To inform, to comment, to entertain: that is the primary mission that the media set for themselves. Governance as such is not directly their problem, except when they embark on an educational campaign in collaboration with the State or with national or international NGOs, for example. But by their very existence, by their plurality, the media fulfil a function without which governance would be impossible. We must not therefore expect the media to change everything all at once, or to pursue objectives that are not their own. If a newspaper exposes a case of corruption and the judicial system fails to follow it up, it is up to the political parties or human rights NGOs to do so. The media therefore rely on those actions to follow the issue as it evolves and to inform public opinion.

What public?

This is the first key question that must be asked in any communication situation. When we talk

about the media, we tend to think mainly of an urban public. This is a popular presumption also shared by the elites of our partner states. But the majority of those who benefit from SDC's development programmes, in Africa, Asia and South America, are rural populations.

The present document will focus primarily on the illiterate rural and urban populations that often represent the majority of the public. This methodological approach is justified by some of the principles of governance:

- Democratic participation: this concerns all citizens, literate or not, however near or far they are from the capital of their country.
- «Empowerment» of all population groups, especially women's groups, which are often the most dynamic and most dependable.
- It is important to formulate inclusive, not exclusive, policies in the context of SDC intervention.

What language?

It is essential for communication to be in people's everyday language. Even if they are fluent in an official language, even if they speak several languages, it is only in the language they actually speak that are likely to be most deeply affected. Communication is part of culture, and is therefore nourished by the deep roots of the various societies. That is why it is so important to circulate laws in national languages and to deal with all questions of governance on the basis of positive traditional values.

Switzerland is a multilingual, multicultural country; it is particularly sensitive to languages and minorities. This is a comparative advantage that ought to be used in all areas of development in general, and of governance in particular.

What media?

Every medium has its own special characteristics. Some media are better suited to development operations than others. The degree of freedom they enjoy is different, too. Depending on the goals they are pursuing and the public they are addressing, we can count on one or another, or even on a measured combination.

1. Traditional communication

Societies did not have to wait for the flood of modern media in order to communicate. Even today, the most powerful «medium» is still word of mouth. Information spread by the «mass media» doesn't survive for long if it isn't picked up, discussed and commented on in the street.

2. Radio

This is the most popular medium, and often the most appropriate for development. It is not necessary to be able to read and write, live in towns or be rich to benefit from it. It is all the more effective because it is a direct continuation of oral culture.

Two fairly recent developments have made radio a particularly interesting medium from the point of view of governance, especially for participation and decentralisation.

- Broadcasting on FM wavelengths, which enables many different local radio stations to be set up, well suited for participation and interaction.
- The emergence of radio pluralism in many countries tied to the past by an audiovisual monopoly.

3. Press agencies

Their function is to supply raw information rapidly to the media that the latter will then complete, synthesise and comment on. In poor countries, editors often don't have the means to subscribe to the national Press Agency, even if it is subsidised. In such cases, agencies are reduced to producing a simple bulletin that they print and sell like a newspaper.

4. Newspapers

This is an essentially urban medium. Illiteracy, the high cost of paper, low advertising revenue and distribution problems are the main obstacles to their circulation nationally. Their precarious

economic situation also sometimes leads them to yield to economic or political pressures. For all that, they play a strategic role in forming the opinions of the elite, in democratic interaction, and in exposing abuses. The written press is growing strongly in Asia, but declining in South America and in jeopardy in Africa and Eastern Europe.

5. Television

This is the medium of the collective imagination. Images of major football matches, series from Brazil, Mexico and the USA give the whole world something to dream about, and not understanding the language is no obstacle. The future of television will be more «democratic», simpler technology will soon enable it to be decentralised and participative – like radio.





6. The new media (Internet, e-mail, mobile phones)

This is a sector that is really buzzing and evolving rapidly. The new media carry great hopes for countries where SDC is active. At the same time, their technical requirements (modern telecommunications infrastructures, the ability to read and write and mastery of the keyboard and the mouse) are a new obstacle to the participation of many citizens in the global information society. Overcoming the digital divide therefore poses a new challenge, one that international cooperation has to take up. The potential of the new

media for governance (more transparency, more democracy, more consultation, more information, etc.) is enormous. But there is a growing trend among States, no matter how liberal, to control them.

In terms of governance, we must emphasise that the new media

- favour networks, overcome distances and strengthen horizontal communication and civil society organisations;
- reduce the effects of isolation;
- facilitate decentralisation.

Encouraging governance through the media

This refers to the role that the media can play as «instruments» and partners of governance programmes. For a better understanding of this special role for the media, we have to appreciate that in certain cases, communication means directly influencing reality.

Here are some examples:

- introducing village residents to the provisions of the property code, which gives them rights over their local environment, will induce them to refuse to give away their trees to the first dealer who comes along, and even perhaps to put their natural resources to good use («empowerment»);
- informing the public that an entry in the public register is a free service might encourage them to refuse to accede to the demands of a dishonest government official (fighting corruption);
- local radio stations that regularly organise round-table discussions on the extent of decentralised powers will more easily overcome resistance from local officials than through an approach to the Ministry of the Interior (decentralisation);
- systematic campaigns on schooling for girls, or following up failures in education, will help the authorities and communities to take measures to improve the percentage of children in full-time education (gender balanced development);
- a pacifying message from local moderates may defuse a situation at the very point where demonstrators are preparing for a confrontation with armed police (prevention of conflict);

- announcing food distribution times to refugees avoids scuffles and frustrations (humanitarian aid).

We have to be wary of using the media as instruments, as a means of manipulating minds. On the contrary, we have to listen to people to enable them to find appropriate solutions for themselves. Rather than «sensitising» people, we have to «sensitise» our-selves for them. Communication itself can either be participative or authoritative. Moreover, if they transmit a message that the population can easily understand, the media are functioning as a community link. They stimulate debate, encourage the circulation of ideas, reinforce the sense of identity and self-confidence. They are also consolidating the fabric of society.

The process of speaking out is an important stage in empowerment. Country folk, when they're asked, start by saying they don't have ideas. But if we listen to them for long enough, a great many suggestions and ideas will come to the surface.

Regarded as «country people's radio run by country people for country people», rural radio stations in Africa and South America are participatory media. They belong to the community, are managed by a local committee and run by enthusiastic amateurs. Experts take part on the air (assuming they speak the local language), but are just one category of interlocutors among others. «There's no better expert than one country person talking to another».

The media and crises

This is a very particular way of using the media for specific goals.

We can distinguish three levels:

- **Before the crisis**
This means professionals instructing people how to react to a crisis before it arises (how to address the public, where to find information, etc.). A module called «information in time of crisis» should be introduced into the training of all journalists and broadcasters. Prevention of conflicts is a multi-disciplinary approach. International cooperation and the media have a central role to play in this.

■ **During the crisis**

In civil war situations or in extremely violent situations, it is likely that professionals will no longer be able to carry on the essential job of informing and conciliating. If the crisis is a natural disaster, the media may themselves have been destroyed. That's where specialised NGOs come into the picture, capable of working «under fire» in collaboration with humanitarian aid organisations whose communication needs are immense. Professional training and codes of ethics are important, but fragile, safeguards at a time of crisis.

- **After the crisis**, local professionals can relearn how to work more or less normally under difficult conditions. That's when support programmes, covering issues such as reconciliation and material and psychological reconstruction, are particularly opportune. Several international NGOs actually do useful work, but anything they do is no substitute for cooperation between professionals, among themselves, nationally or even internationally. Projects of the «media house» type are one means among others of encouraging national professionals to work together again.

The media are a means of collective access to information. Without that access, it is impossible for the individual to form a free personal opinion, or for the community to form a pluralist public opinion. Information provided by the media allows genuine democratic participation; it gives full meaning to citizens' civil rights, exercised by «enlightened» individuals (empowerment). It imposes an obligation on the public authorities to give a transparent account of themselves.

Can the media be a factor in bad governance?

If the rule of law exists, if all opinions can be voiced, if the private sphere of individuals is protected, if there is a high standard of professional training, then the system is in equilibrium. Then the media play their role of radiating democracy under the watchful eye of the public citizen, and regulatory and self-regulatory authorities.

Reality, however, is often rather different. The power of money leads to concentrations, which distort the free expression of pluralistic opinions. The media, in the short term, are capable of focussing the attention of voters to topics selected by partisan interests. Or again, journalists divulge information, often on the basis of voluntary leaks, at embarrassing moments.

So what can we conclude from this? That the media are capable of good and bad, certainly, but in particular that democracy could not exist without the media.

Governance for the media

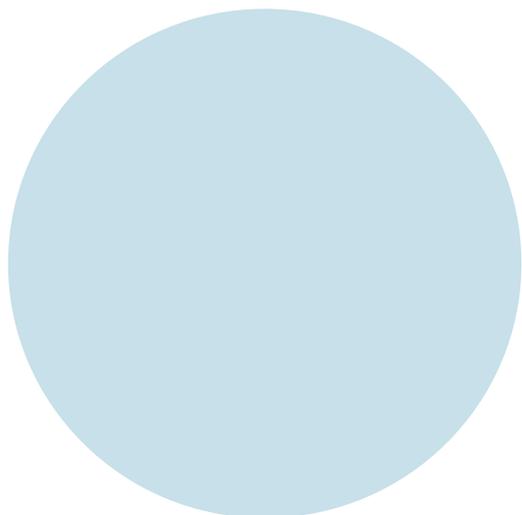
Every State, in its Constitution and by its laws, imposes a framework on media activity that should only be dictated in the general interest. But in developing countries, or countries in transition, far too much national legislation is conceived so as to influence media content, by authorising abusive repression of publishers and journalists in contravention of the rules in force.

Freedom of expression and information is covered by founding international texts: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 19) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 19).

Freedom

Freedom is one of the pillars of the democratic constitutional State. It must be guaranteed without ambiguity in legal texts.

- Freedom of expression is the essential principle.



- Freedom of the written and audio-visual press: the way to guarantee freedom of expression.
- Freedom of communication: this is the modern way of gaining a dynamic understanding of the first two freedoms from a perspective that also encompasses new media.

Legislation

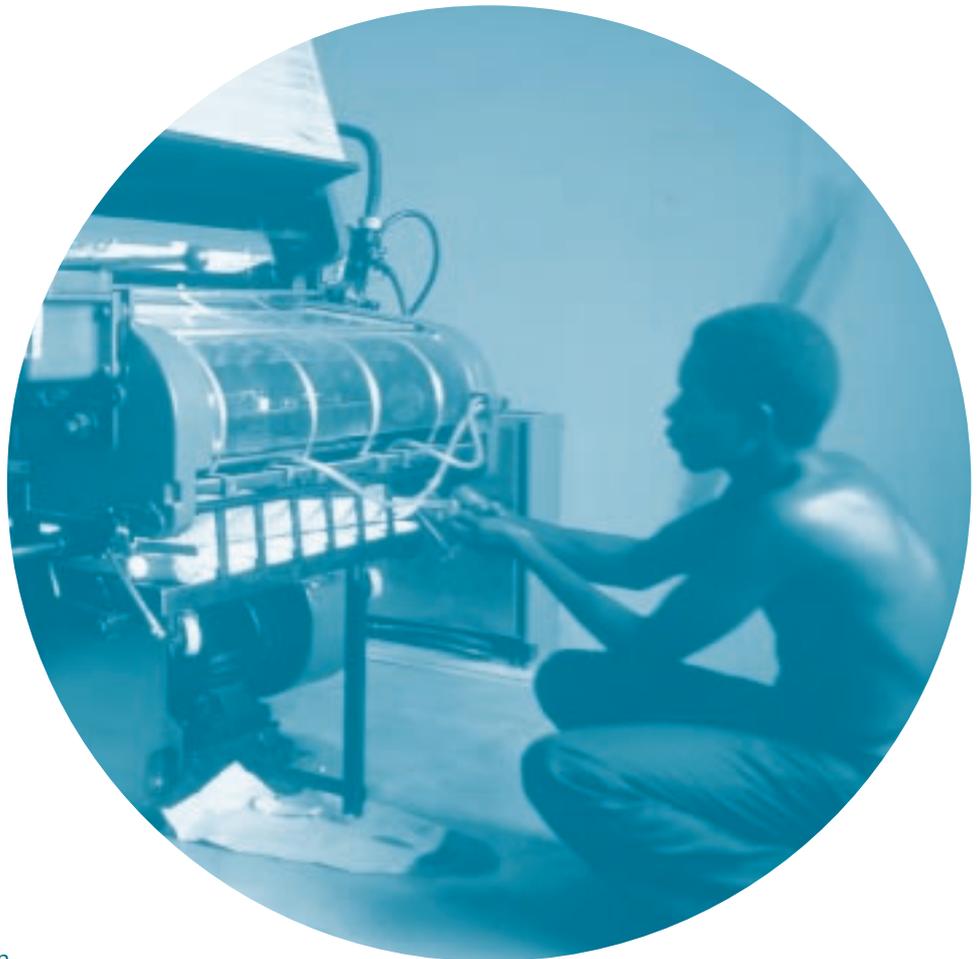
If the media, in their plurality, are the very breath of democracy, then those who make the laws and the authorities must allow them to breathe.

Media law in certain countries resembles a list of all possible and imaginable misdemeanours that might be committed by the press, accompanied by tariffs for fines and days in prison. Everyone accepts that abuses of the freedom of communication should be punished. Journalists' trades unions in general demand that their members be subject to the same rules and regulations as the general public – the provisions of the penal code. But offences committed by the press should not lead to their perpetrators going to prison. Nor should fines ever be large enough to ruin an enterprise. Criminal law does not exist to kill the press or to settle old scores.

Good laws are essential, but not enough. In European states in transition, for example, there are clearly sizeable gaps between the spirit of new laws inspired by the western model and their application controlled by old, authoritarian reflexes.

Governmental bodies for regulating audiovisual media

Regulatory bodies are state institutions, albeit independent ones. Their role is an essential one, as there can be no system of communication without a minimum of practical rules, the application of which cannot be left to the government alone.



The principal tasks of the regulatory authorities are:

- to preserve the general interest;
- to guarantee access to public service organs for all citizens;
- to appoint and to dismiss directors;
- to guarantee fair access to the airwaves during elections;
- to guarantee freedom of audiovisual communication by allocating radio frequencies, telecommunication cables and satellites to public and private radio and television sponsors.

The law and regulations on communication are the responsibility of parliaments. Before making legislation, it is advisable to consult regulatory bodies, as well as the professional and non-professional associations directly concerned, such as media syndicates, publishing companies, Internet companies, lawyers' associations, defenders of human rights or other citizens' groups.



Spirit of the law: pluralism and public service by audiovisual media

Regardless of the law, freedom of expression will only truly blossom if two general conditions are met:

1. Media pluralism

«Several newspapers, however mediocre, are worth more than a single newspaper, however excellent.» This aphorism, which can equally be applied to radio and television, sums up a complex process that integrates the necessity of having a number of channels to express the different trends of public opinion, emulation of the competition and the advantage of spreading freedom of expression over a number of actors.

Every country that has switched from a monopolistic regime to a pluralistic model has seen how

competition has encouraged the media to be more curious, more dynamic and better able to serve the interests of democracy and governance. Even former State media have developed in this way.

Pluralism of the written press, the computer and computer-aided publication has become widespread more rapidly and more easily than audiovisual pluralism.

Withholding information is a universal social phenomenon. Training those who hold information - governments, enterprises, associations, international organisations - for the requirements of transparency provides an excellent support for pluralism. In a pluralistic context, the State is obliged to distribute information emanating from itself to all media, not just to State or public service media.

2. Audiovisual media in the public service

The advent of pluralism has profoundly altered the audiovisual landscape in many countries. But State radio and television services still have considerable difficulty in adapting to the new situation. In order to qualify as a «public service», a title they often improperly bestow on themselves, it is essential for State radio and television services to submit themselves to the control of civil society, and that they take the whole population into consideration, including minorities. It is also essential for them to have editorial, administrative and financial independence, as without them they would be unable to serve the general interest.

Private, community, associative, religious and commercial radio and television services often say that they also provide a public service. While that may be partly true, it is only because of their contribution to pluralism. In countries where public radio and television services are not in a position to respect the principle of universality (coverage of the whole country and all minorities), the State, or the concessionary authority, may be induced to allocate public service functions to private media (national news bulletins, official notices at times of crisis, cultural programmes in minority languages, etc.).

The principles of public service are to a large extent concordant with those of governance.

- Universality of services means radio and television for all, and not just for urban dwellers or majority groups.
- By presenting the plurality of opinions, civil society assumes a position that enables it to scrutinise the management of public affairs (empowerment, accountability, transparency).
- Audiovisual media must respect the principle of the general interest, and not serve private interests.

In a broad sense, public service is the governance of public audiovisual media. Newspapers, unlike radio and television, do not lend themselves to public service type organisations. It is rather the pluralism of titles that guarantees the best public interest.



Governance in the media

Professionals can set their own rules, demands and aspirations, the major elements of which are:

Autonomy

This is the basic principle without which no medium can aspire to any degree of freedom. Autonomy has a number of facets.

- Editorial autonomy means that journalists receive instructions only from their hierarchical superior (and not from a minister, banker, religious figure or diplomat).

- Financial autonomy: a guaranteed budget, however modest, prevents the media from having to live on their wits or by compromising. Financial autonomy will be all the more solid when there are a number of different sources of finance. In poor countries, particularly where there is an abundance of local radio stations, the staff are sometimes not paid.
- Technical autonomy: a newspaper's independence is extremely limited if it is produced in a State printing press or distributed by state postal services.

Professional training

This is one of the best ways to guarantee the health of the media. It is essential that all those who start work in the media, whatever previous training they had, are trained and supervised by experienced professionals.

Ethics

Professionals generally accept the principles of ethical conduct. This is shown by the close similarity between the major codes of ethics. In many countries, ethics are violated on a daily basis. But the important thing is for the guilty journalist – and his or her colleagues – to be aware that a rule has been broken.

Editorial charters

These take the form of an agreement negotiated within a media enterprise between the journalists and the publishers establishing a general line, the journalistic programme and the organisation of the enterprise. In Switzerland, if there is a drastic change of course by the publishers, journalists can invoke a conscience clause that authorises them to resign and claim compensation.

The surveillance and conciliation system in the Swiss media

*The Swiss press council is the self-regulatory organisation set up by journalists to defend the principles embodied in the **Declaration of the rights and obligations of the journalist**. Its function is to ensure that certain ethical principles are respected within the profession. It reacts to complaints and has no means of legal constraint, but its counsel carries considerable authority in professional circles.*

Some newspapers have mediators, who are the link between unhappy readers and the editors. As regards radio and television, unhappy listeners and viewers have recourse to a pyramidal complaints system:

- 1. They start by setting down their grievances in a letter or e-mail. A dialogue is established with those responsible for the broadcast. That is as far as most cases go.*
- 2. If they are not satisfied, they can forward their claim to a **mediator**, as provided for by law, who will seek conciliation. This is a simple, free procedure.*
- 3. If that fails, a complaint may be addressed to the **independent authority for radio and television (AIPE)**, comprising nine members appointed by the government. Its independence is guaranteed by law. This is a serious and costly procedure. The complaint has to be submitted within 30 days of notification by the mediator and must be countersigned by 20 persons. The AIPE will verify whether the law and regulations have been violated. If that is indeed the case, the broadcaster must indicate what measures it has taken to prevent any repetition of the perceived fault.*
- 4. Decisions of the AIPE may be subject to appeal to the federal Tribunal, and its decisions, in certain cases, to the European Court of Human Rights.*



Media self-regulation bodies

These are institutions that monitor compliance with ethical rules and ethical practice in the media: the professional tribunals, press councils, journalists' orders, or publishers, mediators and ombudsman. These constitute an internal police force for the journalistic profession, but have no

coercive power. The underlying idea is that it is in the interests of the communicators to put their own house in order without the State or courts becoming involved.

In the same spirit, conciliation boards seek to reach an agreement between the complainants and the media, in order to avoid legal action.

The media and international cooperation

The existence of a pluralist and autonomous press (written, audiovisual and new media), carrying on its business within a global framework of respect for freedom, is the most important contribution that the media can make to governance. Every endeavour made in this direction deserves to be sustained by bilateral and multilateral aid.

Nevertheless, considerable prudence is called for, as problems relating to media freedom, defamation or free access to public information are extremely difficult to regulate. It is for the local partners, and media professionals in particular, who have the difficult task of achieving consensus.

The methodological approach to international aid is therefore very important.

Possible types of cooperation

Through the media

Here are some examples of operations where partnerships could benefit governance:

1. Media campaigns promoting the major themes of governance: respect for human rights and access to justice
 - democratisation and decentralisation
 - fight against corruption
 - dissemination of relevant professional, economic and scientific information.
2. Co-production of articles and broadcasts aimed at preventing conflicts and managing political crises and natural disasters. In Bosnia, for example, articles highlighting inter-community collaborative experiences were published in this way.

3. Support for the creation of local radio stations and community multimedia centres to facilitate the setting up of a project.

For and in the media

Below is a (not exhaustive) list of measures potentially capable of reinforcing the media in their central role in the smooth running of societies and governance.

1. Sustain media pluralism and independence by:
 - Consultations to improve framework conditions (legal or other)
 - Support for professional organisations
 - Support for regulatory bodies.
2. Improve professional training facilities (journalists, managers, technicians).
3. Create access to electronic mail and the Internet, especially wherever this is scarce.
4. Support the conversion of State radio and television services into public service media.
5. Make targeted programmes to help the written press where there are serious economic problems. For example:
 - by helping all newspapers in the same market to source paper cheaply
 - by improving distribution networks.
6. Reinforce local professional organisations (journalists' unions, publishing companies, etc.).
7. Encourage collaboration between the authorities and the independent media. In particular:
 - encourage the authorities to develop public information services
 - encourage national, regional and local authorities to develop public information services on the Internet and help them to set up their own websites.
8. Encourage the creation of endogenous content, especially in the new media.
9. Help the media to switch from old to new technologies.

What methodology for intervention?

The classic method of on-demand support for local partners is also an appropriate one. A decision to provide aid for the media will depend on a positive response to the four following questions.

1. Will the needs expressed by the local partner be in the interests of good governance?
2. Is the local partner willing to go some of the way towards governance?
3. Does the partner have the necessary space for freedom?
4. Is the partner credible?

In all cases, effective international cooperation gives precedence to:

- content in the language spoken by the people in their everyday lives;
- endogenous creation;
- sub-regional approaches facilitated by the tendency of newspapers and local radio stations to work in networks.



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■ **Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), Kuala Lumpur**

<http://aibd.org.my>

Africa

■ **Union for Radio and Television Networks for Africa (URTNA)**

www.urtna.org

■ **Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Windhoek**

www.misanet.org

■ **Union des journalistes d’Afrique de l’Ouest, Dakar**

www.ujao.org

Latin America

- **Inter American Press Association (IAPA), Miami**
www.sipiapa.com
- **International Association of Broadcasting (IAB), Montevideo**
www.airiab.com

Europe

- **European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Geneva**
www.ebu.ch
- **European Institute for the Media (EIM), Düsseldorf**
www.eim.org

NGOs and Swiss consultancies

- **Fondation Hironnelle, Lausanne**
www.hironnelle.org
- **Cimera, Geneva**
www.cimera.org
- **Intermédia consultants, Berne**
www.intermedia-consultants.net
- **Media Action International, Geneva**
Field of competence: Information in periods of crisis, Afghanistan.
www.mediaaction.org
- **Medienhilfe, Zurich**
Field of competence: Information in periods of crisis, Central Europe.
www.medienhilfe.ch

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