

Strengthening Africa's Media Building sustainable institutions to bolster the public sphere and nurture effective states

**Summary Note
Workshop held at
Economic Commission for Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
9-10 March 2006**

Media and communication experts¹ met at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa from 9-10 March 2005 to inform the design and implementation of a consultation strategy aimed at developing priorities for strengthening Africa's media. The workshop was convened against the backdrop of renewed engagement around media development in Africa, stimulated in large part by the Commission for Africa's emphasis on the media as a key agent of good governance and its call for the creation of an Africa Media Development Facility. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) – which is providing support through the ECA to the consultation process – funded the workshop.

The workshop had three objectives²:

- Arriving at a shared understanding of the state of the media and communication sector in Africa;
- Exploring the extent to which different actors in Africa could develop a common framework of action based on a shared agenda; and
- Informing the design and implementation of a consultation process towards a coherent and inclusive set of interventions to strengthen media in Africa.

Media as Guardian of the Public Sphere:

Participants agreed that, alongside civil society and other important actors, a sustainable and pluralistic media is an important guardian of the public sphere, and a key actor in ensuring the accountability that is critical to building effective states in Africa. A capacitated media working in the public interest is an agent of good governance and democracy, a medium for the promotion of human rights, social justice and the fight against poverty, and a vehicle for the voices of all Africa's people.

In light of the differential levels of infrastructure and widespread disparities in access that obtain in different African countries, media must be defined inclusively, spanning the mainstream press and broadcast media, alternative and community media, civil society media, formal and non-formal communication, and new media. The definition also includes special interest media, addressing cross-cutting concerns such as gender equity and human rights. Of key importance are media entities within countries, although there is an emerging institutional architecture of sub-regional as well as regional media support organizations and initiatives.

¹ See attached list of participants. It should be noted that the group was convened as a technical resource, and was not intended to be representative of the media development community.

² Five key questions informed the meeting: a) Media Development, Media for Development or Communication for Development? What are the complementarities and differences between these schools, and how inclusive should we strive to be? b) What has been Africa's experience in building media capacity over the past two decades, and what have we learned? What are the major initiatives underway today and to what extent do they enrich our shared agenda? c) Does the current international development climate provide a new window for media development in Africa? Which are the main opportunities and threats? d) What are critical issues we need to bear in mind in seeking to build a strong African media/ communication sector? e) With specific reference to the coming months, how should we go about designing and implementing the process of consultation, in such a way as to ensure inclusiveness at the same time as maintaining focus on key priorities?

Friday 17 March 2006

The media's role as guardian of the public sphere in African countries has traditionally not been well understood by the international community, a fact that accounts for the low levels of investment in media infrastructure to date. Donor support to media has tended to be project-based and small-scale, resulting in diffusion and fragmented impact. In large part, this has been because the media sector itself, a broad church with a myriad of different constituent parts, has failed to make a compelling case for wider support.

Put together with recent Africa-focused initiatives, a convergence of thinking in the development community provides a significant window for the media in Africa to make its case and attract the support needed to enable it to fully play its role. Key opportunities include the current development focus on governance, the international consensus around an African-owned and led partnership agenda, and the ongoing UK White Paper process focused on building effective states.

In the current focus on good governance, the emphasis should be squarely placed on building the media as an institution in its own right, worthy of holistic, coherent and sustained support to enable it to contribute to building effective states.

Challenges and Obstacles:

A number of challenges stand in the way of a strong media sector in Africa. Sustainability emerges as an overarching concern common to all media actors, irrespective of type.

Of particular concern is financial sustainability. In many African countries the market for commercial media products is thin, manifested by a weak subscription and advertiser base. Where such markets do exist, the concentration is overwhelmingly urban and to a lesser extent peri-urban. Rural dwellers must rely largely on alternative and community-focused media, where they exist. There is an overall deficit of investment. Media owners and entrepreneurs have little or no dedicated means of support, as a result of which media is unevenly developed, within and across countries. In the short term, consistent and coherent financing is required to address this concern. A longer-term challenge is how to graduate from reliance on donor funding, to full sustainability.

Press freedom remains a significant challenge. The collapse of the state monopoly on media in the 1990s notwithstanding, the growth of independent media has been circumscribed by state efforts to claw back power. In many countries, journalists and communicators are not allowed to operate freely, and intimidation and censorship remain the order of the day. The spectre of journalists threatened, jailed and even killed in the course of doing their jobs remains too common a scenario.

Often, economic imperatives and political alignments make nonsense of the media's role as a guardian of the public sphere. Some state-controlled media continue to serve as propagandists, ensuring that only prescribed messages are released. The same phenomenon of crowding out space applies to the private media, with concentration of media ownership threatening pluralism. Moreover, the dearth of public media in Africa raises concern that serving the public interest rests solely on the shoulders of state and private media, both of which have overriding concerns – such as serving ruling elites and ensuring financial sustainability.

Capacity and standards are also identified as a major concern. In recent decades, donors have supported media training aimed at individuals and, to a lesser extent, organizations. However, the conventional wisdom is that such training has been piecemeal, small-scale and inimical to institution-building of the kind that is needed to sustain media as a sector. Producing content of a consistently high quality that is accurate and reliable requires a stronger configuration of training providers and a clear vision as to how to develop media capacity in different countries and sub-regions, all with their own specific characteristics and realities. Media management and

entrepreneurial skills, as well as skills to strengthen media representation, also need to be developed with the same holistic approach in mind.

Towards 'Strengthening Africa's Media':

Experts attending the meeting agreed that a consultation was needed to determine the priorities for strengthening media-as-institution in Africa. The consultation process will provide a platform for African media actors, in collaboration with their support partners, to articulate concerns and perspectives, identify priority issues and areas requiring support, and propose concrete initiatives and programmes³ towards a strengthened media sector. African ownership is a fundamental principle underpinning the process and its outcomes. An important outcome will be a 'Strategic Framework for Strengthening Media in Africa' that will make the case for investing in media, and provide the basis for a Stakeholder Conference⁴, to be held in September 2006, that will discuss and agree on immediate as well as medium- and longer-term priorities that should attract financing.

Stakeholders: Four key groups of media stakeholders were identified around which the consultation process would be designed: *Owners, Practitioners, Trainers* and *Support Organizations*. For each group, workshop participants tentatively identified the types of organizations working in media that should be consulted, suggested inputs needed and outputs expected, and discussed knowledge sharing arrangements to ensure an inclusive and far-reaching consultation.

Modalities: The consultation process will involve: Mapping of participating organizations; Electronic Consultation; Sub-regional and Linguistic consultations⁵; Opportunistic consultations via major upcoming events/ processes; Review of existing documentation and research findings⁶; and travel by Secretariat to consult in selected locations.

An electronic consultation is agreed to be a cost-effective way of garnering perspectives from each of the four stakeholder groups, and will begin as soon possible, once a detailed mapping of participant organizations had been completed. A comprehensive literature review will be conducted, and findings from ongoing research processes factored into the process. A short questionnaire will also be developed to inform the electronic discussions. In addition to being e-mailed out, it will be accessible via a 'Strengthening Africa's Media' website, to be developed shortly, and sent to recipients that are not online by post.

Sub-regional meetings are considered to be important for garnering national and sub-regional perspectives. Subject to availability of funding, Facilitating Organizations, to be nominated, will take charge of organizing these meetings. The Secretariat will also opportunistically identify and harness major ongoing events of relevance to gather additional views. Secretariat members will travel to selected locations to undertake consultations.

Outputs: The following outputs are expected in the course of the five-month consultation process:

- i. Conceptual Guidance Note – a set of principles guiding the process
- ii. List of Stakeholder Organizations & database of Initiatives
- iii. Periodic e-discussion summaries
- iv. Synthesis Report of Consultation Findings
- v. 'The Case for Strengthening Media in Africa' – Framework and Proposals

3 The idea of a media development facility, proposed in the CfA report and by a number of media support actors, was agreed in principle to be worthy of further consideration. However, it was considered premature to focus the consultation process on a facility alone, since participants felt that any initiative or initiatives emanating from the process should be determined by and emanate from, rather than drive, the consultation.

4 It was agreed that the Conference would be funded by combining resources allocated to the BBC World Service Trust for a meeting to showcase its research with resources to be allocated to ECA by DFID.

5 One meeting for each of the 5 sub-regions of Africa, including North; and a separate linguistic consultation. Alternatively, ensure linguistic component in each sub-regional workshop. Dependent on funding which is not currently available.

6 A key input here is the research being conducted by three African universities under the aegis of the BBC World Service Trust.

Implementation arrangements:

The 'Strengthening Africa's Media' *Secretariat*, located at the ECA, constitutes the engine of the consultation process, and will be responsible for coordination, managing available resources, and generating all relevant outputs. A Consultation Strategy and Plan, detailing actions to be undertaken in the coming five months, will be available shortly. A *Task Force* of five persons – four representing stakeholder groups and one representing linguistic concerns – will be appointed to provide guidance, expert technical advice and other relevant input to the Secretariat's work.

Facilitating Organizations will be nominated, based on capacity, availability and willingness, to play a lead role in facilitating sub-regional and linguistic aspects of the consultation process. The *UK Department for International Development* is providing pivotal and critical support. It has contributed £100,000 towards the consultation process, and is willing to finance part of the Stakeholders Consultation and broker support from other donors. DFID has also allocated resources to the *BBC World Service Trust* to conduct and disseminate research on the state of African media⁷. The consultation process and research undertaken by the Trust will be undertaken as a coordinated effort, so as to eliminate duplication and ensure the best possible chance of success.

Next Steps:

The following are immediate-term actions⁸ to be undertaken in the coming weeks. The Secretariat is working on the assumption that the electronic consultations will begin in mid-April.

- 1) Secretariat to circulate Summary Note of Workshop – *Friday 17 March*.
- 2) Secretariat, BBC World Service Trust and DFID teleconference to discuss coordination – *Wednesday 22 March*.
- 3) Secretariat to prepare TORs and nominate Task Force – *Friday 24 March*.
- 4) Secretariat to draw up and circulate preliminary list of potential Facilitating Organizations – *Friday 31 March*.
- 5) Secretariat to approach potential Facilitating Organizations to discuss potential partnerships – *Friday 31 March onwards*.
- 6) Secretariat to finalize Conceptual Guidance Note (based on input from Prof. Fackson Banda) – *Wednesday 23 March*.
- 7) Secretariat to begin gathering of data and preparation of electronic list of organizations to be consulted – *Thursday 24 March onwards*.
- 8) Secretariat to circulate detailed Consultation Strategy and Plan – *Monday 10 April 2006*.

⁷ The workshop agreed that the Secretariat at ECA should work together with the Trust to ensure that the Stakeholder Conference, in addition to showcasing the perspectives of different stakeholders, also provides a forum for the dissemination of the results of the Trust-led research initiative. The Trust has devolved the research to three African universities with strong capacity – Rhodes University in South Africa, Dar es Salaam University in Tanzania, and Ahmadou Bello University in Nigeria. Research is currently underway in 17 countries.

⁸ The Consultation Strategy and Plan document will spell out actions, responsibilities and timelines for different activities in detail.

Annex – List of Participants

Name	Designation & Organization
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Prof. Fackson BANDA	SAB Chair – Media & Democracy, School of Journalism & Media Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown SOUTH AFRICA
Ms. Christine BUTEGWA	Programme Officer – Communications, African Women's Development & Communications Network (FEMNET), Nairobi KENYA
Mr. Luckson CHIPARE	Director, Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Windhoek NAMIBIA
Mr. Peter DA COSTA	Secretariat, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
Mr. James DEANE	Director of Strategy, Communication for Social Change Consortium (CFSC), London UK
Ms. Grace GITHAIGA	Chair, Africa Network World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC-Africa), Nairobi KENYA
Mr. Josiah Maximilian JARRETT	Secretariat, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
Mr. David KEIGHLEY	Manager – Corporate Relations, ABN Holdings, London UK
Mr. Stephen KING	Director, BBC World Service Trust, London UK
Ms. Martha MOGUS	Secretariat, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
Mr. Jeanette MINNIE	International Freedom of Expression & Media Consultant, Zambezi FoX, Johannesburg SOUTH AFRICA
Mr. Sina ODUGBEMI	Programme Manager & Adviser, Information & Civil Society Department, Department for International Development (DFID), London UK
Mr. Edetaen OJO	Executive Director, Media Rights Agenda, Lagos NIGERIA
Ms. Diana SENGHOR	Director, Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA), Dakar SENEGAL
Ms. Aulora STALLY	International Women's Media Federation, Harare ZIMBABWE
Ms. Mercy WAMBUI	Secretariat, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
Mr. Tamrat WOLDEGIORGHIS	Editor-in-Chief, Fortune Newspaper, Addis Ababa ETHIOPIA
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