

FUNDERS' ASSISTANCE TO THE MEDIA IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Proceedings of the round-table meeting held in Brussels, 24 - 25 June 1996

1 - FROM PARIS TO BRUSSELS

On 24 and 25 June 1966, the European Commission hosted the second round-table of funders of the media in sub-Saharan Africa. There were nineteen participants at the meeting, representing fifteen bilateral and multilateral departments of cooperation and private foundations.

This second round-table followed a previous meeting, on the same theme, which had been organised in Paris from 11 to 13 December 1995, at the initiative of the French department of cooperation. The Paris meeting had had two objectives:

- enable an initial exchange of information between funders on each others' strategies and programmes;
- to study the possibilities of dialogue and cooperation between funders.

The aim had been to share information and insights, without seeking to define "the" correct way of operating. Indeed, the diversity of strategies and programmes is itself a valuable asset. The interest in establishing a dialogue should not be seen in any way as an attempt to coordinate foreign assistance on this topic.

The second round-table in Brussels provided an opportunity for widening information exchanges between funders on their activities, and to raise the question of support to African television stations.

It opened the possibility for a more serious discussion on three concrete questions:

- an initial review of support to the establishment of press centres;
- the setting up of a database on training opportunities for professionals in African media;
- the most appropriate way of working which would meet the need for programmes and - at the same time - strengthen local production.

Finally, the Brussels round-table continued the discussions started in Paris on the possible creation of an informal exchange network and the establishment of a technical secretariat to facilitate the flow of information and ideas.

2 - FUNDERS' STRATEGIES: COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES

At the first round-table meeting in Paris, two major approaches in funder strategies had emerged:

- the first was a straightforward support to the media as such. This aimed at consolidating a sector which was vital to any nation state, and which was seen also as playing a dynamic role in the economy, especially in terms of job creation;
- the second strategy regarded the media not as a sector as such, but as a means to an end, in which they could help to create the processes of social communication considered essential to a more participatory and sustainable development. In this, the media were seen as a means to disseminate information key to development, dealing with financial, hygiene, social and technical issues.

As was shown by the presentations of the European Union and IDRC, this broad typology of strategies was also valid for the second round-table meeting.

A typology such as this can be useful for a better understanding of the different approaches of funders. Given the operations of funders, however, the reality is somewhat more complex and subtle. The actual work of many funders combines elements of both approaches. In the cases of Sweden and Finland, for example, the major objective of their support to the media has been to provide support to democracy and human rights, whilst still seeking to strengthen their involvement in social communication.

This typology then should not lead to a polarisation of the two approaches which are, in fact, complementary and need to be better linked.

3 - MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: A STILL RELATIVE FREEDOM

Recent years have seen the emergence of democracy in many African countries. This has been witnessed by a proliferation of independent media, whether in the private or voluntary sector and even by changes in some public media under the pressure of competition. Some media are in a precarious state: their quality is mediocre, their sales low and their balance sheet shaky.

These trends have led many funders to place greater emphasis on the training of journalists, and on support to the organisation and (re-)structuring of the overall sector (through professional associations, joint services, and the legal and institutional frameworks).

These democratic openings are still fragile and unfinished. Indeed, in some countries, governments are seeking to regain greater control of the media. In other countries, press freedom has never been established, and action in the defence of the rights of the press and of journalists still remains essential.

The precise type of support to be prioritised (in protecting journalists' rights and support to professionalisation and organisation in the media sector) depends on the national context.

There is a growing trend for development aid to be linked to respect for democracy and human rights. Should press freedom not become part of these conditionalities? Is the information provided by the political leaders of aid agencies an adequate source in this respect?

4 - NATIONAL TELEVISION IN AFRICA: A RUDE AWAKENING, AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

After having been lulled by their monopoly situation, national television stations in Africa have been subjected to strong competition. Broadcasting channels and satellite programmes have multiplied, as have the satellite dishes to receive them in African towns and cities. Private operators pick up these broadcasts and re-broadcast them in coded form on either cable or microwave networks, and earn their living from subscriptions. This is an active seller's market, and the number of operators is sure to increase in the years to come. Some of them supplement - or plan to supplement - their foreign broadcasts with those of local channels using local output made with compact, low-cost production units.

National television stations have reacted in various ways to these trends. Some have responded to the challenge, by opening up their programming and raising the quality of their output (viz Burkina Faso and Chad). Others (such as Niger, Madagascar and Benin) have lost their audience share and their output has deteriorated.

The only national television stations which will survive are those which implement drastic, far-reaching changes, notably through:

- adapting their programmes to the wishes of viewers;
- more rational use of equipment and available skills and expertise;
- tighter financial management;
- new ways of broadcasting;
- asserting their autonomy of political bodies in providing information and not simply covering meetings opened by members of the government...

It is possible for national television stations to survive, although perhaps not in all cases. Despite the possibilities of cost reduction which are offered by digital technologies, television is a costly medium, given the very high costs of equipment and depreciation, and the training of technical staff. One hour of production time costs approximately FFR 1 million (160 KECU). There are serious financial issues at stake, and there is no room for mistakes in programming as far as advertising revenue is concerned. In Namibia, for example, where there is a very tight media market, the screening of the World Cup generated advertising revenue of FFR 150,000 in fifteen days.

Furthermore, beyond the financial, technical and institutional issues, it is at the level of political will on the part of the national powers-that-be that the future of national television stations will

be decided... It costs no more to produce high quality local broadcasts than to produce the current low quality output.

5 - SUPPORT TO NATIONAL TELEVISION STATIONS: SOME EXAMPLES

Several funders provide direct support to national television stations: the French department of cooperation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Francophone Agency. Most of them have focussed their support on national production and on the dissemination and exchange of programmes.

The Francophone Agency provides support to TV5 Afrique, and operates a support fund for television production in the South. It also provides modest material support (through the dissemination of cassettes) and funds and organises training programmes.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation launched the Afrovision programme in 1991, which exchanges programmes between eleven national television stations in Africa. It also finances training, and steps towards new legal and institutional frameworks.

The Rockefeller Foundation support production through aiding scenarios, through dissemination (meetings and exchanges), and through training.

The Ford Foundation has embarked upon a massive programme, in joint North-South production, of a series of broadcasts on the history of the African continent.

By far the most significant funder in this sector is the French department of cooperation with an average annual investment of FFR 110 million to African national television stations. It is the only department of cooperation to have provided large-scale funding for materials and equipment.

6 - NEW PRINCIPLES, NEW DIRECTIONS

Most funders are reviewing the impact of the approaches they have adopted:

- in the case of the French department of cooperation, their support has allowed many national television stations to exist. However, some significant funding has gone to national television stations which are today moribund (as in the case of Niger, for example). Most of the television stations find it hard to finance the replacement of equipment previously provided...
- the Afrovision programme of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation is only functioning with difficulty: there are only eleven national television stations involved; contributions from participants have dropped by one-third in the last two years, and two-thirds of the remaining contributions originate from stations in North Africa;
- the Francophone Agency is seriously reviewing the value of providing training to specialists who then move on to other posts. An evaluation of the impact of their training programmes is underway. Since the recent decision to charge national television

stations for the cost of shipping, the programme of dissemination of blank cassettes has shrunk considerably.

The dual factors of the disturbing situation of some national television stations and the limited success of some of their approaches have led several funders to reconsider their strategies: it is perhaps not realistic to believe that all national television stations will survive. Funder support, undoubtedly, will have to be more elective and be based on the real intentions and skills of the stations.

The proliferation of private operators is leading to the need for new approaches: to support production capacity in the private sector; to avoid acts of piracy and to mitigate fierce competition with national television stations; to define new, clear rules for the sector and to help it to organise itself.

There are changes in training: priorities are now linked to issues of re-organisation, to key posts and to production, scripting and management...

Support for production is a priority now, especially in enabling closer links between film and television, and in promoting co-production, particularly at regional level.

Finally, support to television involves significant amounts of finance and the need to avoid to errors. Whilst national television stations do need support, an element of caution is advised. It can be said that funders have a responsibility not to involve national television stations in acquiring material and equipment which they will be unable to replace or renew.

It is the French department of cooperation, the major funder of national television stations in West Africa, which has introduced the most far-reaching changes in its approach in this sector. Emphasis is now upon strengthening and consolidating production capacities at the national level, and support to the re-structuring of the sector. Support to material and equipment is now limited. The mission of Canal France International (CFI) has been redefined, whereby it reverts to the earlier role of being a pool of programmes for national television stations and not a competing channel.

There is considerable convergence among the funders as far as their thinking is concerned about priorities for supporting national television stations, but there is still some degree of duplication and competition. This is the case, for example with the pool of programmes run by CFI and exchange programmes such as those run by Afrovision. The French department of cooperation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation are seeking to harmonise their approaches on this, by eliminating duplication on monitoring, dissemination agreements, etc.

7 - CAN TELEVISION BE A TOOL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION?

There have been very few satisfying results with the use of television in disseminating messages about development, from the point of view of cost, effectiveness and impact. A television broadcast is fifty times more expensive than a radio broadcast.

There are some very rare cases where community television stations have played a clear role in social communication. In the Comoros, for example, on the island of Anjouan, a local television station has been set up with external aid. It provides a mixed output, combining recasts of satellite broadcasts and local production, including amateur video output. It has to be noted, furthermore, that there is no national television in the Comoros.

All in all, television would not appear to be the most appropriate medium for social communication.

8 - SETTING UP PRESS CENTRES - TO BE CONTINUED

Several press centres have been established recently in Africa: in Tanzania, in Ghana and in Burkina Faso, with the assistance of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), using support from the European Union; in Mali, with the assistance of Panos and several funders; in Togo, with the support of the French department of cooperation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation...

These press centres provide a range of joint services: documentation service, subscriptions to press agencies; desk-top publishing facilities; room hire... They also provide a meeting place for professional associations to hold discussions and organise press clubs.

8.1 A pole of dynamism, or just another body?

The provision of joint services in a press centre can serve as a stimulus to encourage local professionals to work together. It allows opportunities for exchange and enables new forms of cooperation. Nonetheless, it raises a number of questions.

The totality of the projects for press centres vary greatly in size and ambition. However, they all have problems with the funding of their operational costs and the costs of depreciation of their material. Is, then, their range of services the correct one? What services do actually properly match the real needs of the media? How viable are they? Will they lead to improvements in the media sector? By offering partially subsidised services (DTP, printing), do they not mean unfair competition for the private sector?

Have some press centres not been too heavily pushed by Northern agencies? And just how deeply are the professionals involved?

The answers to these questions vary from country to country. In Togo, for example, the journalists themselves have raised the funds to pay a year's rent for their press centre.

8.2 - An interesting innovation requiring caution

The emergence of press centres is a relevant one, but caution is called for, in ensuring that projects stay on a realistic scale; tracking and reviewing progress; properly assessing the viability as well as the importance of the services they offer; measuring the involvement of the professionals.

At the round-table there was a broad consensus between funders on:

- better coordination of dealing with new projects (for example, joint action by the European Union, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the French department of cooperation on the press centre in Togo);
- identifying and sharing information amongst funders on press centres: of lists of projects and their costs, of descriptions of the services provided by various centres, and of feasibility studies and evaluations undertaken in this field;
- undertaking, at an early opportunity, an evaluation of well-developed press centre projects, possibly through co-funding;
- joint discussion of the results of this evaluation

9 - HOW TO AVOID DUPLICATION AND LACK OF FOCUS IN TRAINING PROGRAMMES

There is already a significant amount of training opportunities. Most funders are keen to establish more structured programmes in the medium-term, and no longer simply respond to the immediate training needs. The mutual sharing of information is essential to avoid the organisation of several courses at the same time, on the same topics, in the same countries, with the same journalists...

Many funders face the same difficulties in this respect:

- It is hard to select the 'right' trainees (those who have no already following several training courses, and those in the right posts). Some funders, such as the Swedish department of cooperation, have the additional criteria of at least 30% of trainees being women.
- There is no system of information, either at a country level, and even less at an international level, to describe previous courses, their scope, and participants. This leads inevitably to duplication.
- Few training courses produce replicable course materials and training documents.
- Identification and selection of trainers is not always an easy task (due to lack of information), in particular with African trainers.

The selection of trainees should be improved by the establishment of a database of African professionals who have followed training courses. This is being compiled by the International Federation of Journalists with finance from the European Commission.

At the round-table, there was general agreement that an improvement in the sharing of information between funders was essential for the provision of training opportunities to be

rationalised, and, hence, for a greater impact. At the same time, it was felt important to avoid setting up an over-ambitious system which, through its weight, could lose its utility.

9.1 - Information on courses, or on trainees?

A proper information facility would have to be based on a clear definition of the nature of information to be covered, and of how it could be shared simply and quickly.

One approach would be to focus on information about courses being organised: topic, country, date, with additional information about previous and projected courses. Such a database could help course organisers and planners to better focus their courses, and to examine the possibilities of sharing or co-funding certain elements.

This database should also comprise information about the organisers of training courses and trainers (both in the North, and especially in the South) and on training materials which have been produced.

Another approach would be to use the current database of IFJ on trainees. This would be slightly more ambitious and complex a task. Given that African journalists have access to various training opportunities, this database cannot be seen as fully exhaustive. Its central function would be to facilitate the process of identification and selection of trainees. It could also be used for compiling and publishing professional directories.

9.2 - Need to define the project

An information facility such as this poses several questions about content, scope and use. What would be the most appropriate mechanism to collect and disseminate information? Should it be organised at national level or at international level, or both? Who should have access to it? What would be the role of African trainers and organisers in its development? What would be the cost, and how should it be financed?

A small group of funders (European Commission, World Bank, Swiss department of cooperation, French department of cooperation and Unesco-PIDC) will meet to discuss these questions and to develop a concrete proposal.

10 - BALANCING SUPPORT TO PRODUCTION AND TO PROGRAMMES

Not all African media are able to produce all their programming requirements, and have to have recourse to information from external sources. As part of an approach to improve the medias' programming, both qualitatively and quantitatively, some funders provide sound, written and visual materials on a regular basis.

Thus CFI (Canal France International) distributes programmes by satellite to national television stations. The leading radio stations (Deutsche Welle, RFI, Radio Nederland, BBC...) distribute both written and sound material to radio stations in Africa.

Specialised press agencies distribute feature articles, as in the case of the Syfia agency which handles rural development.

Another type of assistance to programming is provided by the various networks for the exchange of programmes, such as the Afrovision mentioned above, the exchange network in South Africa, the network run by WACRB (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), etc.

10.1 - *Substitute or stimulant?*

Support to programming can have some perverse effects. The receiving media can treat it as an easy option, and cut back on their own production and increase their use of external programmes. This is lower in cost, and easily resolves the problems of production. It can be argued that the provision of programmes leads to African media paying excessive attention to external information, whereas the real problem is how to promote and diversify information about local and national realities.

The risks of such perverse effects have led some funders (Sweden, Switzerland, Finland...) to provide support solely to local production, preferably in national languages, and to provide no support to programming.

With some conditions, the round-table felt, it is possible for programming support and production product to be complementary and mutually reinforcing, as shown by these basic principles:

- give preference to semi-finished products rather than off-the-shelf products. The provision of materials in "kit form" could act as a stimulus to production;
- complement the provision of programmes with support to local production, through training, a support fund, co-production, and also through the purchase and dissemination of materials produced locally: as well as providing financial support, this would help to 'Africanise' broadcasts;
- disseminate programmes which have broad popular appeal, and even leave space for commercial breaks. By providing external programmes in this form, income can be generated with which national production can be financed;
- make a clear distinction between the dissemination of programmes produced by African media and of those produced by international television and radio stations which are aimed at African audiences. In order to separate the two types of programmes, the French department of cooperation has encrypted broadcasts by CFI for part of the day. Its programmes are only accessible to national television stations and no longer private operators or individual viewers.

11 - CONTINUE TO MEET, AS A NETWORK

The participants at the second round-table decide to create an informal network of funders supporting media in Africa. This network, which should be flexible in its organisation and its operation, could work along the lines of the Bellagio Publishing Network. This network, established in 1991, comprises funders and other parties involved in support to publishing in Africa (including the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Nordic departments of cooperation). Links could be established between the two networks.

Objectives of the network

The “media network” would offer to funders:

- a regular information exchange, and a dialogue on specific projects and general approaches;
- information on projects underway and, possibly, on their impact, thus enabling all members of the group to benefit from each others’ successes and failures;
- a forum for discussing strategies and sounding out ideas on new and appropriate approaches. There is a shared conviction, evident at the second round-table, to move away from the well-trodden paths of media support.

Composition and operation

The network would be composed of funders active in support to media in Africa. Some bilateral departments of cooperation and private foundations not attending the second round-table would be invited to future meetings. It is felt that the group would thus comprise about thirty members, and be able to function properly. After an initial period of meeting every six months, the general feeling is that “cruising speed” should be at the rate of one meeting annually.

It was felt, also, that an annual meeting should be held with the beneficiaries and partners of funders. Specialised partners (trainers and organisers) would also be invited to specific meetings in this series, depending on the topic. At present, however, the priority is to consolidate the group of funders, to strengthen the exchange of information and expand the discussion on approaches.

12 - A LIGHT TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

The round-table accepted the terms of reference for a secretariat, drafted by GRET¹. The idea of a rotating secretariat was not considered appropriate, since the network needed to have an institutional memory, with an good understanding of the relationships within the network.

The secretariat would provide services for all of the members of the network, under whose control it would operate, providing three functions:

? **Providing information**

The round-table felt that the main information needs were:

- ? on the development of the media sector in Africa (trends, important events);
- ? the activities and programmes of the various funders.

This information could be circulated as a fax-letter and as a directory (with indexed descriptions of each funder, with summaries grouped by type of activity and type of media).

This information service would be complemented by provided a service of customised, on-demand information in response to specific requests by different members of the network.

? **Analysis and working documents**

on trends in the media and in funder focus and support. This would cover:

- ? drawing attention to innovative approaches, and to evaluations and impact studies of activities,
- ? preparing network meetings with thematic documents;

? **Organising network meetings**

The topics to be covered should be decided by members of the network. The secretariat would prepare the meetings, draw up and disseminate preparatory papers, develop the meeting programme and organise its logistics.

In addition, if required by members of the network, the secretariat could play the role of “facilitator” in setting up selected joint activities.

¹ See the document “*Terms of reference of the network’s technical secretariat*”. This present document contains the major points of agreement.

12.1 - Human resources and operating costs

The round-table invited GRET to draw up a budget for the operation of a secretariat under its auspices for a period of three years. It was felt that the funders who would be *a priori* susceptible to providing finance would be the Rockefeller Foundation, the French department of cooperation, the Francophone Agency, the World Bank and the Swiss department of cooperation.

The working languages of the network would be French and English.

12.2 - A third meeting in March 1997

The third round-table meeting will cover the following topics:

- the place and role of various media as tools for social communication;
- access to information sources: news agencies, specialised press agencies, role of new information and communication technologies;
- the financial viability of various media.

The Rockefeller Foundation suggested that it might be possible to make its Bellagio meeting facility in Italy available for the network to organise its next meeting, in March 1997. It was necessary to confirm when the facility was actually available, and to ascertain the possibilities of providing simultaneous interpretation.

ANNEX 1

Cooperation for development new issues, new constraints

After thirty years of international cooperation and aid for development, and its series of success of failures, most funders and donor agencies are seriously reviewing their policies. This process is all the more called for given the changes in the overall international context.

The limitations of the statal model of development strategies have become clear. Funds made available for development cooperation are shrinking, and are subject to rigorous control of effectiveness and the need for results. In a very summary way, we can see these major trends:

- the wish of development cooperation programmes to be involved directly with the players in civil society, and no longer solely with the state;
- the wish to involve 'beneficiaries' more closely in the definition of projects, and to move from the logic of a supply-sided model of development cooperation to a logic based on response to demands and to needs;
- the desire to provide greater continuity in those activities which are supported, and to develop a medium-term impact in the programmes developed;
- the desire for greater efficiency, marked by a series of concentrations, on the basis of geography, of coherent, structured programmes rather than aggregates of individual projects, and of broad priority strategies...

COMMON QUESTIONS

We can develop these new approaches by asking the following questions:

- How can we identify genuinely representative organisations in the media sector?
- How can we reconcile maintaining a dialogue with the state and with representatives of the media professions?
- What new models of cooperation and dialogue should we establish to enable partners in the South to genuinely design and implement projects?
- How can we prevent a "needs response" approach falling into the model of shopping lists of demands for materials and training?
- Should we strive for continuity? Every project is mortal, with an end and a beginning. What should be its legacy?
- What criteria should we use to judge when to stop? Are there not countries where the media no longer need external support?
- How can we measure the long-term impact of certain activities: training, enhancing the institutional and financial environment... given that continuity is not always visible?

TOWARDS SOME SOLUTIONS

Some of the ways forward in improving strategies of media support include:

- access, faster, fuller, to information on trends within the sector, enabling on-time approaches and anticipatory responses;
- more analysis of the overall process, so as to identify - and solve - real bottlenecks;
- further refinement of methods and means of monitoring and evaluation, to allow en-route changes;
- strengthening the mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation with partners in the South;
- working on the environment of the media, as well as on the media themselves: the financial, institutional, legal environments; networks for exchange and cooperation, joint activities... The issue of continuity suggests the need to create the most favourable - or the least unfavourable - context for the development and professionalisation of the independent media;
- start to deal seriously with the relationships between the media and their environment, and notably in the triangle of Public-Media-State. For the media to better respond to the needs of the public, they need to have a better understanding of those needs. The state and the media need to improve their relations: this means work on the rules of engagement, reciprocal rights and responsibilities, the flow of information and communication.

NETWORK OF FUNDERS
SUPPORTING MEDIA IN AFRICA

Operating budget for the network's technical secretariat

(per annum, expressed in FFR)
estimate: 28 August 1996

	<u>FFR</u>
1. Activities	340,000
<i>1.1 Providing Information</i>	<i>150,000</i>
Information needs cover:	
? trends in the media sector in Africa	
? activities and programmes of funders	
This information will be collected and disseminated in the form of a fax-letter and directories. In addition, there will be an on-demand customised information service, dealing with specific member requests.	
<i>1.2 Analysis and working documents</i>	<i>80,000</i>
on trends in the media and funder approaches: innovative activities, impact assessment.	
Development of thematic working papers for meetings of the network	
<i>1.3 Organising network meetings</i>	<i>110,000</i>
Identification, support and development of network; preparation, organisation and reporting of meetings.	
Year One: two meetings of funders	
Year Two: one meeting of funders, one meeting of funders with beneficiaries and partners	
2. Operational costs	44,000
<i>2.1 Telecommunications and reproduction</i>	<i>24,000</i>
(international telephone, fax, email, photocopying, mail) estimated at FFR 2,000 per month	
<i>2.2 Travel and subsistence</i>	<i>20,000</i>
3. Translation costs	30,000
Total per year	FFR 414,000
Total over three years (September 1996 - September 1999)	FFR 1,242,000

COMMENTS ON BUDGET

Provision should also be made for (eventual) costs of interpretation at network meetings.

GRET staff:

- secretariat leader - half-time
- secretariat secretary - half time

GRET, as the host organisation, will provide office space and equipment, telecommunications infrastructure and management of the two staff positions.