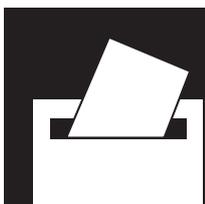# Media Assistance and Elections:

Toward an Integrated Approach

PolicyPaper

May 2015

This paper presents an overview of the main challenges to the integration of media development in electoral assistance programming. Despite widespread acknowledgement that the media is critical to electoral processes, and that it has the potential to impact voter behaviour, electoral assistance providers do not consistently prioritize its integration into their work. International IDEA identifies several obstacles to the integration of media support into international electoral assistance programmes, which can be grouped into three main categories: a lack of clarity regarding the definition and role of the media in the electoral process, the politically sensitive nature of the media and the failure of many organizations to plan projects well in advance of election day.

International IDEA at a glance

What is International IDEA?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

The objectives of the Institute are to support stronger democratic institutions and processes, and more sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy.

What does International IDEA do?

The Institute's work is organized at global, regional and country levels, focusing on the citizen as the driver of change. International IDEA produces comparative knowledge in its key areas of expertise: electoral processes, constitution building, political participation and representation, and democracy and development, as well as on democracy as it relates to gender, diversity, and conflict and security.

IDEA brings this knowledge to national and local actors who are working for democratic reform, and facilitates dialogue in support of democratic change.

In its work, IDEA aims for:

• Increased capacity, legitimacy and credibility of democracy

• More inclusive participation and accountable representation

• More effective and legitimate democracy cooperation

Where does International IDEA work?

International IDEA works worldwide. Based in Stockholm, Sweden, the Institute has offices in the Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West Asia and North Africa regions. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

Contents

Key recommendations

1 Promote empirical research, within both the academic and policy communities, on the media's impact on the electoral process. Such research should advance a theory of change that offers a detailed explanation of the causal pathway from media interventions to specific development and democratization goals.

2 Staffing decisions should take media relations into account. Electoral support project providers and media development organizations should hire social media experts (to help stakeholders develop and maintain a social media presence) and senior media experts who have a deep understanding of the role of the media beyond its use as a public relations (PR) tool.

3 Where people may not have access to electricity or where there is a high rate of illiteracy, non-traditional media formats, such as street theatre, may be the most effective way to reach people.

4 There are certain contexts in which some constraints on the media are necessary, and even useful. Media support in post-conflict environments and/or in divided societies should help ensure that the proper legal safeguards and codes of conduct are in place to guard against hate speech. Support should also focus on strengthening outlets and individuals that are working to be fair and impartial.

5 Election-related assistance projects must be reconfigured to reflect the electoral cycle approach. They should be planned as early as possible, and media components should be long term, based on substantial and detailed contextual analysis.

6 In order to effectively support the media, it is important to enhance coordination between electoral assistance programmes to promote mutual understanding of their priorities, goals and work plans.

Executive summary

The media serve critical roles throughout the electoral process. In addition to promoting public debate and educating citizens, they monitor the integrity of the process and can be a primary vehicle for accountability demands. Social media have made it easier to create, share and consume media stories. Perhaps more than ever before, the media have the potential to significantly impact perceptions and behaviour during elections.

Despite widespread agreement on the media's centrality to the electoral process, electoral assistance providers do not prioritize media development in their work. Without a more consistent, long-term and sustained approach to media development, election assistance providers risk marginalizing the public's primary means through which to voice their views and direct the trajectories of their countries' democratization processes. In the current age of new technologies, a failure to holistically integrate all media into the electoral process could render traditional electoral actors—such as electoral management bodies (EMBs) and international assistance providers—irrelevant in broader discussions.

This report, which is based on desk research and personal interviews, identifies and addresses the main challenges to integrating the media into election assistance. The report's main findings indicate that the primary challenges to the integration of media into international electoral assistance programmes are related to serious ambiguity regarding the definition of media and its place within democratization work, the political sensitivities of host countries, and a lack of advance planning and coordination.

As the discourse around media support develops, it will be important for actors to make more proactive use of the electoral cycle approach and to conceive of media assistance as a long-term engagement. Going forward, it will also be critical to think of the media as one partner in a complex web of election-related stakeholders, each of which uses (and is used by) the media to inform, educate and communicate. Greater collaboration with media development specialists, emerging social media experts and other electoral assistance providers will also help enrich media development programmes by making them more responsive to elections and democratization work.

Introduction

Kenya's much-anticipated national elections of 2013 were the first held since 2007, when post-election interethnic violence ravaged the country and left more than 1,000 people dead and 700,000 displaced. There was so much palpable fear on the ground in the lead-up to the 2013 poll that even the media engaged in a certain degree of self-censorship to avoid inflaming tensions. That was understandable, to a certain extent, because it had been blamed for inciting much of the previous violence.[1]

Too much caution can also be dangerous, of course, because the public may be denied information at a critical time. Veteran journalist, author and expert on East African affairs Michela Wrong (2013) said about the election coverage:

> Western reports have attracted undue interest, I'm convinced, because domestic coverage, while increasingly slick, has been so lifeless. It sometimes feels as though a zombie army has taken up position where Kenya's feisty media used to be, with local reporters going glaze-eyed through the motions.

She was not alone. Kenyan analysts were also concerned. As more and more anomalies and inconsistencies appeared during the counting and tallying process, the media's relative silence was alarming. A prominent Kenyan blogger wrote, 'What maturity is this that trembles at the first sign of disagreement or challenge?... What peace lives in the perpetual shadow of a self-annihilating violence?' (Gathara 2013).

Wrong (2013) went on to note:

> Shortly before handing Uhuru his winner's certificate, the chairman of the election commission congratulated the Kenyan media on their 'exemplary behavior'. As he did, the screen above his head was showing figures that did not add up.

While the EMB praised the media, civil society lambasted it for failing to question, critique and adequately cover the electoral process (Makori 2013).

There is clearly, however, a middle path: a way to ask questions without inciting violence. Indeed, journalists have a responsibility to provide news to the public, perhaps especially so when things seem to have gone amiss. This middle path—based on responsible story framing, fair and impartial reporting, and basic fact checking—is embedded in the concept of media development or support services to bolster the media's professional capacity and promote a free and independent media. As the Kenyan case demonstrates, there is a clear need for election-related media development.

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1 *Perhaps the most prominent example is Joshua Sang, the head of operations at Kass FM radio station in Nairobi, who was indicted by the International Criminal Court on four charges of crimes against humanity for his alleged role in inciting violence in the aftermath of the 2007 election.*

While it is widely recognized that the media are critical to electoral processes around the world and are fundamental cornerstones of democratic societies, electoral assistance providers do not tend to rank media support as a high priority in their work due to a wide range of factors, including short funding cycles and a serious lack of consensus on the media's place in democratization work. Given the rapid growth of social media, which has revolutionized the media landscape, a more systematic, consistent and comprehensive approach to election-related media support is arguably more urgent than ever. After all, the failure to recognize the media as a core component of electoral processes could potentially deny citizens the ability to demand and direct democratic outcomes.

Unfortunately, there is no simple way to effectively integrate the media into electoral assistance. Election assistance practitioners who wish to incorporate the media into their projects must confront a multitude of questions related to the media, most of which remain the subject of intense debate. Where, for instance, does the media fit? Is it a political institution in its own right, with its own separate goals and priorities? If so, how can electoral assistance providers partner with the media to find common aims and work together in support of elections? Or is the media part and parcel of elections and therefore something that should be made a standard part of electoral assistance programmes? If that is the case, what kind of support is required to ensure that the media can fulfil its role throughout the electoral process?

Beyond these issues lies the incredible diversity of the media, which electoral assistance practitioners must also address. What counts as the media? Is social media considered part of the media? How does one decide which media sources to focus on? How should electoral assistance providers deal with national versus local media?

Without answers to these fundamental questions, it is difficult to envision and implement an electoral assistance programme that fully incorporates the media. This paper explores these questions, explains the challenges of media support during elections and presents a set of recommendations to achieve the fuller integration of media support in electoral assistance.

Electoral assistance: an overview

In general, electoral assistance can be defined as:

> [T]he legal, technical and logistic support provided to electoral laws, processes and institutions. It spans a broad spectrum – from the establishment of the legal framework for the administration of elections; inclusive electoral systems and voter registration processes; support to the institutions called to administer and adjudicate upon electoral processes; the provision of financial resources, materials, equipment and expert advice; technical and financial support to civil society engaged in civic and voter education; election observation and media monitoring; to including technical assistance to political parties (Tuccinardi et al. 2007).

Although there have been election assistance projects since the 1960s, they only began in earnest in the 1990s, as a part of the 'third wave' of democratization (Huntington 1991). During this period, it was mainly the dominant Western powers that undertook election assistance, generally as part of their democratization work.[2]

Today, election assistance remains a core component of many countries' democratization programming. The largest and most dominant actors are organizations with global and regional reach, the most prominent examples of which include the United Nations (UN), the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The Organization of American States (OAS) also has a well-developed elections programme. Though they are affiliated with specific countries, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) remain two of the most dominant providers.

There is a range of other actors as well, including state-affiliated and civil society organizations[3] such as the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), established in 1996. It conducts electoral assistance and election observation, working with the African Union, African EMBs, domestic civil society groups and political parties to promote credible elections. There are also many smaller domestic civil society groups around the world that provide a range of election-related services. In fact, many donors now recognize the importance of this sector and have allocated special funding to help these groups in their efforts to improve election administration.

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2 For instance, Australia began its international electoral assistance work with a mission to Namibia in 1989. See <http://www.aec.gov.au/about_aec/AEC_Services/International_Services/Involvement.htm> for more details. Elections Canada began offering assistance in 1980. See <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section= abo&dir=int&document=index&lang=e> for more details. The United States was also active in electoral assistance work during this period. By the mid-1990s, US democracy aid was an accepted part of US foreign aid and foreign policy. See Carothers 1999.

3 Some examples of state-affiliated organizations include the German Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Friedrich Naumann Foundation, as well as the American National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

The field of election assistance has recently diversified to include other regional organizations and EMBs. For instance, in addition to election observation and the provision of expert advisory services, the African Union has initiated a programme to operationalize the most urgent findings of its election observers in various countries (Karume 2014). Likewise, Mexico, India, Brazil and South Korea offer advice on electoral technology and electoral law, and provide capacity-building training to other EMBs (*The Hindu* 2011; India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management 2013; Superior Electoral Court 2013; Association of World Election Bodies 2014).

Together, these organizations and others like them provide a broad range of support to electoral processes around the world. Election assistance work can take place as part of an organization's wider democratization/governance programme, or it can be a separate mission, focusing solely on a particular election. Some electoral assistance projects include components of media support. While the specific focus of such support varies across projects, the main goal is to promote a free and independent media.

Media and elections

At the most fundamental level, the media are channels of communication, serving to relay messages to various audiences. Put simply:

> Freedom is when the people can speak.
> Democracy is when the government listens.
> The media is the messenger (Howard 2004).

Both traditional and new media play critical roles in elections. First, the media serve as watchdogs: they scrutinize the electoral process, analysing how well institutions and electoral actors have performed, and highlight successes and failures to help the public hold them to account. Second, the media act as platforms for campaigns. Candidates and parties use the media to disseminate their plans, promises and visions for the future. Third, the media provide a forum for election-related public debate and discussion. They allow ordinary citizens to be heard, thereby helping them influence political agendas and other voters. Fourth, the media is a public educator. In addition to providing voter education information, journalists offer useful analyses of the news, presenting various interpretations of events and statements. Such analyses help individuals make informed choices of action.

With regard to elections, national and international media play slightly different roles. While the local media can find themselves constrained by risky domestic contexts, international media are often more free to report on the politically sensitive or controversial aspects of elections. Yet international media have been criticized for pushing certain angles or presenting a lopsided view of certain electoral processes (ODI 2014). It is also usually the case that the international media focus on election day rather than the entire electoral cycle.

Until recently, the mass media primarily engaged in 'one-to-many' communication. That is, one author or institution communicates messages to many people at the same time in a relatively impersonal way. Examples of one-to-many mass media are television, radio and newspapers.

The internet and social media have dramatically altered the media landscape, mainly by facilitating many-to-many communication. Unlike traditional media, social media allow for the simultaneous delivery of individualized messages to vast numbers of people. Furthermore, each user has the ability to share, shape and change the content of the information (Crosbie 2002). Within this new media, it is much more difficult to distinguish between producers and consumers, and ordinary people are now empowered to be 'citizen journalists' by breaking news stories and disseminating information. This dynamic has significant implications for elections. For instance, Pew Global (2014) found that 38 per cent of social network users in 22 emerging economies reported sharing their views on politics via social media. Engaging in political talk via social media was found to be particularly popular in Arab countries, where up to 70 per cent of people reported sharing views on community issues and 60 per cent on political issues

through social media. Around the world, people from all walks of life are using social media to express their political views not only among their social circles, but with a view to achieving change at the community and global levels.

Unsurprisingly, traditional media outlets are integrating social media into their work. This trend is somewhat natural, given the mainstream media's longstanding use of interactive features like live programme audiences and talk radio. Today, many media outlets offer multiple avenues for public engagement, including websites with comment sections and social networking sites. This kind of interaction and co-creation of content has changed the face of electoral campaigns, and more broadly has altered the dynamics of the media's function as a political accountability institution.

Media and political participation

There is already a vast body of academic literature examining the relationship between the media and politics. Several studies have explored the role of the media in the development of political knowledge (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Fishkin 1991; Kim, Wyatt and Katz 1999; McLeod, Scheufele and Moy 1999), and one meta-analysis of 90 individual studies found that reading newspapers, watching the news, listening to the radio, etc. has a positive effect on voter turnout (Van Ham and Smets 2012). Consumption of political news can also impact voter preference (Della Vigna and Kaplan 2007), and political debate programmes have been shown to contribute to the public's long-term political engagement (Larkin and Were 2013; United Kingdom International Development Committee 2010; Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Studies have also demonstrated that political debates increase viewers' issue knowledge and issue salience, and influence perceptions of candidates, candidate preference and intention to vote (Benoit, Hansen and Verser 2003; Benoit, Leshner and Chattopadhyay 2007).

The media are critical for ensuring EMB accountability. One study found that independent media provide a 'compensating check on electoral conduct if EMB independence is low' (Birch and Van Ham 2014). The media also check manipulative politicians. Indeed, 'a free press impedes efforts to "brainwash" the electorate' (Birch 2011).

Unfortunately, the large majority of such studies focus on established democracies, and it is difficult to know whether these findings apply to the developing world. There is, however, growing academic interest in exploring case studies from emerging democracies.

Another area that is receiving increasing attention in the world of academia is social media and political participation, especially the relationship between the use of social media and increased public engagement in politics. It is important to recognize at the outset that social media is not a panacea for low levels of civic engagement (Chen and Vromen 2012). In fact, a debate is raging among political scientists and development practitioners over the potential and actual role of social media as a channel for political engagement and a force for democratization (Unwin 2012). For instance, several years after the Arab Spring, scholars are still divided over the extent to which social media was used to drive political mobilization during these events (Dunn and Wilson 2011; Gerring et al. 2014; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). There is, however, one issue on which there is widespread agreement: social media does matter, and it cannot be ignored.

There is also clear evidence to suggest that social media can increase the potential to directly communicate with specific groups within society, including marginalized and disenfranchised sectors. Across the board, women and young people are heavy users of social media. With the right strategies, backed up by a good understanding of these channels and a commitment to dedicating the required resources, civic and political engagement initiatives can effectively target these audiences through social media to create a meaningful conversation and potentially increase political participation (Kaiser 2012).

Electoral assistance and media support

Given its potential to impact voter opinion and behaviour, it is hardly surprising that electoral assistance can (and often does) include support for the media. This support is also called media development, a well-established concept that can be defined in the following way:

> The term 'media development' generally refers to efforts by organizations, people, and sometimes governments to develop the capacity and quality of the media sector within a specific country or region. Many organizations engage in efforts to help the development of free and independent media in countries around the world. These efforts can take many forms, from funding the establishment of an entirely new media outlet to assisting an existing outlet in improving its professional capacity. Common efforts at independent media development include: journalist training and education; improving the legal environment for media; efforts to improve the sustainability of existing outlets; media literacy training; digital media training and integration; infrastructure development; and monitoring and evaluation efforts. [4]

Media development is closely related to media *for* development, but experts disagree over which approach offers the best results. Some support the 'media development' approach, which focuses on skills training. This group believes that fundamental skills—such as objective reporting, story framing and fact checking—are important prerequisites for the ultimate goal: a free and independent press. Others advocate the 'media for development' approach, and argue that journalists should be trained specifically to convey customized and targeted messages on issues like health care, the environment, poverty reduction and good governance. There is clearly a significant overlap between the two approaches, and in fact skills—whether acquired through general or topic-specific training—can always be applied to other areas. Moreover, some of the largest media development organizations, such as BBC Media Action, undertake both kinds of media assistance, implementing specific development-oriented projects that include media capacity building when possible.

Advocates of the 'media development' approach assert that 'media *for* development' is too restrictive because it risks neglecting the development of a long-term base for independent media (CIMA 2008). Moreover, there are some who warn against an overemphasis on elections. Many civil society groups reject the idea that democracy is mostly about the moment of elections, and tend to view projects that focus on elections as negative (Giraud 2014). Beneficiaries welcome much more long-term, holistic, community-based approaches (Giraud 2014).

Related to this debate is the question of where exactly the media fits in the broader world of democracy, governance and elections. Should it be regarded and approached as a separate, stand-alone institution, or should it be seen and treated as part and parcel

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4 http://cima.ned.org/media-development.

of elections programming, in much the same way as voter registration, political party development and electoral technology? The answer is complex and gets to the heart of the problem, for while the media is 'the fourth estate' and therefore a political institution in its own right, it is also a core aspect of, and actor within, the electoral process. It is thus true that it is important to promote a free and independent press through the development of basic journalistic skills, but it is also critical to ensure that journalists are equipped with the specific knowledge and technical know-how to effectively report on elections, which can be politically sensitive.

> But there remains a serious lack of clarity on where media fits…Donors remain unconvinced of either the merit or logic of considering media a sector in its own right. This lack of definition means media has no 'home' within the development system and few entry points within individual donors. Media development organizations face substantial challenges in situating their work within donor strategies and budget lines; for donors a significant challenge lies in a lack of capacity to oversee and understand what their investment in media is achieving (Noble 2011).

Another reason it is difficult to define the media's place is that it plays multiple roles in society. Electoral actors may have their own internal communications teams that are tasked with addressing the media, giving interviews and handling public relations. Yet they must also engage the media in a way that extends beyond public relations.

In the long term, the goal should be to have a highly skilled and independent press corps that has the wherewithal to effectively investigate and analyse a broad variety of issues, including those related to development. For now, however, it may be necessary and practical to strike a balance between media development and media *for* development.

Media and the electoral cycle

Regardless of which approach electoral assistance providers choose to adopt, it is critical to integrate media support projects into the electoral cycle. On a fundamental level, the media is the vehicle through which all actors disseminate information to the public and consume each others' news, and depending on its portrayal of an event, organization or individual, the media can make or break reputations.

Unfortunately, the media are sometimes seen as little more than a PR tool. International electoral assistance providers in some parts of the developing world have a 'real lack of understanding' of media development, and view media development organizations as little more than 'contractors' that can help with public relations. Some such organizations have 'little interest in engaging in discussions about building trust at the local level and the potential to impact development outcomes' (Friguglietti 2014).

On a secondary level, however, media work extends far beyond the realm of PR. The media are promoters of accountability in and of themselves. Precisely because they are connected to other stakeholders, who use them to disseminate messages, the media have the power and connections to hold those stakeholders accountable. As Figure 1 shows, the media are at the centre of a wide range of interconnected actors. Therefore, it is critical for election assistance programmes to incorporate the media into all aspects of their work and throughout the electoral cycle.

The electoral cycle planning tool was designed by International IDEA, the European Commission (EC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to help development agencies, electoral assistance providers and election officials understand the cyclical nature of elections. The cycle (see Table 1) can be broadly divided into three phases: pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral. There are activities associated with each phase, but there are no fixed starting or ending points and the phases may overlap.
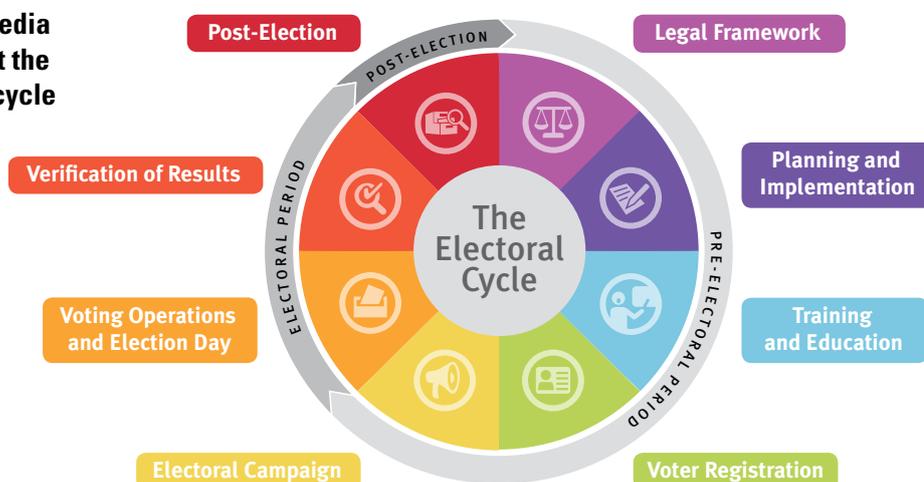
> Elections are composed of a number of integrated building blocks, with different stakeholders interacting and influencing each other. Electoral components and stakeholders do not stand alone. They are inter-dependent, and therefore the breakdown of one aspect (for example the collapse of a particular system of voter registration) can negatively impact on any other, including on the credibility of the election itself, and thus on the legitimacy of the elected government and the democratisation process of a partner country and its overall development objectives (Tuccinardi et al 2007).

The electoral cycle planning tool is meant to facilitate stakeholders' planning of electoral assistance by pushing them to think five to ten years ahead. Instead of planning activities by reacting to events, the electoral cycle reminds actors that 'every time a decision to support an electoral process is made, such a decision entails an overarching involvement and commitment to the democratic evolution of the concerned country far beyond the immediate event to be supported' (Tuccinardi et al. 2007).

After the development of the electoral cycle tool, numerous development agencies quickly engaged with it. In 2006, the EC and UNDP endorsed it for all joint electoral assistance projects, and a number of bilateral donors have formally (and informally) adopted the approach over the past decade. USAID has, for example, trained democracy and governance officers in the electoral cycle approach from the time the tool was initially developed. DFID recently included a commitment to the electoral cycle approach in its strategic guidance on electoral assistance (DFID and Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2010).

A close examination of the electoral cycle reveals the media's clear and distinct roles. Table 1 provides examples of various media-related activities during the electoral cycle.

Table 1: Media throughout the electoral cycle

The Electoral Cycle

- POST-ELECTION
- ELECTORAL PERIOD
- PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD

Legal Framework · Planning and Implementation · Training and Education · Voter Registration · Electoral Campaign · Voting Operations and Election Day · Verification of Results · Post-Election

Legal Framework

Review electoral law and codes of conduct relating to media

Raise potential problems/issues with electoral law

Planning and Implementation

Generate inclusive and critical political dialogue throughout the electoral cycle

Ensure availability of analysis and political content in non-majority languages

Build relationships with key stakeholders

Training and Education

Explain electoral legislation, rights and duties to voters

Inform and engage voters on the campaign and election day

Be transparent about media ownership and political relationships

Voter Registration

Investigate and report irregularities in voter registration

Ensure that journalists and the public understand rules regarding voter registration

Electoral Campaign

Cover rural issues and events

Ensure that due weight is given to the views and policies of all parties/candidates

Assess and report public opinion and response to campaigns and policies

Put safety measures in place to support journalists

Provide the right of reply to criticism

Ensure fair and impartial coverage of elections in other countries

Accredit campaign journalists

Report and analyse the election campaign

Exercise caution in reporting opinion polls and survey results

Investigate candidates and electoral boundaries

Clearly distinguish political broadcasts and advertising from editorial output

Develop guidelines on use of personal social media by employees

Keep civil society informed about civil society initiatives

Set up and report about candidate debates

Reflect cultural and political diversity in electoral coverage

Establish a specialist Elections Unit

Put in place a procedure for complaints about media coverage

Monitor own electoral coverage

Voting Operations and Election Day

Carry out exit poll with caution

Monitor and report during election day

Scrutinize and report on the administration of the election

Verification of Results

Investigate and report electoral irregularities and fraud

Report and analyse election results

Properly contextualize exit polls and indicative/claimed results

Provide comprehensive coverage of election results and implications

Post-Election

Carry out internal post-election analysis

Hold politicians accountable to their electoral promises

Report on possible electoral reforms

Understand and observe parliamentary rules on reporting

Participate in media code of conduct revisions or development

Scrutinize and report on policy implementation and real-life impact

Source: International IDEA, The Electoral Cycle, available at ‹http://ecycle.idea.int›

Clearly, it is important to keep the media in mind throughout election assistance programming. The proactive integration of media support into the electoral cycle also shows how electoral stakeholders are interconnected; i.e., the media do not act in isolation. Figure 1 clearly shows that the media interact with many partners throughout the electoral cycle. Indeed, it is just one of many relevant actors in the field.

Figure 1: The centrality of the media
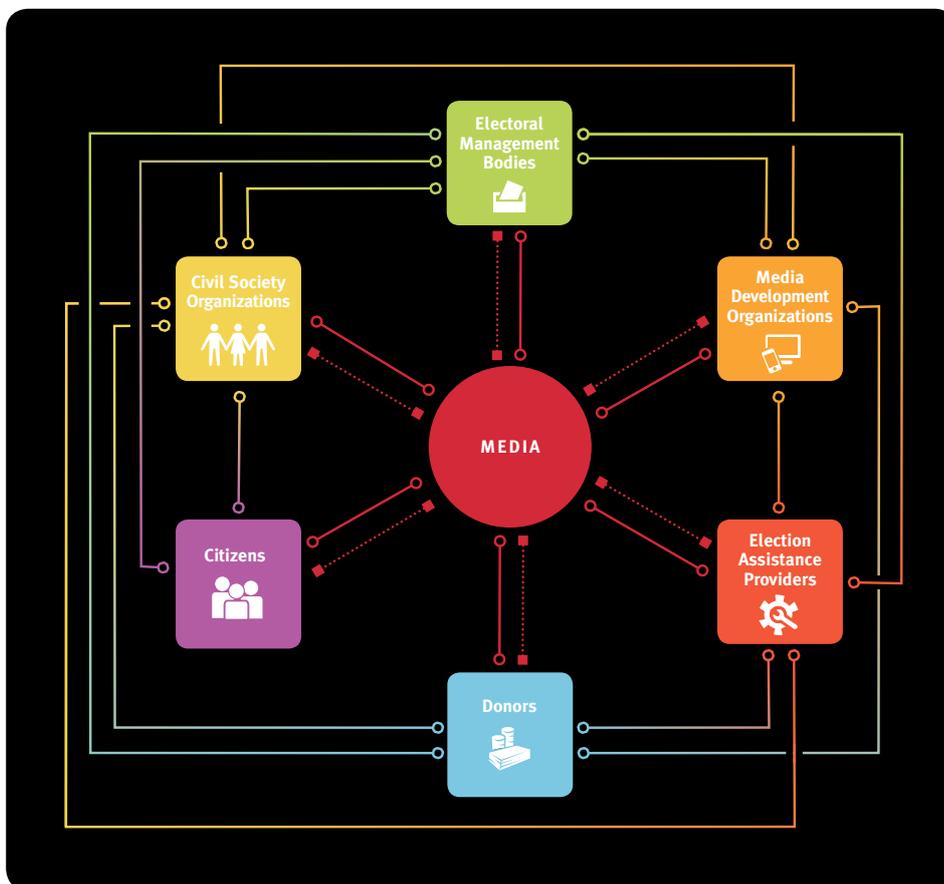
Dashed line indicates the use of media for purposes of public relations (one-way communication). Solid line indicates a two-way, interactive relationship between stakeholders.

Electoral assistance and media support: a challenging relationship

As a result of the ambiguity regarding the media's place in democratization and development paradigms, media support is not consistently integrated into elections work. Where it does occur, it tends to be characterized by several problems, which can be grouped into the following categories:

• lack of clarity regarding what is considered to be part of the media and where the media fits within democratization work;
• political sensitivities of host countries or EMBs; and
• logistical challenges related to advance planning and coordination with partners on the ground.

The following section looks at the specific challenges that fall into each of the above categories.

The need for greater understanding regarding the definition of media and its relationship to democratization

The four main challenges related to the definition and role of the media are:

• understanding the diversity of the media and managing its integration into democratization work;
• integrating social media into electoral assistance;
• identifying experts to carry out media support work; and
• remembering the importance of non-traditional media.

Understanding the diversity of media and managing its integration into democratization work

On a practical level, the lack of clarity regarding what is (and is not) considered to be the media means that there is little consistency with regard to how electoral assistance providers understand and approach media support. The media landscape is fragmented and diverse, encompassing many different types of messages, modes of communication and providers. The growth of the internet and social media further complicates the terrain, blurring the lines between producers and consumers and rapidly expanding the channels through which to communicate. It is thus difficult to support all media in any given context, and it is challenging to decide how and where to focus resources and attention.

At the same time, there is some merit to maintaining diversity within the field. Multiple viewpoints are useful, and those who work on media-related issues in the non-governmental organization (NGO) world bring important 'questioning and passionate indignation' to the field (Dahlman 2014). The challenge, then, is for electoral support providers to embrace the broad array of media sources in a way that allows for flexibility and change. Currently, the approach tends to be haphazard.

While most practitioners perceive the media as a separate institution, to be dealt with largely by a dedicated cadre of specialists, they still undertake some media support

programming on their own. EISA, for instance, supported the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission (ZEC) in the development of a media strategy for the country's 2013 election. The strategy involved the ZEC convening regular consultative meetings with members of the media, including a separate meeting with editors and senior staff, assisting with the development of a code of conduct and generally facilitating relations with the media. However, EISA does not conduct media monitoring, which it regards as outside its mandate (Tip 2014). Similarly, while UNDP programmes often help EMBs develop a communication strategy and facilitate good relations with the media, or even provide some elections training for journalists, the main objective of an electoral project may not be media development *per se* (Ferreyra 2014).

Indeed, activities such as monitoring the media for hate speech and equal airtime for all parties tend to be done by electoral observers rather than electoral assistance providers. This division of labour might be due to the fact that media monitoring involves a judgement about fairness and is therefore beyond the scope of traditional electoral assistance. At the same time, however, media-monitoring experts emphasize the problems with what is sometimes seen as a relatively superficial level of monitoring undertaken by observers. Monitoring is too often little more than a 'tick box exercise', and there is a lack of understanding of the 'real point' of monitoring (Bird 2014). Some reports therefore lack new and relevant information, and often do not focus on identifying what citizens do not know and what they need to know, and they do not 'unpack' that information to help citizens make sense of it (Bird 2014).

There are guidelines to assist observers in unpacking such issues. For instance, International IDEA and UN Women published *Election Coverage from a Gender Perspective: A Media Monitoring Manual*, which identifies the differences and inequalities in the media's treatment of male and female candidates, as well as the importance assigned to gender equality issues relative to others debated in campaigns. However, it is unclear to what extent such guidelines are used.

The lack of clarity regarding whose responsibility it is to develop the media also leads to the perception that there are already too many actors out there. Electoral assistance providers sometimes do not take on media support work in order to avoid duplicating the work of NGOs, which are often funded by donors to perform such work (De Bard 2014).

Without agreement on what media development does and does not include, as well as a map of providers, it is difficult to ensure that adequate media support is provided throughout the electoral process.

Integrating social media into electoral assistance

Related to the lack of consensus on what counts as 'media' is the challenge of social media. Electoral assistance providers are struggling to keep up with the ways in which social media and new technologies have altered the media landscape, due in part to the rapidity of change and a lack of expertise in the field (Noble 2011). Such difficulties are often compounded by poor advance planning of media support projects.

Without a doubt, social media has dramatically altered the media landscape around the world. With the click of a button, ordinary citizens now have the power to break news stories, share articles, videos and photos, and comment on others' posts.

> Increasingly the balance of power is shifting in favour of citizens. Underpinning this shift is people's ability to communicate with large audiences at minimal cost, interact directly with decision-makers, build social movements rapidly and globally, inform and shape news agendas—all through media and social networks (Noble 2011).

These changes have serious implications for journalists and traditional media outlets. The ability to reach millions in less than a second has shifted people's expectations. Waiting for the evening news to hear about the day's events is no longer necessary, as it is now easy to keep tabs on events almost as they happen. For traditional journalists who want to remain relevant, it is thus imperative to be active on social media.

Social media is also changing elections. Political parties and candidates are using it to reach out to constituents, mobilize supporters and raise funds. Voters also use social media to talk to candidates and to each other about election-related issues, and to get involved in campaigns. In what appears to be a growing phenomenon, civil society groups and citizens are using social media to monitor elections, checking officially announced results against tallying forms (140journos.com; Bland 2014). Recently, EMBs have used social media to facilitate voter registration, help voters find the location of polling stations and follow election results. Some EMBs are also using it to engage voters in new and creative ways, such as through online games and music videos (Electoral Commission of South Africa 2014).

Of course, in much the same way as traditional media, social media is always at risk of being abused by those who aim to disrupt the electoral process. As has been widely documented, the 2007–08 post-election violence in Kenya was largely organized by and facilitated through text messages. During the 2014 Afghan election, supporters of rival candidates used Facebook and Twitter to spread divisive messages, many of which had religious and ethnic undertones (Bezhan 2014).

Such changes have significant implications for electoral assistance providers, who must expand their conceptions of the media to include social media. Assistance programmes will also have to change to respond to practitioners' new needs. Thus far, attention to social media has been inconsistent (De Bard 2014). Organizations such as the African Union have yet to fully integrate it into their missions (Karume 2014), while the OAS has thus far concentrated more on the phenomenon of electronic voting than social media (OAS 2014). On the other hand, USAID has moved to integrate social media into its election assistance work. In Rwanda, for example, USAID's Media and Elections programme aims to build the capacity and confidence of the local media around election and political reporting, with specific attention to 'citizen journalists' and the role of innovative technology (USAID 2014).

Given the inherent risks related to social media, this inconsistency is at least partially understandable. Even organizations and individuals specializing in social media are unable to predict what will work on social media platforms. Given the level of up-front resource commitment, with no guarantee of even some level of success, it also represents a serious consideration for donors investing in development assistance using taxpayer funds. While the appeal of technological innovation is significant, it must be balanced with resource considerations and significant uncertainty in relation to potential impact.

Without greater awareness and integration of social media into election assistance programming, it will be difficult to stay ahead of developments that have the potential to significantly transform the scene.

Identifying experts to carry out media support work

It is becoming increasingly common for organizations with limited expertise in media development to carry out media support activities. In a bid to offer a comprehensive and complete service to donors, many for-profit development organizations, as well as electoral assistance NGOs, offer media-specific analysis and election reporting training. While these services are sometimes provided through partnerships with specialized media development organizations, they are increasingly provided by consultants.

In some cases, it is more cost effective and efficient to rely on consultants. For example, EMBs that require specialized strategic communication assistance might benefit the most from an expert who can be embedded in their own teams. For more substantial projects, however, it is unsustainable over the long term to rely too much on consultants. Organizations without specialized in-house media capacity are unlikely to build any institutional learning or practice through these kinds of engagements. Media development organizations were found to be the most able to offer journalism training in a number of African countries (Schiffrin 2012).

Remembering the importance of non-traditional media

Furthermore, the media's inherent diversity can sometimes make it difficult to keep up with, and be aware of, the many non-traditional programming options available for election-related purposes. Indeed, electoral support organizations rarely exploit the creative power of the media, which is exactly what allows it to connect to a vast array of audiences.

Given the paucity of research on the impact of non-traditional media, such as street theatre, on electoral and political engagement, it is difficult to conclusively determine the nature of the relationship. The extant literature is mixed. While there is some evidence to suggest that 'politically relevant entertainment media can affect citizens' attitudes, opinions, knowledge and behaviour in much the same way as traditional news and public affairs broadcasting has been found to do', it is important to note that the influence of entertainment media is highly dependent on socio-political contexts and a host of demographic, attitudinal and behavioural characteristics (Semetko and

Scammell 2012). Creative formats such as drama serials may be particularly effective in addressing social norms and, in the context of electoral support, norms such as the role and fair representation of women in politics.[5]

Political sensitivities of host countries or EMBs

The next set of challenges relates to the realities of working in a field that is highly politicized. Electoral assistance providers' work can be restricted for a number of reasons, including funding limitations, donor priorities and political sensitivities. Navigating within these boundaries can be difficult. The three primary challenges for electoral assistance providers related to political sensitivities are:

- navigating the relationship between electoral assistance providers and EMBs;
- requiring an invitation to operate in some countries; and
- remembering that not all media are inherently 'good'.

The relationship between electoral assistance providers and EMBs

Many electoral assistance providers set their work plans and determine their priorities based on their primary partner, which is often the EMB. Viewing elections solely through the eyes of the EMB means that the media's role will be fairly strictly defined, and will not necessarily account for the needs of voters and other stakeholders.

EISA's involvement with the ZEC centred on helping it reach out to the media (Tip 2014). Such projects stand in stark contrast to those that take citizens as the starting point. For example, Media Monitoring Africa's elections programme focuses on how citizen oriented the media are. According to Media Monitoring Africa, one issue that is deeply problematic in South Africa is that the media simply present the facts, whereas they should also assess the quality and kind of information provided to the public, and provide analysis to help citizens understand the implications of the facts presented (Bird 2014).

The constraints that come with invitations

Many electoral assistance providers only implement programmes in countries in which they have been invited to do so (Tip 2014; De Bard 2014). One possible result is that such invitations limit programming, in the sense that these organizations must be careful not to offend governments that have invited them. This consideration, in combination with the inherently political nature of the media, makes media support a potentially sensitive activity. The lack of a more complete integration of media support into electoral assistance work is at least partially explained by this environment.

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5 *Two examples of relatively successful non-traditional projects are Makutano Junction, a Kenyan (with further reach) television drama supported by the NGO Mediae and Story Story, a Nigerian radio drama supported by BBC Media Action. These shows wove civic education messages into existing storylines and narratives.*

Indeed, around the world, trends indicate that media organizations are owned and controlled by an increasingly smaller number of individuals. One study found that only 4 per cent of media enterprises are widely held, while only 2 per cent are employee owned. On average, the state controls approximately 29 per cent of newspapers, 60 per cent of television stations and 72 per cent of the top radio stations.

> This result is consistent with the insight that the large amenity potential of ownership of media outlets creates competitive pressures toward ownership concentration. In a sense, both governments and controlling private shareholders get the same benefit from controlling media outlets: the ability to influence public opinion and the political process (Djankov et al. 2003).

In fact, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' report on the 2012 Russian election stated that the Russian broadcast media failed to provide balanced coverage of election contestants, and that news reports and analytical programmes often portrayed daily events in a partial manner. The report also noted several instances in which critical comments about the authorities were cut from talk shows and one instance in which a programme was cancelled (OSCE/ODIHR 2012).

According to the Media Map Project, a joint World Bank Institute and Internews initiative, 'even independently funded media is seen as purely oppositional and biased against the power structure. Leaders of weak regimes and fragile states argue that allowing dissent in the media makes things worse' (Nelson and Susman-Peña 2012).

These challenges have significant implications for the extent to which donors, national governments, and media support and electoral assistance organizations are incentivized and prepared to collaborate. As has been pointed out by several commentators, 'the tendency of governments to view media development in the context of national interests—political, economic, and security objectives—has so raised the stakes of collaboration that the political risk of alignment with the efforts of others is often seen as outweighing the benefits' (Dean 2013). As a result, more straightforward and technically focused media support, such as monitoring and journalism training, is more likely to be considered a feasible mode of support within basket-funded electoral assistance programmes, while longer-term and more targeted support (to particular media organizations, for example) tends to remain outside of these programmes and is managed and funded bilaterally.

All media are not inherently 'good'

Election-related media support tends to approach the media as an indisputably beneficial and positive institution. This approach, which does not take into account the nuances of certain contexts—especially post-conflict situations—can be dangerous and short sighted.

> The trouble is that media isn't a guaranteed good. This is the whole big conundrum when it comes to assistance. It's not like water or education or even voting. You can't say that more media always makes things better, but you can say that more education, more water, more voting is good (Myers 2014).

The privatization of the media may not always be positive; there may be cases in which state or public involvement in the media can be a necessary and constructive force. In fact, state regulation of the media can be useful in order to minimize the potential for divisive violent conflict (Putzel and van der Zwan 2006).

> Mechanisms to map the implications of rapid media and communication changes for electoral outcomes are sparse and primitive. Diagnostic systems that can assess whether electoral or media support strategies are sufficient to minimize the risk of media being captured or co-opted to foster violence, or to maximize their role in informing public debate and reinforcing scrutiny and accountability of electoral and democratic processes are insufficiently developed (International IDEA and BBC World Service Trust).

Media support during elections must be developed within the political context of particular societies. In some post-conflict countries, for example, there are strong arguments in favour of some constraints on the media. '[Constraints] should protect information flows from being excessively manipulated for cynical political purposes by powerful government officials, and should constrain hate speech. Such protection should be instituted in laws…' (Putzel and van der Zwan 2006). Election-related media support in such cases might focus much more on monitoring and identifying biased media outlets, and supporting and bolstering the work of those that are working to produce fair and impartial coverage (Myers 2014).

Advance planning, partnerships and logistical challenges

A final set of challenges revolves around planning and logistics. The three main challenges in this category are:

- Media support is rarely planned in advance.
- There is little coordination between electoral assistance providers.
- There is little coordination between electoral support and media support organizations.

Media support is rarely planned in advance

All too often, media support is an afterthought. Donor funding of media support is often haphazard, and there is little systematic sense of how to use or develop media in the electoral context (Myers 2014). 'Media support interventions tend to be conceived and implemented late in the electoral cycle, and systematic approaches to understanding and supporting the role of media around elections are rare' (International IDEA and BBC World Service Trust 2010).

One consequence of such poor planning is the proliferation of short-term activities that may have limited impact and sustainability (De Bard 2014). For example, the short-term training of journalists has for many years been one of the mainstays of

election-related media assistance. These courses have tended to be short (often conducted in a matter of days) and have aimed to engage a large number of individual journalists working for a wide range of organizations. Many of them have been funded locally, through embassies, and have been seen as a cost-effective and relatively high-profile means of engaging with the media. Additionally, this approach to journalism training has often been included as a key component of media support within electoral support programmes managed by the UNDP or the EC. While other elements of electoral assistance have increasingly recognized the limitations of short-term, event-driven support for elections, the practice of short courses in election reporting has persisted.

Despite having played a key role in electoral assistance for a number of decades, little rigorous research has been conducted on the impact of short-term journalism training. One notable study argues that 'short-term training for journalists just before election day has mostly been discounted as ineffective' (Armao 2012). Over time, there has been a shift away from these kinds of interventions due to a recognition that training should ideally be delivered on site (i.e., within media outlets), with smaller groups and over longer periods. It should also engage media owners, managers and editors (Armao 2012). A recent external evaluation of Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation-funded media development in South Sudan, including components focused on electoral reporting and the provision of information, advised that 'short term ad hoc trainings of journalists should be avoided, while journalists' strategic long term development should be invested in' (Oscar 2013).

The vast majority of other impact evaluations undertaken on this kind of intervention consider outputs in terms of the number of journalists (and sometimes outlets) trained, the number of hours of training delivered, and, at best, the impact of the training on individual journalists' skills and output (i.e., their reporting) (Schiffrin 2014). Furthermore, most impact evaluation is undertaken by the implementing organizations, which have an implicit interest in demonstrating a positive impact in order to bolster their track record and reputation, and to maximize new business opportunities in this area.

Given the reliance of electoral and media assistance organizations on project funding, these opportunities will continue to be taken up if offered. Some organizations take them on knowing that the impact will inevitably be limited, but that limited impact and engagement is better than none. Others embark on short-term projects as a means of securing a modest grant, particularly where their experience and existing resources mean that the management and delivery of the training will be easily achievable. Larger and more established media support organizations are likely to ignore calls for the provision of short courses, either due to an organizational policy not to undertake such work (based on their limited potential for impact) and/or the expectation that administrative and management costs outweigh the financial and reputational benefits.

Such approaches belie a narrow conception of the media as little more than a tool. In order to fully benefit from the media, however, it is necessary to approach it as an end in itself, and one that is a natural partner in electoral assistance programmes.

Media is not just a tool to be used by democratic governance actors—it remains a powerful force for accountability in its own right. Its effectiveness is substantially rooted in the power of public discourse at scale. The importance of media as an accountability mechanism increases in line with enhanced media and communications penetration and improved access to information (Noble 2011).

A second consequence of poor advance planning is the relative failure of electoral assistance providers to consistently use the electoral cycle approach, which means that media support tends to be concentrated around election-day-related activities. A failure to integrate the media into the entire electoral cycle makes it challenging to link media development to broader long-term governance goals. The media consistently and explicitly link electoral accountability to wider political accountability both throughout and well beyond the electoral period. High-quality political reporting puts elections into context, referencing both past performance and future promises and analysing their implications for ordinary people. While there is significant potential for the electoral cycle approach to be effectively applied to election-related media assistance, it is rarely used.

The media development organizations surveyed for this paper reported little or no organizational awareness and/or knowledge of the electoral cycle approach as such, but several asserted that its underlying principles are well understood.

Little coordination between electoral assistance providers

There is generally little coordination between electoral assistance providers, and insufficient cooperation with local stakeholders. As a result, projects run the risk of either duplicating work or failing to address all the extant needs. Moreover, providing media support without buy-in from local stakeholders is dangerous, because it limits the long-term sustainability of the project, as well as the scale of the impact.

Media assistance is often initiated by international donors without close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders in developing countries. However, development experience shows that development effectiveness depends on domestic ownership. At this point, donors often fail to engage in coalition-building with national government and relevant non-governmental actors to support media development (World Bank COMMGAP and BBC World Service Trust 2011).

To a certain extent, it is only natural that different organizations will have their own approaches to project design and implementation. After receiving a request for assistance from a host nation, the UN Department of Political Affairs Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD) uses the results of a needs assessment mission (NAM) to make recommendations regarding the strategic direction of a support programme. While the media is often one of several aspects considered in this analysis, whether the

programme includes a media support component depends on several factors, including the assistance requested by the national counterparts, the role and state of the media in the country, and the assistance provided by other development partners (Ferreyra 2014).

This system leads to substantially different in-country approaches. In Afghanistan, for example, a UNEAD NAM carried out during the transition from the first phase of an electoral support project called Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (which contained a media support component) to the second phase recommended that media strengthening not be included in the second phase, and that this area of work would be more sensibly undertaken through bilateral arrangements. A substantial programme of media assistance is now being managed by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, an electoral support organization. By contrast, UNDP electoral support programmes in Cambodia and Nigeria include a substantive focus on media support over the course of at least one electoral cycle. In Cambodia, media assistance is being delivered by specialized organizations, including the Australia Broadcasting Corporation International Development and BBC Media Action. In Guinea, the electoral support programme leading up to the 2012 elections lacked clarity on the media support component. A lack of coordination between media support and electoral support organizations and the EMB resulted in unclear remits, and a failure to adequately address the EMB's lack of media and communications capacity (Myers and Nkurunziza 2014).

Little coordination between electoral support and media support organizations

Clearly, the lack of such collaboration seriously impedes the development and delivery of effective media support during elections. Most respondents surveyed for this paper reported that they had collaborated with electoral assistance organizations at some point, but that this collaboration occurred either rarely or occasionally, and always on an ad hoc basis (Noble 2014). Interviews with experts representing electoral support organizations confirmed this finding (Ruthrauff 2014; Stevens 2014).

A review of the long-term impact of UNDP electoral assistance noted that: 'Where development partners and assistance providers have established media development strategies and programmes, the strategic linkages to electoral assistance have so far been weak. Mechanisms for lesson learning from these programmes are also very limited and the coordination of media support around elections could be improved' (Guerin 2012). Representatives of organizations that focus on building democracy, supporting elections and strengthening media interviewed for this paper confirmed that there is occasional, infrequent, ad hoc collaboration between the two fields on specific projects (Nelson 2014; Rasmussen 2014; Ruthrauff 2014; Menaker 2014).

There appears to be some desire to address this deficiency, and clear acknowledgement of the usefulness of increased networking and possibly institutional partnerships. The key—and as yet unmet—challenge over the past five years has been translating this desire into concrete actions. In part, these efforts need to be driven by (and within)

democracy/electoral support and media support organizations. But donors also have a key role to play in recognizing the importance of media and communications within policies and strategies on democracy building and electoral support. Donors should stipulate the expectation (or even requirement) for closer collaboration between these communities in their funding mechanisms/instruments and programme designs. A combination of these two approaches is likely to yield better results than increased cooperation driven by either donors or NGOs.

This type of collaboration will help educate election assistance providers and media support providers about each other's specific roles and goals, and make it easier to integrate media support into election assistance in the long term.

Recommendations

The ambiguous definition of media

1. Promote empirical research, within both the academic and policy communities, on the media's impact on the electoral process. Such research should advance a theory of change that offers a detailed explanation of the causal pathway from media interventions to specific development and democratization goals. The research should also include an explicit discussion of the assumptions used to explain such change processes, and the specific building blocks necessary to achieve clearly stated goals. Such studies will help demonstrate the impact of the media, and will help identify which areas are most in need of support. While these studies can—and should, to some degree—involve the practitioners who are carrying out the work, they should remain outside the realm of traditional evaluations, which can be biased by a perceived need to prove the effectiveness of a particular project or intervention.

2. Staffing decisions should take media relations into account. Electoral support project providers and media development organizations should hire social media experts (to help stakeholders develop and maintain a social media presence) and senior media experts who have a deep understanding of the role of the media beyond its use as a PR tool. These organizations need to be able to track trends, identify potentially dangerous or inflammatory commentary, and navigate and use social media with ease. Given the 24/7 nature of social media, it is important to have at least one full-time expert committed to it. Senior media experts should be able to liaise with media institutions and media support groups, both locally and internationally, and should have enough experience in democratization and governance work to understand the electoral cycle and the relationship between the media and development.

3. Remember that the media is incredibly diverse, and traditional media are not always the most effective communicators. In some contexts, where people lack access to electricity or have a high rate of illiteracy, for instance, drama may be the most effective way to reach people.

The politically sensitive nature of media assistance

4. Keep in mind that the media can have many faces, and there are certain contexts in which some constraints on the media are necessary and even useful. There can be a risk of hate speech, especially in post-conflict states and divided societies. Media support in these contexts should include work related to ensuring that the proper legal safeguards and codes of conduct are in place to guard against it. Support should also focus on strengthening outlets and individuals that are working to be fair and impartial.

Logistical challenges

5. Election-related assistance projects must be reconfigured to reflect the electoral cycle approach. They should be planned as early as possible, and media components should be long term, based on substantial and detailed contextual analysis. Since many election assistance programmes are short term in nature, it is necessary for these programmes to collaborate with local or international media development organizations on the ground. Such collaboration will also help ensure that media support is sustainable and integrated throughout the electoral cycle.

6. Enhance coordination between electoral assistance programmes. Where there are multiple electoral assistance projects on the ground, it would be helpful for these programmes to communicate about their individual priorities, goals and work plans to minimize the risk of duplicating work and to support as many sectors as possible, including the media.

Conclusion

Despite widespread acknowledgement that the media is critical to electoral processes and that it has the potential to impact voter behavior, electoral assistance providers do not consistently prioritize the integration of the media into their work. Some hesitation is due to uncertainty about where exactly the media fits in democratization broadly and electoral assistance specifically. Experts continue to debate what media development should look like, and who should carry it out. Weak integration is also the result of poor advance planning, which is linked to short funding cycles and results in limited collaboration with partners on the ground. There is also the challenge of the inherently political nature of the media, which makes donors reluctant to fund certain media projects and can restrict the type of work that can be done.

The media landscape is rapidly evolving. As new media sources on the internet and innovative social media applications emerge on a regular basis, and as electoral actors increasingly use these tools for a wide variety of purposes, electoral assistance providers must stay ahead of the curve. Otherwise, they risk losing perspective on the new reality of communication and falling behind important developments that can impact all phases of the electoral cycle.

The integration of election-related media assistance with the electoral cycle approach remains a work in progress. Going forward, however, some clear actions can be taken to improve how electoral assistance providers approach and integrate the media into their projects.

As the discourse around media support develops, it will be important for actors to more proactively use the electoral cycle approach and to conceive of media assistance as a long-term engagement. It will also be critical to think of the media as one partner in a complex web of election-related stakeholders, each of which uses (and is used by) the media to inform, educate and communicate. Greater collaboration with media development specialists, social media gurus and other electoral assistance providers will also help enrich media development programmes, making them more responsive to elections and democratization work.

Acronyms and abbreviations

DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EC	European Commission
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMB	electoral management body
NAM	needs-assessment mission
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PR	public relations
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEAD	United Nations Electoral Assistance Division
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZEC	Zimbabwean Electoral Commission

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Acknowledgements

Case studies

Case study 1:
Targeting youth through multimedia in Cambodia

One of the legacies of the Khmer Rouge's rule is that more than half of Cambodia's population (52.1 per cent) is under the age of 25; the median age in 2014 was estimated to be 24.1 years (CIA World Factbook). Although they comprise a majority of the electorate, youth are poorly represented in politics and public life (Cambodian Development Research Institute 2009). These youth tend to exhibit high levels of deference to authority and relatively high levels of political apathy (Cambodian National Institute of Statistics 2011; Kim Eng 2005; McKinley and Noble 2012; Roberts 2011; World Bank 2015), which is likely due in part to a lack of information on civic engagement and electoral processes (Sherpe 2013).

Low rates of political participation are unsurprising. Decades of civil war and years of political repression by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) have severely limited the space for public expression (Sherpe 2013). Following the UN-led transition in the 1990s, dwindling donor funding—combined with increasing government control—greatly curtailed the independence of the Cambodian media. Most media outlets are owned by the state or by elites with strong political affiliations, and thus are regarded primarily as a political asset rather than a business or industry (McKinley and Noble 2012; Roberts 2011).

In this context, and recognizing the dearth of youth political participation as a key obstacle to democracy development in Cambodia, the UNDP launched its Strengthening Democratic Governance Programme in 2011. The programme runs through 2015 with a budget of USD 15.9 million. One of the programme's primary objectives is: 'strengthening civil society, media and political parties as conduits for citizens' participation in democratic processes and decision making' (UNDP Cambodia). One of the key components of the programme is the Multimedia Initiative for Youth Civic Education in Cambodia, implemented by BBC Media Action under the brand Loy9 (loosely translated as "well done" (Phnom Penh Post 2012).

Loy9 is a multi-platform project that aims to build civic knowledge and participation among Cambodians aged 15–24. The Loy9 brand incorporates a television magazine programme, a television drama, a radio phone-in programme, public service announcements, several websites, apps, and live games and events. All outputs focus on civic engagement, and key themes and learning outcomes are incorporated across different platforms and programmes to reinforce learning and maximize audience engagement with key issues. Outputs target youth, who are heavy media consumers (though new media access is heavily skewed toward urban youth). The project spanned both commune council and parliamentary elections (in 2012 and 2013, respectively). It engaged in voter education by producing and broadcasting public service announcements leading up to the elections and incorporating election-related information into other programme outputs.

This very creative project has involved some particularly innovative initiatives, including training young media professionals on infographics to help youth more easily visualize

and understand political institutions and processes. Issues related to civic engagement are brought to life through Loy9's weekly drama, which features a cast of young Cambodians from a variety of backgrounds. The drama aims not only to increase knowledge among audiences, but also to role model confidence and teamwork. The project has shown how creative approaches to civic engagement can improve the potential for democratic engagement, particularly among difficult-to-engage young audiences.

More than 2 million young people have watched or listened to Loy9, regarded by some commentators as a 'remarkable success' in a country with a total population of approximately 15.4 million, where only one-third of young people are online (Spadacini 2013). According to an 18-year-old student from Kampot, '[Loy9] changed my view on whether or not we should speak out [about] what is on [in] our minds. In the past, I thought we should not speak it out. Now I think we should speak…out because others can help us' (BBC Media Action 2012). Audience research shows that the issues of voting and elections are particularly impactful. Of those who were able to recall Loy9's content on this topic, 98 per cent said it had helped improve their understanding of the topic (BBC Media Action 2014b: 5).

Loy9 programming was accompanied by a substantial research effort; BBC Media Action commissioned a Knowledge Attitudes and Practice survey to understand the reach and impact of the Loy9 project. Key findings include high levels of access among 15–24 year olds to both traditional media (with 92 per cent of young people consuming both radio and television daily) and the internet (with around one-third accessing the internet daily), and near-universal access to mobile phones (96 per cent) (BBC Media Action 2014a). Most young people (over 65 per cent) consider the media to be a trusted and important source of information on a variety of civic issues. They reported that the media was their main source of information leading up to elections, and that it influenced their voting choices. One in eight survey respondents said the media influences their decision to some extent, and one in five said the media has a significant influence on their voting choices (BBC Media Action 2014b).

Research has also uncovered significant correlations between higher levels of political efficacy, knowledge and participation among Loy9 audiences compared with those not exposed to Loy9 programming (BBC Media Action 2014b). Loy9 audiences have a greater awareness of civic terms and opportunities to participate in civic life than those not exposed to Loy9 outputs. Loy9 audience members are also twice as likely to have expressed their opinion in a public forum, and 73 per cent of its audience say they would vote in a national election, compared with 63 per cent of those not exposed to Loy9. They are also more likely to express positive attitudes toward civic engagement, particularly toward youth participation in community life (BBC Media Action 2014b).

Tellingly, nearly all respondents exposed to Loy9 (98 per cent) agree or strongly agree that the programme encourages young people to 'be brave', to express their opinions, and to provide information on opportunities to participate in public and political life (including elections) (BBC Media Action 2014b). An 18-year-old high school student told researchers, 'Before I didn't know what documents I [needed] to bring to cast a vote, and after listening to the Loy9 radio, I [now] understand I need to bring my national

identification card to cast a vote' (Gowland 2014). Another audience member, also a high school student, said: 'In the past, I thought that voting [was] not important for me, but now I understand [that] voting is very important. I need to vote' (Gowland 2014).

Loy9 is a project of its time, when access to the media—particularly social media—is increasing and public opinion is becoming a more potent force in politics (Kung 2014). While the long-ruling CPP maintained its majority in the 2013 election, its dominance was substantially reduced by a swing toward the Cambodia National Rescue Party. Rapid change in the political environment and the media sector remain unlikely, given the tight control the CPP has maintained over both arenas over the course of several decades. But signs of political compromise, including a willingness on the part of the ruling party to engage in discussion of electoral reform, may pave the way for more gradual change.

Online media, which are to date largely free of government control, are likely to play a key role in connecting young citizens and activists (McKinley and Noble 2012; Peou and Chea 2011). The success of Loy9 demonstrates the potential for a mixed traditional/new media approach to supporting a nascent but increasingly visible demand for change among youth. As a highly innovative and creative example of election-related media assistance, Loy9 also shows the potential for creative approaches to voter education and mobilization using a combination of accessible and collaborative media platforms.

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Case study 2:
Monitoring dangerous speech on social media in Kenya

Kenya's media sector is highly developed, relatively well funded and generally regarded as a key driver of accountability within the country (Abdi and Deane 2008). BBC Media Action analysis argues that: 'the media contributed significantly to the introduction of multi-party politics in 1992 and regime change in 2002. In fact, the media in Kenya has gained a reputation for exposing corruption, acting as a platform for public debate and being a guardian of the public interest against state power' (Muriithi and Page 2014: 15). In this context, it is not surprising that Kenyans are tech-savvy, heavy media consumers. Nearly half of the population (47 per cent) has access to the internet (Internet World Stats ND), the majority of whom (62 per cent) are online every day (Pew Research 2013). Three-quarters (76 per cent) of internet users are also social network users (Pew Research 2013).

Several recent cross-country studies have shown that Kenyans are highly politically engaged and confident in their understanding of political issues and processes. BBC Media Action research in seven countries found Kenyans to be the most confident in their knowledge of politics, with 64 per cent reporting a 'fair amount' or a 'great deal' of knowledge about politics. The vast majority (91 per cent) reported talking about politics either occasionally or frequently, and nearly three-quarters (70 per cent) said they were 'somewhat' or 'very' interested in politics, again putting Kenya among the most politically engaged countries surveyed (Casserly, Elias and Fortune 2014). Pew Research (2013) discovered similarly high levels of engagement among Kenyans, finding that 68 per cent use social media to share their views about politics (compared with a median of 38 per cent in 22 countries), and more than a quarter reported using their mobile phones to 'get political news' (also high compared with other countries).

Kenya's media has, however, only just started to recover from its role in widespread electoral violence following the country's 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections. Violence flared in the aftermath of the announcement that Mwai Kibaki had won the election, following a tally regarded by many as flawed at best, and possibly deliberately manipulated (Abdi and Deane 2008). Six weeks after the announcement, more than 1,000 people had been killed, and more than half a million people (estimates vary) were displaced (Muriithi and Page 2014). A number of vernacular radio stations were accused of deliberately fuelling the violence, leading to the trial of radio personality Joshua Sang at the International Criminal Court for his alleged role in the commission of several crimes against humanity. In contrast to the prominent role of Sang and Kass FM, the radio station he presided over, other media outlets were noted for their efforts to calm tensions and challenge the drivers of violence (Abdi and Deane 2008).

All eyes were on Kenya's presidential and parliamentary elections in 2013, which were the most complicated in the country's history, following electoral and constitutional reform mandated by a negotiated settlement following the events of 2007–08 (Muriithi and Page 2014). A considerable amount of attention was paid to media capacity building and monitoring, with a particular focus on preventing and detecting hate speech (Oriare, Okello-Orlale and Ugangu 2010).

In this context, the Umati project was launched in 2012. It was developed by iHub Research and Ushahidi, the Kenyan company formed off the back of an online tool developed to monitor electoral violence in 2008. With funding from a variety of sources, Umati built on a conceptualization of dangerous speech developed by US academic Susan Benesch and developed a research framework suited to the Kenyan context (Sambuli 2014a). Aiming to better understand the use of dangerous speech in the Kenyan online space, Umati monitored blogs, forums, online newspapers, Facebook and Twitter. Monitors worked in a number of languages, and largely manual monitoring methods were used. The initiative was thought (by the project team) to be the first of its kind (Awori 2013).

Umati's first phase ran for nine months from September 2012 to the end of May 2013. Six human monitors scanned selected sites for eight hours per day, recording and coding incidences of hate speech in seven languages. In analysing the statements, the team sought to understand how inflammatory the content was, and the potential influence of the source and statement (Awori 2013).

One of the project's working assumptions was that Umati could only collect and analyse around 5–10 per cent of all hate speech during the monitoring period. The project team also contended that the relative conservatism among Kenyans would mean that 'the behaviour of the Kenyan online user would be equally conservative, and that their most acerbic sentiments would not be expressed in the public online space' (Awori 2013: 20). Surprisingly, however, they collected a significant number of hate-speech statements (5,683) and found that one in four constituted dangerous speech—'a call to kill, beat or forcefully evict another group, or a person because of their belonging to a group' (Awori 2013: 20). Interestingly, the vast majority (92 per cent) of hate-speech incidents was made by identifiable commentators, i.e., people using their real names or pseudonyms that could potentially be traced back to them (Awori 2013)

Further key findings included significant divergence between existing, formal definitions of hate speech and the way in which members of the public understood hate speech; that dangerous speech is not necessarily a precursor to violence on the ground; and that a certain level of citizen self-regulation occurred online. In some cases, citizens publicly ridiculed originators of dangerous speech, and others proposed counterarguments, often leading originators to shut down their social media accounts (Awori 2013). One example of this is the following tweet, sent in March: 'I smell some KIKUYU'S stinking up the media waves. […] I wish I could find & KILL ONE!' The tweet was reported to Uchaguzi 2013 (an election monitoring initiative of Ushahidi, supported by a number of organizations), and within 48 hours the user had closed his account, likely because of a backlash from other Twitter users who were appalled by his online behaviour (Awori 2013).

Initial findings have been widely disseminated through an online public forum, seminars, and meetings with electoral and media stakeholders. A full account of the background, methodology and findings is available in Umati's final report on the first phase of the project (Awori 2013).

Whereas the project's first phase relied solely on human monitoring, the second phase concentrates on developing automated online monitoring of dangerous speech. Automating some functions, which are overseen by human monitoring, could potentially reduce the costs of monitoring and/or increase the capacity to monitor more sites. The second phase also focuses on developing community and civil society organization engagement as a component of civic education on dangerous speech (Sambuli 2014b). The Umati team will be actively involved in deploying its methodology in Nigeria, and scholars from Addis Ababa and Oxford universities are adapting the Umati approach to study hate speech in Ethiopia. Civil society organizations in a number of other African and Asian countries are also considering local pilot projects based on Umati's methodology (Sambuli 2014c).
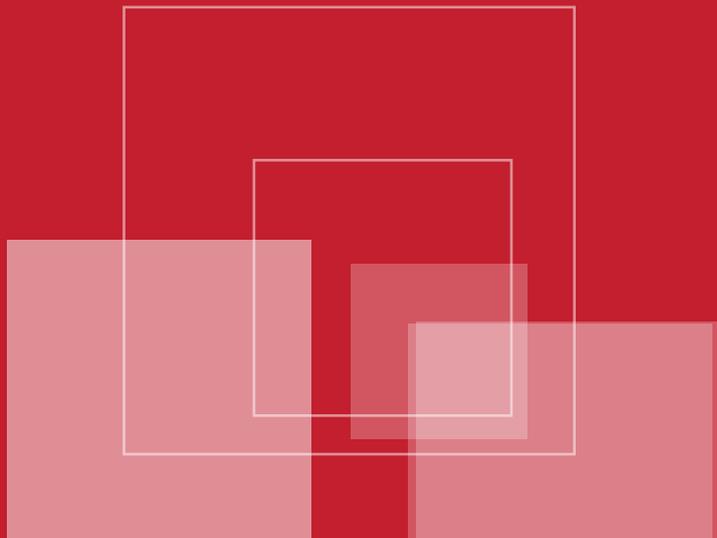
In the Kenyan context, Umati and other media initiatives (both locally driven and externally supported) arguably represented one of the most successful aspects of the 2013 elections. While the media faced some criticism for taking an overly cautious (and therefore insufficiently analytical or critical) approach to electoral coverage, it was credited as a key driver of peaceful elections, as well as a key source of information for citizens participating in a highly complex election (European Union 2013).

Umati is likely to demonstrate an impact well beyond Kenya's 2013 elections. The Umati team hoped from the beginning that the project might offer lessons and adaptable methodologies for contexts other than Kenya. Media-monitoring methodologies aimed at assessing balance and equitable access have been developed, adapted and implemented on a trial basis by numerous organizations over several decades. However, monitoring specifically associated with conflict, and monitoring of social media, are undertaken less frequently, in part because there are fewer tools with which to do so (Awori 2013). Umati broke new ground with its focus on social media, and other organizations that focus on electoral conflict and hate speech in other contexts should examine the initiative for lessons and potentially adaptable methodologies.

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