

THE
Media

& THE INFORMATION SOCIETY



ISBN 983 2588 06 5

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© April 2004 Global Knowledge Partnership (625215-K)

ABOUT THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIP

The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) is a worldwide network committed to harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for sustainable and equitable development. GKP's vision is a world of equal opportunities where all people can access and use knowledge and information to improve their lives. The network enables the sharing of information, experiences and resources to help reduce poverty and empower people.

Within the GKP framework, governments, civil society groups, donor agencies, private sector companies and inter-governmental organisations come together as equals to apply ICTs for development (ICT4D). Such alliances are known as 'multi-stakeholder partnerships', a relatively new approach to forging collaborations among different sectors sharing a common vision and goal.

Founded in 1997, GKP now comprises more than 80 members from 38 countries covering all continents. It is governed by an elected Executive Committee and serviced by a Secretariat based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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Foreword

The term 'Information Society' has been coined to refer to communities in which there is ready access to information and knowledge, leading to sustainable and equitable opportunities for growth and progress. In an Information Society, there is free flow of two-way communication between governments and their people, and among the people themselves. In such a society, everyone is informed of current affairs, especially those affecting them directly; and everyone has the ability to make his or her voice heard. Hence, everyone has a say in shaping socio-economic plans and strategies of national relevance.

So, what does the media have to do with such an Information Society?

Without exaggeration, everything! In an Information Society, communication has to reach the masses. It has to seep down to the grass-roots level – to fishing villages by the sea, hamlets on mountainsides and even to remote nomadic settlements wherever they may exist. But it cannot be merely a one-way transfer. Community needs and aspirations, culture and values, indigenous wisdom and experience have to filter up to policy makers and other stakeholders in order for communication to truly improve people's quality of life.

The most cost-effective way of achieving such widespread communication is through the mass media, and especially the radio. Of all forms of media – both traditional and new – radio has by far the most pervasive reach. People living in rural areas in many countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, depend heavily on the radio to connect them to the bigger world 'outside'.

The potential of newer forms of media – such as the Internet – in non-urban areas is also there. However, these forms of media have not as yet made their way to a large enough area beyond major towns and cities to have significant mass impact. The concentration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in urban enclaves, as we all know, has led to the digital divide which neatly splices the world into its haves and have-nots.

Once again, traditional mass media can make a difference. Radio, television and newspaper journalists can make a bigger effort to educate those on 'the other' side of the digital divide about ICTs and how they can be used to improve standards and quality of living in hitherto neglected areas. There is as yet very little reporting on ICTs and their long-term potential and consequences in the traditional media. Yes, superficial news on the launch of an updated version of some hot technology will make the pages of newspapers, but in-depth, analytical and thought-provoking pieces on the impact of ICTs on development do not often appear. As a purveyor of information and change, the mass media has a duty to shine the spotlight on this potent tool and agent for global change.

The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) has, since its establishment, advocated the use of ICTs to catapult growth and progress of developing nations. However, we realise that ICTs on their own are not enough. ICTs depend, for the time being anyway, on the mass media to create greater awareness of the potential benefits that can be derived from it. In order to promote a higher level of awareness among journalists of ICTs and their ramifications, and to motivate a higher standard of reporting on these, GKP along with one of its members, Panos – a global network of NGOs working with the media – launched the GKP/Panos Media Awards in 2003, a few months before the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, December 2003.

There are admittedly certain challenges that the mass media has to overcome if it is to fulfill its grass-roots duty. Over the last decade and a half, media around the world has grown in number and acquired greater freedom with regard to content. This has been due to a gradual liberalisation of the various forms of media, as well as erosion of traditional government monopolies. At the same time, financial independence has meant greater reliance on advertising which has tended to concentrate media houses in urban areas where there is an obligation to cater to urbanites' demands. In terms of radio, this has resulted in higher entertainment content and 'hip' programmes imported from developed nations.

Mass media, and radio stations in particular, needs to break from the commercial groove and focus more intensely on rural folk as well as other marginalised groups. The ultimate aim is to create what has been termed 'media pluralism', namely media that reflects the needs of all members of society, and especially those whose voices have till now been ignored.

GKP hopes to see media pluralism materialise by advocating for policies and regulatory frameworks that will facilitate free, plural and inclusive media. It also plans to support local content creation by local stakeholders through the use of ICTs, particularly those that contribute to poverty reduction. Towards this end, the GKP will intensify its efforts on capacity-building, awareness-raising, knowledge-sharing and advocacy on this issue.

This publication is part of the Global Knowledge Partnership's 'Knowledge for Development Series', an overall effort to increase the availability of information and knowledge on various issues in the area of ICT4D. The hope has been to highlight the importance of the media in general, and further to create greater awareness of what can be done to help media promote the concept and goals of the Information Society.

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APRIL 2004

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our sincerest appreciation to Kitty Warnock of The Panos Institute, United Kingdom, who compiled the contents of this book and graciously wrote the introduction.

We also thank the following for their contribution to this book:

1. Nalaka Gunawardene (Regional Representative, TVE Asia Pacific)
2. All staff at Panos Institute
3. All staff at the GKP Secretariat

GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIP SECRETARIAT
KUALA LUMPUR
APRIL 2004



Introduction

MASS MEDIA IN AND FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The documents collected in this book cover two topics: mass media as a fundamental part of the Information Society, and mass media as a channel for debating and shaping the Information Society. Though they are distinct, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), in following the discussion about mass media in and around the World Summit on the Information Society, has opted to treat the two topics together. A third topic, also of importance to GKP, is helping journalists to use and benefit from information and communication technologies. This is not addressed in these pages, although it does form part of the activities of GKP and its members.

The mass media is so much a part of our lives, that it is easy to forget it forms a fundamental part of the Information Society. Mass media creates an environment in which use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) can flourish.

We cannot afford to forget about the mass media. Over the past 15 years, the media in most countries has both proliferated and become more liberal. While creating exciting opportunities for variety, inclusiveness and debate, commercial pressures which threaten these have also increased. Specific efforts are needed to encourage the media to address issues of public interest, including those affecting the poor and marginalised; otherwise, media content all over the world will become increasingly bland and meaningless.

GKP's efforts towards this end can be briefly summarised as follows:

- In March 2000, GKP organized a Media Forum at its Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII), where leading developing country media actors called for measures to strengthen the freedom, real pluralism and relevance of developing country media in today's globalised world. Their ideas were expanded in a chapter contributed by James Deane, Executive Director of Panos Institute (a GKP member), to Global Civil Society 2002, a publication of the London School of Economics. This chapter provided much of the material for the GKP Issues Paper on Mass Media and Communications, drafted in 2003 for discussion by GKP members.
- In 2001, GKP submitted recommendations to the G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force on media issues related to the Digital Divide.
- GKP organised media fora together with the United Nations Economic Commission For Africa's African Information Society Initiative (UNECA AISI) at two African preparatory meetings for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), in Bamako, Mali, in 2002 and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2003. The official African submission to (WSIS) Geneva reflected these meetings' emphasis on the need to promote accessible media and to strengthen local and relevant content, as well as to build journalists' capacity to use ICTs and to report on information society issues.
- In October 2003, building on the Recommendations for the GKII Media Forum, Panos invited leading media advocates and practitioners to the Rockefeller Foundation's conference centre at Bellagio, to clarify the relationship between media freedom and its potential role in reducing poverty.
- In 2003, GKP sponsored two Media Training workshops for women journalists in South Asia in Kathmandu, Nepal and Bangalore, India in August and November respectively. The objective of the training was to familiarise women development journalists in South Asia with the potential of using new media for communications.
- In December 2003, at the Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) Platform, World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Panos and GKP acknowledged the important role of media reporting in building inclusive Information Societies, by granting Awards to four journalists from around the world.

Mass media in the Information Society

The term “Information Society” came into use along with new information and communication technologies (ICTs) — internet, email, mobile phones — and generally refers to aspects of modern life that are shaped specifically by these. For instance, the term may be used to refer to a hoped-for future in which everyone has access to the internet; or to today’s economic and trade systems which depend on the new ICTs for their speed and spread; or to economies in which information processing is responsible for a high proportion of the jobs and wealth created.

The ultimate objectives of an Information Society are the benefits information is expected to bring, such as economic growth, individual opportunities, better health, participation and good governance. Hence, mass media has a great and absolutely fundamental part to play.

The specific and unique functions of press, radio and television are journalism and public debate. Mass media expresses the public life of a society, whereas much of the use and value of new ICTs is in communication between individuals or among restricted groups. Mass media mediates the relations of people with their governments and the societies in which they live. It debates the big public questions of citizenship, democracy and political processes, identity, society and culture. It helps shape meaning, forms public opinion, demands transparency and holds governments accountable. It is an irreplaceable part of public education, and can help build social cohesion. Mass media is the guardian of the wider environment in which “micro-ICTs” like telephones and the internet can fulfil their functions.

Both mass media and new ICTs are needed to make up an Information Society. In the words of the statement from the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII) Media Forum, included in this book, “The media plays an absolutely central role in the development of a knowledge-based society. A free and pluralistic media (public, private, community) is essential for transparent and accountable political and economic systems....Media helps set the agenda and influence public debate.”

Mass media, especially radio, is also distinguished from ICTs by the far larger number of people who have access to it. To give just one example: in a sample of households studied in rural Zimbabwe in 2001, 42 households possessed a radio in working order, while only one had a working telephone (and presumably none had a computer).¹

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the first stage of which was held in Geneva in December 2003, with the second stage planned for Tunis in 2005, was conceived principally to promote the NICT-based kind of “Information Society”. As African media expert Guy Berger puts it, the aim of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was “to hasten the construction of a single networked world.”²

Civil society organisations lobbied hard for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to acknowledge mass media as part of the Information Society. For instance, the August 2003 African media conference, Highway Africa, took as its theme Mainstreaming Media in the Information Society. The conference’s final Declaration proposed “that the concept of the ‘Information Society’ should be wider than the role of Information and Communication Technologies and [should] incorporate issues related to the mass media such as freedom of expression, access to information and the role of journalism.” Tracey Naughton, chair of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Media Caucus group, said, “An Information Society without media would be like agriculture without farmers.”

1. *Media and the Empowerment of Communities for Social Change*, Chido E.F. Matewa, Ph.D Thesis, June 2002, accessed via the Communication Initiative website: www.comminit.com/ctrends2002/sld-6111.html

2. *WSIS and the Big Picture*, Guy Berger, Mail and Guardian (South Africa) online, January 2, 2004

As it turned out, however, the role of the media was one of the most divisive issues in the run up to the summit. This was not so much because delegates questioned the value of the media, but because for most of them, commitment to the inclusion of media as an actor in an Information Society goes hand in hand with commitment to media freedom and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some governments — notably China — were unwilling to sign on this.

A compromise wording for the Summit Declaration was agreed to at a late stage of the preparations. The Final Declaration confirms Article 19 as a basis for the Information Society but refers to Article 29 for a caveat that “the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society” may be invoked to limit freedom of expression.

So the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) did agree that mass media is a part of the Information Society — but it did not give it high priority. Of the 10 targets agreed to in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Plan of Action, only one, the eighth, relates to what is now often referred to as “traditional” media — radio and television. Stronger backing for media was given by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, when he opened a parallel event, the World Electronic Media Forum. Meanwhile, activists will be vigilant as preparations begin for the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Many governments are still restricting media freedom, and in a post-9/11 world fraught with concerns about internet security, such restrictions may increase.

WHY DOES THE MEDIA NEED OUR SUPPORT?

Amid all the excitement created by new technologies, it is easy to take mass media for granted. But this would be a mistake, as the GKP Issues Paper on Mass Media and Communications included here explains. It is true that many developments in the past two decades have been very positive for media — there is now far more media freedom, and a larger number of newspapers, radio and TV stations. At the same time, however, certain trends and pressures are working against the media, especially against those media that are relevant to, and accessible by, the poor.

Positive developments include greater political freedom in most countries (boosted partly by ICTs, which overcame rulers’ efforts to control the flow of ideas and information) and economic liberalisation (also boosted by ICTs and pressure on countries to participate more fully in the global economy). In many countries, these brought to an end government monopolies that had characterised media, especially electronic media, until the 1990s. Independent newspapers, radio stations and television, including community radio stations, sprung up. With competition, formerly complacent government-owned media has become more lively and innovative. Overall, more media can mean more journalism, more voices, more debate.

These liberating forces have a downside, however. Liberalisation and globalisation tend to concentrate ownership of media in fewer hands. Commercialism affects the quality and variety of media content, and tends to limit its reach. The new independent media needs to compete commercially, keep costs down and appeal to wealthier sections of the population in order to win advertising revenue. They are, therefore, likely to be located in urban areas and to fill their pages or schedules with lifestyle and entertainment content. For radio and television, this means music and imported (often Northern) entertainment, rather than journalism and locally-produced programmes.

Grants to public or state-owned broadcasters have been cut, so they also have to compete, replacing some of their traditional public-interest broadcasting with entertainment. For news reporting, both public and private media increasingly rely on Northern agencies. Altogether, despite the new freedom and the much larger number of media houses, locally-produced coverage of news, public affairs and debate may actually be shrinking. The new ICTs, meanwhile, flood developing country audiences with information and entertainment from the North.

If these trends continue, there will be less rather than more of what Panos Director James Deane calls “real media pluralism”. This is defined as a situation in which there are not just many media outlets, but media with varied ownership including those run by local people and communities. It means also media that reaches the majority of society, including poor and rural people, featuring content of local interest and in local languages, and in which many different voices and perspectives can be heard.

Economic pressures towards a bland, uniform, “dumbed down” globalised media are strong; but there is much that civil society, governments, media houses and journalists themselves can do to push in the other direction.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

The three challenges identified by the GKII Media Forum in 2000 still face us, namely:

- ⦿ the challenge “to create an effective policy environment that nurtures a free, independent and pluralistic media”;
- ⦿ the challenge to prevent excessive concentration of media power; and
- ⦿ the challenge to strengthen dynamic and locally relevant content — by building skills and combining new and old technologies.

MEDIA, FREEDOM AND POVERTY

A positive first step would be to develop a vision for the role of media that combines media freedom — the basic commitment to Article 19 — with a pro-active commitment to helping the poor and marginalised gain “real access”³. The lack of such a two-part vision has caused dissension between different groups of media champions for many years, including most recently in the run-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

For one group, the ultimate goal is development and social inclusion. They see communication as a universal right and a means to development. These “communication rights” advocates agree that freedom is a sine qua non, but they fear concentration solely on freedom does not address the macro-economic issues that shape media today and could leave the poor excluded from a media that increasingly addresses urban elites.

On the other hand, media actors whose priority is freedom fear the creation of any sort of requirement or regulation that media must address the poor would justify more fundamental restrictions on media freedom.

The “Joint Statement from the Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty”, is the result of a two-day discussion among leading representatives of both points of view in October 2003. It shows that a combined vision is possible. But more debate is needed in the coming years among all types of organisations concerned with Information Society, media and development, to work towards a strong consensus.

3. “Real Access” is a term used by South Africa-based NGO Bridges.org to refer to access by the poor and marginalised to ICTs, but it is equally applicable to mass media

POLICY AND CONTENT: THE CHALLENGES

Policy challenges include, at international level, the need to ensure that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis confirms the importance of the media, and does not dilute the commitment to Article 19. At the national level, media freedom has not been won in some countries and needs constant vigilance in many, while civil society organisations – all those concerned with development and democracy — can advocate for “real pluralism” on many fronts. For instance, they can monitor the content of newspapers and broadcasting; monitor the operations of media licensing bodies; demand that broadcasting bandwidth allocations be handled in a transparent, equitable and effective manner; and campaign for lower legal, technical and financial barriers to establishing new broadcasting stations.

When it comes to direct support for more high-quality and relevant media content, much can be and is being done. “Radio for Development” is experiencing a surge of interest, and many development agencies — multilateral, government and NGO — are supporting programmes aimed at giving the public, especially the poor and rural people, essential information and ideas about issues that affect their lives and livelihoods. Educational soap operas and other “infotainment” as well as magazine and documentary programmes abound, covering agriculture, health, citizenship and peace. Many, moreover, are produced with strong involvement of their target communities.

When sufficient resources are available, such programmes can reach large audiences and be a vital source of information and stimulus for discussion. In Burma, over 10 million people were able to listen to a radio drama about healthcare issues, including HIV/AIDS, from November 2003 to April 2004. Produced by the BBC World Service Trust in close consultation with local people and NGOs, and broadcast by the BBC’s Burma Service, early feedback suggested that the series was enabling communities to discuss and confront hitherto taboo subjects.⁴ In Somaliland, international NGO Health Unlimited is building on the fact that over 70 per cent of the largely nomadic and illiterate target population have access to radios, to broadcast a series on women’s health to nine million Somali speakers in the Horn of Africa. Listening groups, both formally established and spontaneous, help stimulate discussions within communities that can lead to change of behaviour and attitudes.

These initiatives are important. But they do not help develop journalism, which lies at the heart of mass media’s role in an Information Society. Radio journalism in particular needs support, because many of the new independent stations are small and struggling for resources. It does not help that development agencies tend to view the new independent radio as commercial, entertainment-focused, and having very little to offer “development”.

While it is true that many private station owners are concerned with making profits and winning larger audiences, some producers from independent stations are starting to challenge the status quo. This new breed of producers insist, given the resources and opportunity, they could show that audiences actually like listening to good local journalism.

“People out there want to talk, they’ve got a lot of issues to raise, but no forum to do it in,” said Joel Okao Tema, a producer from Radio Rhino, an independent station in rural Uganda, during a recent discussion about producing local programmes.⁵ “I’ve done programmes on AIDS, and on a crisis when banana plants got diseased and the Ministry of Agriculture’s response was to cut the trees down, leaving the farmers with no livelihood... People listening to these programmes get the true feelings from the ground”.

4. Information from the Communication Initiative, February 2, 2004

5. Observation made during a meeting at Panos Eastern Africa in Kampala, Uganda, to mark the launch of CATIA 2b, a project to support radio content production in Africa, funded by the UK’s Department for International Development, January 31, 2004

Many reporters working with small independent stations share the same interest in good journalism. “Donors have a big responsibility,” said another reporter at the same meeting. “They ...didn’t put much into developing radio stations. Instead they’ve put their money into making programmes themselves — for instance on health. At the station, all we can do is wait for the CD to be sent to us. It was a big mistake on the part of the donors”.

Media about the Information Society

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration opens by stating a common vision of the Information Society: “We... declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life...”

Obviously, the realisation of this vision is some way in the future. Furthermore, it will not come about automatically; it depends on leaders making the right policy decisions and the right technology choices, and deploying technologies in a way that will meet the real needs and capacities of the masses who are not yet part of the Information Society. Otherwise, if decisions are made in isolation from debate and public scrutiny, we could face the nightmare described by media analyst Cees Hamelink as “an Orwellian social order in which free speech is routinely violated, surveillance is stepped up, corporates control intellectual property and access to information depends on purchasing power.” Media reporting on communication issues is essential to build the sort of wide-ranging debate and engagement that will get us to the Information Society we want.

According to Lyndall Shope-Mafole, who oversaw the drafting of the final World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration, “The role of journalists is to influence the direction of global policy in building the Information Society.”⁶ Journalism can help governments and people see and agree on the “big picture” of what an Information Society should be and how to create it. On one hand, media can assist the spread and up-take of ICTs, promoting awareness of their potential and advantages — to rural communities and small business enterprises, for example. On the other hand, media can facilitate the development of shared and inclusive visions — questioning policy decisions, exploring their social and economic impact and ensuring that the interests of the poor and marginalised are represented. The media can debate alternatives, channel civil society involvement and hold governments and service providers accountable.

So far, the media in most countries has not shown great commitment or capacity to fulfil this important role. Reporting on information issues is often limited to surface-skimming announcements on new technologies and successful projects. There is little assessment of the long-term social and economic impact of these technologies or projects, and very little reflection on national or global communication policy issues. Journalists appear to be not fully aware of these issues, or to lack the confidence to debate them.

A study commissioned by the UN Economic Commission for Africa on African journalists’ capacity to cover the Information Society, found a surprisingly low level of understanding of the issues among both editors and journalists in the countries studied.⁷ The lack of media coverage in the preparatory period for the Geneva World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) contributed to, as well as reflected, a lack of serious national debate in countries about the summit. Few journalists went to Geneva to report on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). There was only one from a country as large as Brazil, and three from India — and they had not been sent by their media houses. The Brazilian and one of the Indian journalists were there in their capacity as winners of the GKP/Panos Media Awards.

6. *From Africa to the World*, Lyndall Shope-Mafole, *Rhodes Journalism Review*, Rhodes University Department of Journalism and Media Studies, December 23, 2003

7. *African Media and ICT4D: Documentary evidence*, UN Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, 2003

Various initiatives are under way to encourage and support greater media participation, particularly in Africa. For example, the UN Economic Commission for Africa's African Information Society Initiative includes awards for African journalists reporting on the Information Society. Meanwhile, the school of journalism at Rhodes University in South Africa holds an annual conference — Highway Africa — bringing together journalists and new media practitioners from across the African continent to discuss ICTs and the global Information Society.

GKP and Panos take action

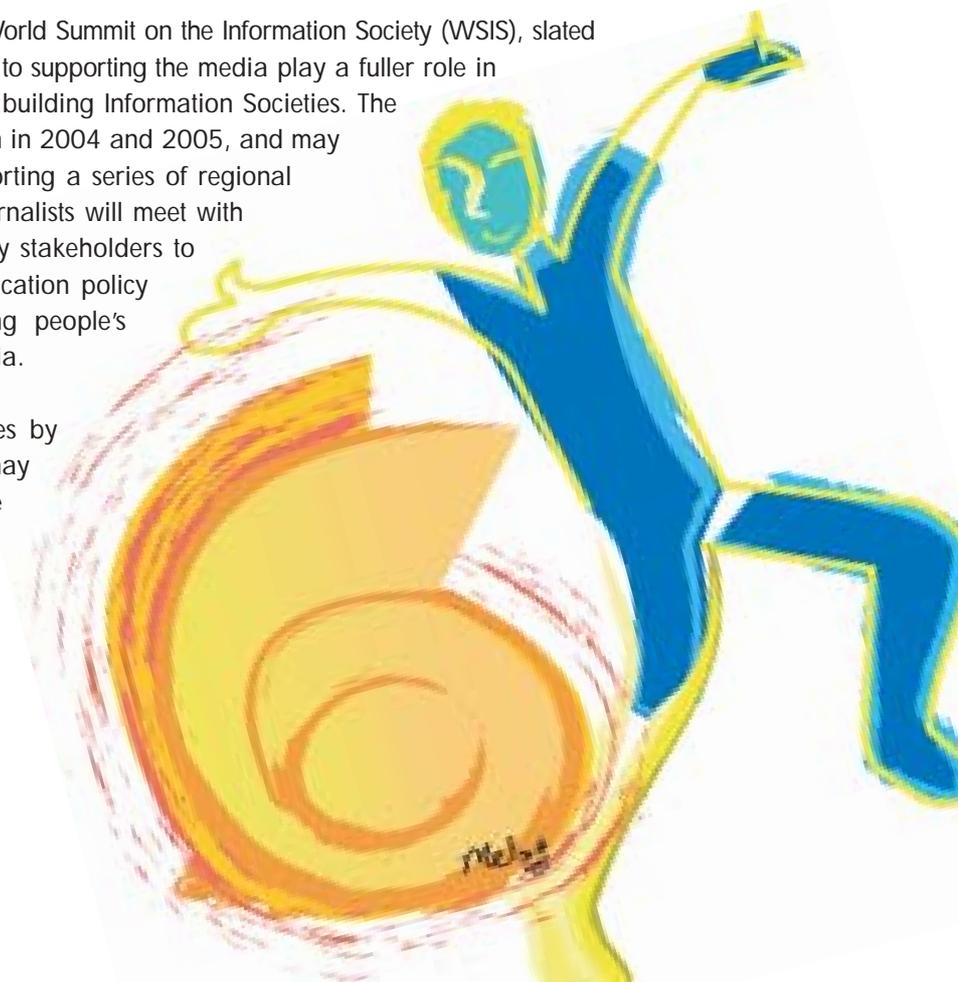
In 2003, GKP and Panos decided they could contribute to raising the level of media engagement around the world by creating an annual award for thoughtful and incisive reporting from developing countries on their progress to becoming "Information Societies". In deciding the winners, the jurors look for reporting that goes beyond describing projects or new investment initiatives to analyse broader questions such as the social impact of ICTs, particularly on rural or disadvantaged groups, or national and global communication policy issues. Almost 80 entries for the first awards were received from around the world, from print, web, radio and TV/video journalists.

The four winners — from Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania and India — came to receive their awards in Geneva in December 2003. These were presented at a ceremony hosted by GKP at the Information Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) Platform, a major parallel event to the official World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), organised by GKP and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The award-winning stories, which form the last part of this book, range from an account of a fully IT-literate village in south India, to a reflection on how disasters have a worse impact when there are no communication channels.

GKP and the media in 2004-5

In the preparatory phase of the Tunis World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), slated for November 2005, GKP is committed to supporting the media play a fuller role in engaging people and governments in building Information Societies. The GKP/Panos Awards will be held again in 2004 and 2005, and may continue after that. GKP is also supporting a series of regional seminars held by Panos, in which journalists will meet with policymakers, experts and civil society stakeholders to debate global and national communication policy issues and how policies are shaping people's access to communication and the media.

Further advocacy or support initiatives by GKP or its member organisations may emerge from the discussion of the issues in May 2004.







SECOND GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE CONFERENCE, KUALA LUMPUR, March 2000

MEDIA FORUM: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In March 2000, the Government of Malaysia and the Global Knowledge Partnership hosted the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII) in Kuala Lumpur. This conference brought together over 1,000 people, representing the public and private sectors, key NGOs and international agencies from over 120 countries. The first Global Knowledge Conference, held in Toronto, Canada, in 1997, had explored how new information and communication technologies were providing unique possibilities for individuals, communities and nations. The aim of the second conference was to draw up an action plan for putting the tools of the information age in the hands of developing countries and the world's poor, focused around three strategic themes: access to ICTs, empowerment through ICTs, and the role of ICTs in better governance.

One component of GKII was a Media Forum, facilitated by GKP member the Panos Institute. Forty senior editors, owners, publishers and directors of media organisations from developing countries met to examine the role the media plays in promoting knowledge for development and facilitating greater access to knowledge. The Forum's final statement, reprinted here, was presented to the final Plenary Session of GKII.

The Forum's statement was reprinted in *Global Civil Society 2002*, an annual publication of the London School of Economics, as part of a chapter entitled *The Other Information Revolution: Media and Empowerment in Developing Countries*, by James Deane (Executive Director of Panos Institute), Njonjo Mue (Director of Panos Eastern Africa) and Fackson Banda (Director of Panos Southern Africa).

MEDIA FORUM SUBMISSION TO GKII PLENARY MARCH 10, 2000

The media plays an absolutely central role in the development of a knowledge-based society. A free and pluralistic media (public, private, community) is essential for transparent and accountable political and economic systems. It must be confident, vibrant, entertaining, surprising, pro-active, balanced and informed. It should scrutinise governments and corporations, but also international organisations and the donor communities themselves.

ACCESS: Mass media such as radio reaches the vast majority of people in almost all countries. Newer communication technologies, including the internet and telephony, while powerful, do not yet have the same reach.

EMPOWERMENT: Media helps set the agenda and influence public debate. It can empower individuals and communities (geographical or interest-based) offering them cost-effective educational opportunities, principally through radio and television.

GOVERNANCE: An independent and plural media contributes to good government, promoting political transparency and accountability.

CHALLENGES:

1. **POLICY:** To create an effective policy environment that nurtures a free, independent and pluralistic media
2. **OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL:** To prevent excessive concentration of media power, much of it located in the North
3. **CONTENT:** To create dynamic and locally relevant content, to counteract North-South information imbalances
4. **SKILLS:** To build human capacity and skills within the media of developing countries
5. **TECHNOLOGIES:** To combine old and new technologies, creating imaginative synergies between the two

1. POLICY: To create an effective policy environment that nurtures a free, independent and pluralistic media

ANALYSIS:

Society benefits from free, independent and pluralistic media. But to achieve this, a supportive policy environment is required, and it must be proactively encouraged by public and private sectors, the international community and multilateral agencies.

ACTION:

- ⦿ Promote, consolidate and effectively enforce freedom of information legislation.
- ⦿ Encourage independent voluntary complaints procedures based on industry codes of ethics, including representation from other sectors of civil society.
- ⦿ Promote independent public service broadcasting.
- ⦿ Develop independent media support agencies (voluntary or statutory) which provide assistance through loans and subsidies, and/or other measures such as postal rate or connectivity cost reductions (eg the Media Development and Diversity Agency being established in South Africa).
- ⦿ Encourage the private sector to support socially useful communication initiatives.
- ⦿ Make licensing and regulation policies for broadcast media transparent and open.
- ⦿ Implement effectively legislation that already exists in these areas.

2. OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL: To prevent excessive concentration of media power, much of it located in the North

ANALYSIS:

An increasing concentration of power in media ownership, internationally and within some countries, works directly against plurality. It leads to more homogeneous content, reducing space for the expression of a diversity of views. New information technologies pose an additional challenge because they are outside existing systems of accountability. The implications of creating such systems are complex, but this remains a key global issue.

ACTION:

- Do research to map and monitor the economic and power relationships emerging among global media and communications conglomerates.
- Introduce or strengthen anti-monopoly legislation or measures to prevent the emergence of private or state monopolies.
- Seek dialogue between transnational media groups, the telecommunications industries and local communities.
- Explore the creation of voluntary codes of conduct at the global level.
- Support existing proposals to organise an International Congress on Media and Communications similar to the UN Social Summit.

3. CONTENT: To create dynamic and locally relevant content to counteract North-South information imbalances

ANALYSIS:

While developing countries need a media that is open, ensures access, and encompasses new technologies, the most crucial aspect is content. Strong and imaginative content can be compelling and, given commitment, can attract and expand audiences. It should be developed and promoted in local languages, and be focused on community needs as expressed by the communities themselves.

ACTION:

- Create space for locally generated content through a variety of measures (which could include legislation).
- Strengthen public service media such that the choice is not solely between private media and government media.
- Foster the ability of communities to operate and control their own media.

4. SKILLS: To build human capacity and skills within the media of developing countries

ANALYSIS:

To strengthen the media sector, a significant investment in human resources and technical infrastructure is required. Only in this way will poorer societies gain greater control of their own media, and therefore greater control over their future. A coalition of various actors — public, private, local, regional and global - is needed to enable this investment to take place.

ACTION:

- Invest in training and professional standards of journalism.
- Provide training in the use of new technologies as an urgent priority for the media sector as a whole.
- Develop skills to interpret information in ways that are relevant to developing countries.
- Promote investigative reporting skills and techniques among journalists.
- Design training programmes that are customised, relevant and appropriate to local needs.
- Build stronger, professional South-focused information and news networks.



5. TECHNOLOGY: To combine old and new technologies creating imaginative synergies between the two

ANALYSIS:

The use of hybrids and applications that arise from the integration of new and old technologies offer exciting, cost-effective and empowering forms of communication. In this way, “old” technologies can be reinvigorated, and advantage can be taken of their wider reach. An example: in Sri Lanka, radio and television programming are being used to demystify the internet so that those without access know and understand the potential power and advantages of the newer technology. New media advantages, including the ability to be small-scale, low-cost, community-oriented and beyond the control of censorship, clearly add value.

ACTION:

- Actively support efforts to upgrade media industry technological capacity at grassroots level.
- Identify and encourage innovative uses of new technology. Learning experiences need to be shared.
- Support specific initiatives which combine the power and flexibility of new technologies with the reach of more traditional media.
- Promote a legislative and policy environment which favours multiple media approaches.

ⁱ The working definition of a free media was based on the 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press which, given changes over the last nine years, the Forum suggested should now be extended to all media and all regions.

1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press

1. Consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.
2. By an independent press, we mean a press independent from governmental, political or economic control, or from control of materials and infrastructure essential for the production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines and periodicals.
3. By a pluralistic press, we mean the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community.

Also recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN General Assembly resolution 59(1) of December 14, 1946, stating that freedom of information is a fundamental human right, the General Assembly resolution 45/76 A of December 11, 1990, on information in service of humanity, resolution 25C/104 of the General Conference of UNESCO of 1989 in which the main focus is the promotion of “the free flow of ideas by word and image among nations and within each nation”.



GKP ISSUES PAPER ON MASS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

The GKP Action Plan that emerged from the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII) singled out community media and community media networks for GKP support. In the following three years, GKP and its members were involved in several initiatives addressing different aspects of the relationship between media and the information society.

In 2003, GKP began to develop a stronger and clearer policy on media, recognising that they are still the most cost-effective and by far the most available means of communication for the majority of the world's people, especially the poor and those in rural areas.

This GKP Issues Paper was drawn up towards the end of 2003. It will be discussed by the GKP membership during 2004, and will then form the basis for further activities to support the GKP position on media.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) provides an important opportunity to place on the international agenda several critical issues regarding North-South and rich-poor gaps in media ownership, content and access.

Particularly with regard to the more than 2 billion people in the world living on less than US\$ 2 a day, the transformation that has occurred in the media — globally and within developing countries — constitutes as pressing and important a set of issues as the recent discourse on the digital divide. There is a clear need to spark an international debate that, while recognising the dramatic advances over the last decade in freedom, vibrancy and complexity of the media internationally and particularly within developing countries, also addresses the increasing marginalisation from most media of the voices of poor.

This paper is divided into two main sections, viz:

- ⊙ The main concerns and issues that need to be addressed; and
- ⊙ A summary of responses and policy imperatives that have emerged from meetings and other consultations in recent years

The brief discussions in this paper are offered with the proviso that mass media forms only a part — albeit an important one — in the wider social and cultural processes of communications.

I. The key issues

INFORMATION AS FUEL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The crux of the matter is not technology but information itself — how much of information is available, in what relevant and timely manner to how many people at any given time. Access to information enables people, particularly the poor and other marginalised peoples¹, to make sense of their lives, livelihoods and the choices they have to make in the increasingly complex and globalised society. All people, irrespective of their socio-economic or educational levels, should be able to discuss, debate and scrutinise issues, options, choices and alternatives relating to all matters that affect their lives. These include health and social development, education and skills, production and trading, political engagement and participation in democracy.

The media still provide the most effective — and often the only way — that people can access information on such issues, and are likely to remain the principal source of outside information for a majority of humanity for decades to come. Media are also a critical way through which the people can, in turn, express their views and concerns in national discussion and debate. In an ideal world, the media have a role and potential to provide a channel and space for the voices and perspectives of all sections of society.

During the 1990s, access to information was transformed by the proliferation of information and communication technologies, or ICTs, and the liberalisation of media and telecommunications markets around the world. These two closely-linked processes vastly increased the flow and amount of information while reducing the cost of access, storage and retrieval. The global economy was transformed and information itself became a core economic activity, as well as enriching cultural, social and political lives in the developed world.

But the majority of the world's population who live in developing countries, and especially the poor in those countries, have not been full participants or beneficiaries of this information revolution. As the Panos Institute, an independent think tank, points out, even simple telephone connections are still rare and expensive for most rural people. Radio is by far the most common source of information, and the radio sector is much more varied and flourishing now than it was a decade or so ago, when most governments had a monopoly control of broadcasting. But rural people and many of the poor are left out of the new radio scene, just as they are left out of telecommunication: broadcasting has become a market-based activity, and clusters where profits are to be made — mostly in cities, attracting advertisers and audiences with a mixture of music and light entertainment. For poor and rural people, there is less information, fewer programmes on their concerns, less chance to make their voices heard.

Panos has cautioned that, without the capacity to seek information, to debate issues, and to make their voices heard, poor and rural people risk becoming more and more marginalised from their nation's and the world's economies.

1. Including, but not confined to, indigenous peoples, women, people with disabilities, older people, refugees, migrants and those who lack access to formal education and higher technical training.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND NEW MEDIA

The new, ICT-enabled media — typified by the Internet and the World Wide Web, but also including mobile phones, satellite television and data networks — have received the most attention in many current debates on information and communication. However, in terms of sheer numbers, it is the more traditional forms of media — print, television and radio — that still have much greater outreach and influence. Consequently, the current status and on-going changes in the structure, content, ownership and access within these media is of equal, if not greater, importance in any discussion on how the Information Society affects the majority world.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Human rights and freedom of expression are central to all societies, whether in northern or southern countries, in the information age. While government censorship of traditional media has decreased in many southern countries in recent years, freedom of expression and diversity of opinion are far from guaranteed or adequate. Outright censorship — i.e. governmental control of information — continues to be found in some countries, while in many others the media engage in self-censorship in order to maintain broadcasting or publishing licences which governments can revoke at discretion. While the Internet holds the potential of rendering many forms of censorship ineffective, some countries have adopted laws in the name of “national security” or “dangerous content” that can or do threaten freedom of speech and the very open nature of this new medium.

MEDIA FREEDOM AND MEDIA PLURALISM

Media freedom is an essential but insufficient component in achieving media pluralism — a situation where all people in society have access to information on issues that affect their lives and have a way of making their voices heard in national public debate. Genuine media pluralism implies:

- a diversity of ownership, including media which explicitly serve a public or community interest;
- media that are accessible by and intelligible to all citizens (particularly in relation to literacy and language);
- media that reflect diversity of public opinion, and particularly that give and reflect expression of the marginalised in society — who are often a majority in many developing countries.

When these criteria are applied, the global trend is moving away from, not towards, real media pluralism. The past decade has witnessed many advances in media freedom, and a growth in the number of media outlets particularly in radio and television, without necessarily enhancing media pluralism.

For sure, there have been positive developments. Since the end of the Cold War, and in tandem with other processes, there has been a rapid, widespread liberalisation of media in general and of broadcast media in particular. Many governments have understood that maintaining a monopoly over their citizens’ access to information in the wake of satellite, Internet and mobile phones is no longer possible. At the same time, the accelerated process of economic globalisation has closely linked the transfer of capital to the trans-boundary flow of information. Developing countries have found that they cannot engage the globalised market without allowing wider access to global information flows by their citizens. Poorer countries have also faced pressure from aid donors and international lenders to liberalise the media and information markets.

Such liberalisation, particularly in the broadcast media, has often been partial, haphazard and evolutionary rather than revolutionary. But in much of Africa and Asia, it has nevertheless been transformative. In other regions, such as in large parts of Latin America, which has a long tradition of community media and where government control of media has tended to be more complex, the transformation has been less dramatic.

The 2002 Global Civil Society Yearbook, published by the London School of Economics and Political Science, noted: "Liberalisation and diversification, particularly in Africa and Asia, have transformed both print and broadcast media from a largely government-owned, monopolistic and uncreative media environment to a more dynamic, popular, democratic, creative, commercial and complex one."

The extent of media liberalisation has not been matched by a corresponding increase in the public sphere — the area that accommodates and nurtures wide ranging discussion and debate on matters of public interest. In some cases, media professionals have found that their media organisations are increasingly commercialised — driven by advertising revenue or audience ratings and less willing to support investigative stories, or less interested in covering the concerns of the poor and other marginalised groups.

This trend is most visible in the broadcast media, particularly radio, which have undergone the greatest transformation in many countries. Competition has ushered in a new environment of choice and creativity in programming, with many new privately-owned commercial channels and a few community-owned stations rapidly carving out large portions of the audience. However, this flourishing of new channels, particularly on the FM bands, has so far been mainly an urban phenomenon, where the middle classes form the largest part of the market. FM channels' preference to remain apolitical, carry little or no local news, and offer content that is largely or entirely based on music and light entertainment has been described as consumer-oriented, advertising dependent, urban-focused and generally driven by a youth and lifestyle agenda. While these serve legitimate needs of audiences, there is little or no analysis of global or national socio-political developments, and very limited exposure to the rural, marginalised majorities.

Meanwhile, the state-run broadcasting systems — unaccustomed to competition for so long — have found their audiences migrating to newer channels and their government subsidies reduced or withdrawn. In struggling to survive, these broadcasters have largely abandoned their earlier remit for public interest broadcasting, instead reinventing themselves as commercial channels competing for a share of the advertising revenue and audience ratings. In many countries the state broadcasters have cut back on both content and infrastructure, and tended to emulate the content of privately-owned channels. This has led to a reduction of transmitting capacity in rural areas and a decrease in local language programming as well as in programmes covering health, education, environment or agricultural topics.

A more positive trend has been the emergence of community radio. AMARC, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, defines community radio as having three aspects: a community station is non-profit making, the community participates in it, and the community owns and controls it. Community radio is characterised by access, public participation in production and decision-making and listener-financing. The intention is that management of the station is in the hands of those who use and listen to it. Originally strongest in Latin America, community radio has spread rapidly in much of Africa and parts of Asia. Although many community stations struggle to achieve sustainability, they have been able to democratise the airwaves and to bring the broadcast medium closer to the urban and rural communities in a way that most state-owned and commercial channels have failed to do.

OWNERSHIP CONCERNS

Integral to discussions on media pluralism is the issue of media ownership. While media liberalisation allowed more non-state players to enter the media industry, especially where the broadcast media were concerned, there has been limited scope and opportunity for civil society organisations or community groups to establish, own and operate their own media.

Increased concentration of media ownership — at the global, regional and national levels — is squeezing out independent media players and threatening to replace an earlier governmentally controlled concentration of media with an increasingly narrow commercial and political one. This trend also threatens to restrict diversity and accountability in the media.

It is argued that government ownership of the media is generally associated with less press freedom, fewer political and economic rights and, most importantly, inferior social outcomes in the areas of education and health. Although governmental ownership of the mass media has diminished in recent years, in many countries governments continue to own wholly or partially a significant number of media outlets in the print, radio and television sectors. In particular, governments have been fiercely and effectively protective of their broadcasting monopoly in rural areas, where commercially oriented media companies take little or no interest in any case. Governments generally have been unwilling to grant licences to short or medium wave radio stations. Some governments have simply declined issuing broadcast licences to community or civil society groups, while allocating the spectrum to a growing number of private, commercial operators. In some extreme cases of deception, so-called 'community radio' stations are wholly owned and entirely managed by state broadcasting bodies, with token involvement of local people in programme production.

While government monopoly or domination has been less evident in the Internet industry, concerns have been expressed that in certain countries the only internet service provider (ISP) is government owned, while in other countries all ISPs are compelled to connect to the outside world through the state owned telecommunication company.

There is another dimension in broadcast media ownership, whether governmental or commercial. Because all broadcasting — excepting cable — uses the airwaves that are a common property resource (that is, a public property that belongs to all people), radio and television stations have an obligation to devote at least part of their content and coverage to the public interest.

TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

Technological developments have helped the media liberalisation process and subsequent proliferation of media outlets. Advances in electronics and digital technologies have lowered capital costs and at the same time increased the sophistication and user-friendliness of media production and dissemination, particularly in the broadcast media. For example, all the equipment required to set up a community radio station can be acquired for less than US\$20,000, and the basic equipment costs one tenth of that amount. Relatively inexpensive digital cameras, sound recorders, video cam-corders (or 'handicams') and audio/video editing equipment have enabled smaller companies as well as civil society organisations and communities to become media producers, broadcasters and publishers in a way that was never possible earlier.

The emergence of digital technologies on the one hand and the expansion of the Internet and World Wide Web on the other have ushered in an era of media convergence, where the clear demarcations between print, radio, television and new media have blurred. The earlier dichotomy between content providers and content carriers has also been shaken, if not shattered. Convergence allows media, telecommunications

(primarily telephony) and computer industries to use one another's capacities and markets to reach out to larger audiences and consumers than ever before. These processes — which are continuing in spite of occasional setbacks — raise serious concerns that media power is being concentrated in the hands of fewer, larger corporations that can decide and control the information and entertainment accessed by a significant proportion of the world's population.

CONTENT CONCERNS

Content is the principal utility of the media, and a major concern in any discussion on the subject. Content also plays an important role in the potential of ICTs to develop the diverse societies of the North and South.

Despite new media freedoms, and the existence of a larger number of media outlets today than a decade ago, there has been a decline in both the inclination and the capacity of media to cover complex, contentious, technical issues such as those relating to globalisation and poverty.

Southern countries are increasingly confronted by the challenges posed by transnational media conglomerates creating content that homogenises and offers unfair competition to local cultural production.

Developing countries are becoming more, instead of less, reliant on powerful northern news providers such as the BBC, Reuters, and CNN for their international news and information, particularly on global stories of globalisation, trade and international politics. In newly democratic countries in the South, and particularly within civil society, there is a renewed and growing frustration at the Southern media's dependence on what are perceived to be partial, biased or at least fundamentally western-centric news organisations for international coverage and the setting of news agendas.

Closely related to matters of content is the issue of cultural diversity. Over the course of the past few decades, the growth of a worldwide cultural industry has raised many questions about linguistic and cultural diversity. For the film industry, a few production centres — from Hollywood to Bollywood — are capturing large segments of the market and threatening the diversity of content, symbols and processes. English is already the predominant language on the Internet and some predict that Chinese and English will dominate the medium in years to come. Recent discussions have recognised the need to ensure adequate representation of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and other groups — including those that do not have a numerically high presence or economic strength.

There is an urgent need to invest in capacity building that is focused on the creation of locally produced, audience-sensitive content that responds to local needs, especially those of marginalised communities and indigenous groups.

II. Responses and policy imperatives

Precisely because media have such a pervasive, regular presence in many people's daily lives, the above mentioned concerns and issues are immediate and their implications far reaching. They have long ceased to be matters of esoteric debate among academics, but have evolved into issues that shape the core political, economic and social dimensions of all societies.

The anomalies and imbalances described in this note in no way detract from the substantial role that media — at local, national, regional and global levels — have played and continue to play in many areas of human development, human rights and human survival.

There have been many recent attempts to better understand the complex issues and linkages involving media, communications and human development, and to identify some of the measures at policy and practice levels that could help transform the media into more accountable, equitable and creative processes. Discussions on the role of ICTs in development have added a new dimension to these debates, but the core concerns remain the same.

One such initiative was the Media Forum held during the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII) in Kuala Lumpur in 2000. The Forum brought together 40 editors, owners, publishers and directors of media organisations from developing countries. Its consensus on the role of media in the information society are included in this volume. Another initiative was GKP's contribution to the G-8 Digital Opportunity Task Force.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE G8-DOT FORCE ON BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

In 2001, GKP presented a series of recommendations to the Digital Opportunity Task Force appointed by the Group of Eight (G8) countries. These included the following:

- The ability of the media to operate freely is necessary both for good governance and for a vibrant, internationally accepted economy. Strategies to reinvigorate the role of the media in informing and empowering the public, particularly the poor, include:
 - i) building capacities of local journalists and supporting southern-orientated news and information networks;
 - ii) encouraging strong, locally relevant content, especially community media, local language media, and media programming that relates to the marginalized, and broadcasting that is politically independent of government;
 - iii) exploiting synergies between media and ICTs, such as upgrading the capacity of radio to access ICTs;
 - iv) creating effective policy environments for empowering media such as freedom of information and anti-monopoly legislation, voluntary codes of conduct, transparency in licensing and regulation policies, and independent media development; and
 - v) sharing ownership and control between transnational media/communication industries and entities in the South.

- Local appropriation of ICT is a process where communities and groups select and adopt communication tools according to their different needs and then adapt the technologies so that they become rooted in their own social, economic, and cultural processes. The process reflects creativity and freedom of expression, and in some cases, resistance to political and cultural dominance by global media markets. For instance, community radio is low-cost, easy to operate, reaches all segments of the community in local languages, and can offer information, education, and entertainment as well as a platform for debate and cultural expression. As a grass-roots channel of communication, it maximises development potential by sharing the information, knowledge, and skills already existing within the community. It can therefore act as a catalyst for community and individual empowerment. The fact that radio is an essentially local medium is its primary strength.
- A new “radio landscape” is appearing in many developing countries. Increasingly it is privatised, deregulated, decentralised, and community-based. When radio broadcasters are trained to browse the Internet effectively and to integrate relevant information into local programmes, radio, especially rural radio, has the potential to improve local people’s access to global knowledge and information.



Conclusion

A serious discussion on media's role in democratisation, development and empowerment extends well beyond the relative merits of traditional and new media, or concerns about the digital divide. While these are certainly key elements of such a discussion, at its core are fundamental concerns of information access — how income disparities as well as educational, social and cultural factors determine the quantity, quality and cost of individuals' and communities' accessing information. As the most pervasive tools or platforms for information sharing, the media dominate the information debate, even though non-media methods have a role to play. A corollary to this concern is how much the media allow their audiences to participate in information creation, value addition and dissemination processes.

It is vitally important to ensure that definition of the 'Information Society' is not maintained as a purely technical, technologically determined one, but is widened to encompass issues of access and voice throughout society.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is an inter-governmental process, even though the UN agencies organising it and the Summit Secretariat made many arrangements to engage and accommodate non-state players from industry, academia and civil society. The Global Knowledge Partnership, as the world's first multi-stakeholder partnership on ICT for development, was able to play a crucial role in the first stage of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), in Geneva 2003, and looks forward to making a difference in the second stage in Tunis in 2005. GKP has in its fold governments, NGOs, industry and donor agencies, and can provide a neutral platform for these multitudinous players to articulate their perspectives and to find the common ground to work together to create a truly pluralistic, responsive and responsible media in the future — which will be an essential part of the Global Information Society.

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BELLAGIO SYMPOSIUM ON MEDIA, FREEDOM AND POVERTY

5th October 2003

JOINT STATEMENT

Mass Media are key components of Information Societies. They are more accessible to more people than newer ICTs, and they channel the public debate and reflection that is crucial for the functioning of democratic, participatory societies. But the public service role of media is threatened by trends of liberalisation and commercialisation, and the poor in many countries are increasingly excluded from access to and participation in mass media.

The link between poverty, disempowerment and media receives too little attention — for instance, in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). This is partly because the response of civil society to the changes and dangers facing the media is fragmented, with a division between those who focus mainly on media freedom, and those whose principal concerns are poverty and social change.

The Panos Institute decided to bring together champions of the two groups to explore the extent of common ground between them and the possibility of more united and effective support for media at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and in the future.

Panos, in association with the Communication for Social Change Consortium and the Rockefeller Foundation, organised a meeting at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Conference Centre in Italy, in October 2003, one of a series of "Fratelli Dialogues on Media and Social Change". Building on the outcomes of the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII) Media Forum, this meeting brought together 19 leading media actors and advocates to debate the relationships between media, freedom and poverty. The Joint Statement which follows, agreed by all the participants, is an important step towards effective actions towards developing the full potential of mass media in an inclusive information society.



STATEMENT

The Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom and Poverty came together to explore the links between, and develop a better understanding of current media trends and poverty. This meeting was in part an attempt to bridge differences in approach among organisations involved in media freedom, media pluralism and social advocacy. While we have differences in perspective, we agreed on the following points.

We are particularly concerned that in the World Summit on the Information Society some of the measures being considered run counter to freedom of expression; that insufficient attention is being paid to the crucial role of the media, and to the importance of poverty reduction; and that there is inadequate mapping of development objectives against the proposed actions.

We believe that urgent attention needs to be brought to bear on issues of media and poverty in ways that are rooted in the principle of freedom of expression.

1. Freedom of expression, as expressed in Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental right which underpins all other human rights, and enables them to be expressed and realised. The eradication of poverty is essential to the realisation for all peoples of the aspirations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
2. People living in poverty face particular obstacles to achieving freedom of expression and access to the media which are associated with the conditions of poverty. These obstacles include economic, social, educational, logistical, and political factors. Economic obstacles include the cost of equipment for production, distribution and reception, and the costs of licences and operation; social obstacles include gender and language; educational obstacles include literacy and language; logistical obstacles include transport, physical access and electricity; political obstacles include repression and lack of will of many states to allow democratic expression and to give voice to the most marginalised groups, as well as censorship by government, commercial and social interests.
3. The interests and concerns of people living in poverty are not sufficiently exposed in the media. Economic and market pressures on the media are tending to deprioritise journalistic investigation and reporting on issues of social and public concern. Because the poor often do not constitute a viable market, issues of concern to them are increasingly and particularly marginalised. New strategies, which address these issues and reinforce freedom of expression, need to be devised. Threats to media freedom and freedom of expression continue to come from undue political influence but we are also concerned about issues of economic control and pressure.
4. We recognise that these obstacles need to be overcome in the interests of society as a whole, and not only because in many societies poor people are the majority. When people do not have a voice in the public arena, or access to information on issues that affect their lives, and where their concerns are not reasonably reflected in the media, development tends to be undermined and catastrophes such as famines are less likely to be averted. Lack of access to communication undermines the capacity of the poor to participate in democratic processes. Frustration and alienation over lack of means of expression lead to disaffection with the political process resulting in apathy or violence.
5. Realisation of freedom of expression for people living in poverty requires: media pluralism and diversity, including diversity of forms of ownership; more equitable access to communication; support for cultural and linguistic diversity; and promotion of participation in democratic decision-making processes.

6. Action points

- i. There is a growing number of initiatives taken by the media, by people living in poverty and by other actors to address poverty reduction, including issues of voice, content and access to information and communication. These should be encouraged and actively supported. Best practices should be publicised and exchanged.
- ii. Access for the disadvantaged to information and communication should be an integral part of any strategy to reduce poverty. Such a strategy should include participatory media.
- iii. Community media should be specifically encouraged, including through access to licences and spectrum allocation. Frequencies should be allocated in a balanced way amongst community, commercial and public service media. Broadcast licensing should be administered by independent and transparent regulatory bodies.
- iv. There is a need for increased resources, better coordination and targeting of training programmes; including training journalists in poverty related issues.
- v. Involvement of media in education, and the development of media literacy, should be promoted.
- vi. Public service broadcasting mandates should include obligations to provide information and education to address issues of poverty; and to ensure that public service broadcasters provide universal service.
- vii. National communication policies should be developed that address access to communication for people living in poverty. Such policies should be developed and implemented in a transparent and participatory manner.
- viii. Professional standards and ethics of journalism, as defined by journalists themselves, should be supported and encouraged. The journalistic ethic should include sensitivity to issues of poverty.
- ix. Journalists should be provided with living standards and working conditions which enable them to realise these professional standards.
- x. South-South and South-North exchanges between media and journalists should be encouraged, including personnel, training, equipment and content.
- xi. Support should be provided for civil society organisations in working with the media.
- xii. Mechanisms should be encouraged for making newspapers more affordable and more available to the disadvantaged, including measures to cut the price of newsprint and equipment.
- xiii. The use of ICTs to provide the media with more diversity of information sources should be promoted; together with combinations of traditional and new information technologies to facilitate better access to communication for people living in poverty.
- xiv. Resources should be provided, including by public authorities, to address shortcomings in communication access for those living in poverty and to remove cost and other barriers, in ways that do not compromise freedom of expression.
- xv. More research needs to be undertaken on the implications of current media trends for poverty reduction.

This statement was agreed by:

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Article XIX

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Guillaume Chenevière, Chairman
World Radio and Television Council

All participants attended the meeting as representatives of their organisations, and the statement represents a consensus of all who participated. However, this statement has not been through a formal approval process by all of these organisations and therefore signatories should be taken to have approved this in their personal capacity.

For further information, please contact Kitty Warnock (conference organiser) at the Panos Institute (kittyw@panoslondon.org.uk).







GKP/PANOS MEDIA AWARDS 2003

Panos is global network of NGOs working with the media and other information actors to generate informed and inclusive public debate on key development issues in order to foster sustainable development. Panos was among the first organisations to join the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP).

Panos' Communication for Development Programme aims to stimulate greater public awareness, understanding and debate about Information Society issues. Its strategy to achieve this includes various activities to support high-quality media coverage and to strengthen journalists' capacity to report, analyse and debate progress towards the Information Society. One of these activities is the GKP/Panos Media Award, which was launched in 2003, a few months before the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

In August 2003, print, radio and audiovisual journalists in developing countries were invited to submit an already-published piece of "thoughtful and incisive reporting on developing countries' progress to becoming 'Information Societies.'" By the closing date in mid-October, Panos had responded to hundreds of enquiries and received 61 eligible submissions. 41 of these were from print media (including one cartoon), 14 from web journalists, four radio and two video. 26 entrants were from Asia, 25 from Africa, 7 from Latin America and three from the Pacific region; at least 18 were women (we could not always tell from the name whether an entrant was male or female).

All four of the winners were able to accept an invitation from GKP to attend the Summit in Geneva at the beginning of December – to participate in GKP and other activities in the Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) Platform, file stories back to their paper or radio station from the official World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) meeting, and receive their awards at a ceremony hosted by GKP.

The winning stories were:

- "BRAZIL IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY", a five-part radio series by Márcia de Toni for RadioBras
- "AN INFORMATION SOCIETY WITHOUT INVOLVEMENT?", a column by Ansbert Nguromo in Mwananchi Wiki Hii, a Kiswahili weekly published in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- "INDIA'S FIRST COMPUTER-LITERATE VILLAGE", an article for India's The Hindu newspaper by IT correspondent Anand Parthasarathy
- "SHIRORO: IN THE WAKE OF THE GREAT FLOOD", a two-part feature in the Daily Trust newspaper, Abuja, Nigeria, by Features Editor Tadaferua Ujorha

MÁRCIA DE TONI is a journalist for Radio Brasil, and director of Radio Brasil's São Paulo office. Her winning submission was a five-part series of radio reports on "Brazil in the Information Society", broadcast by National Radio of Brasilia and National Radio of Rio, from 8–15 October 2003.

Speaking at the GKP Pavilion in the Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) Platform at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) before receiving her award, Márcia explained that her purpose in making these programmes was to invite listeners to reflect on the meaning of "information society", the changes that have occurred and their impact. Information Society issues have been little discussed in Brazil, and she wanted to bring them into the open. When people do not understand the information society, it is difficult for them to see how they can benefit from it or how they might be disadvantaged by exclusion from it. Civil society must be mobilised and educated so that it can set the agenda for ICT policy and development towards the information society. Journalists can drive and lead this process.

ANSBERT NGURUMO is a columnist for Mwananchi Wiki Hii, a Kiswahili weekly published in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His winning article, “An Information Society without involvement?”, was published as the “Hard Questions” (Maswali Magumu) analysis column in the newspaper on 14 September 2003.

His aim in this article was to call attention to the lack of knowledge among governments and the public in Africa on issues of information society, and the lack of stakeholder participation in the development of national ICT policies. As a result of these gaps, very little is being done. Speaking at the GKP Pavilion in the Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) Platform at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Ansbert pointed out that if African leaders do not value indigenous knowledge and culture and African people’s real aspirations, the “Information Society” will mean little to Africans.

ANAND PARTHASARATHY is Information Technology (IT) correspondent of The Hindu, a national daily newspaper based in Chennai, India. His winning submission, “India’s first computer-literate village”, was published in the print and on-line editions on 4 August 2003.

He wrote this story to highlight the startling contribution of one district in Kerala towards meeting the Indian government’s target of “IT for all by 2008”. Explaining the significance of the story, he said, “Malappuram – a hilly area in the Western Ghats with almost no industries other than forest produce – has managed to confound experts in government and outside by setting itself a bold target to make one member of every family (there are 650,000 families in the district) computer-literate: that is, he or she can use a standard Windows PC, send and receive emails, write letters using Word, draw pictures or create simple animation.”

TADAFERUA UJORHA is Features Editor of the Daily Trust newspaper, Abuja, Nigeria. His winning two-part article, “Shiroro: in the wake of the great flood”, was published in his newspaper on 25–26 September 2003.

The purpose of his winning article was to illustrate vividly how the lack of means of communication impedes development and leaves people vulnerable. In the case described in his feature, people suffered the worst impact of a man-made disaster – flooding from an overflowing dam – because there was no way of warning them it was about to happen. Although the dam produces hydro-electricity, villages in its shadow have no power or electronic communication.



Brazil in the Information Society

A series of five radio programmes, produced by Radiobras – Brazil

Series produced by Márcia De Toni

Assisted by Beatriz Pasqualino; sound engineer Sandro Dalla Costa.

Broadcast on October 8th, 9th, 10th, 14th and 15th 2003

Transcripts (translated from Portuguese)

PROGRAM 1

PRESENTER: In December, representatives of countries from all over the world will gather in Geneva, Switzerland, at the First World Information Society Summit. Today the “Revista Brasil” (Brazil Magazine) program will begin a series of special reports on efforts being made by the Brazilian government and the private sector to popularize technology and access to information. Between now and next Wednesday, reporter Márcia De Toni will show how the internet and other forms of communication are being used to reduce social differences and enable the entire country to take advantage of the globalized world.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL) – Create my website, make my home page! How many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide?

REPORTER: Digital technology is the star of the 21st century. With the internet, satellites, cellphones and optical fiber highways, there’s no lack of novelties to facilitate communication. We live in the so-called Information Age. But to grasp what this new society means and how communication technologies affect and will increasingly affect our daily lives, there is nothing better than a classroom. Let’s check what’s happening in some Brazilian schools.

BACKGROUND NOISE – RECORDED AT A SCHOOL IN SÃO PAULO

REPORTER: We are in São Paulo, at the Rio Branco School, which is attended by children from the age of four to eighteen. And what is interesting here is that in all the classrooms through to the fourth grade, there is a computer connected to the internet. In addition, the school has another 73 computers at the students’ disposal in three informatics laboratories and the school library. Here by my side is Professor Márcia Macedo, coordinator of the department of educational technologies. Professor, what is the importance of the internet in education?

PROFESSOR MACEDO: We see the use of the internet as a new educational tool, which opens new possibilities. You could say the internet literally opens the school to the world, by eliminating the school’s walls. The teacher in the classroom, or the student who is studying, can consult the internet and get connected to a whole world of knowledge that is available on the web. And our concern is to help students use this information, because we realize that information by itself does not guarantee knowledge.

REPORTER: What has been the students' reaction? Does this contact with the computer, with the internet, stimulate students to study more, do more research, become more interested?

PROFESSOR: The use of the internet is a personal choice by the students. They use it with their friends. So they feel at home with the technology. What is most important is that they like it and consider it a perfectly natural way to acquire knowledge. The teacher's role is to guide them.

REPORTER: So, let's take a look at the classrooms and the informatics laboratories. Maybe we can even talk to some of the students.

PROFESSOR: Here are pre-school students, and this is their classroom computer. What we try to do is create a comfortable room that is adequate for their age group.

REPORTER: How old are they?

PROFESSOR: Six.

REPORTER: And do they already know how to use the computer?

PROFESSOR: Yes, they do. Do you want to talk to one of them?

REPORTER: Let me ask one of them here ... Hi, cutie, what's your name?

STUDENT 1: Carlos Eduardo

REPORTER: How old are you, Carlos?

STUDENT 1: Six.

REPORTER: Come here, do you know how to use that computer over there?

STUDENT 1: Yes, I do.

REPORTER: Where did you learn?

STUDENT 1: Here at school.

REPORTER: What do you use the computer for?

STUDENT 1: We do drawings ...

REPORTER: And do you like it?

STUDENT 1: Yes, I do.

REPORTER: Who else knows how to use the computer here? What's your name?

STUDENT 2: Mariana.

REPORTER: What do you use the computer for?

STUDENT 2: To learn.

REPORTER: Do you write there?

STUDENT 2: Yes, I do.

REPORTER: Do you already know how to write?

STUDENT 2: Everybody does ... even in script ...

REPORTER: Well, that's fine, everyone. Bye.

STUDENTS: Byyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyye! Byyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyye!

BACK TO THE STUDIO

REPORTER: The Rio Branco School is in Higienópolis, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in São Paulo. People in Brazil with money are getting a first-class education. They are being prepared to become aware, creative people who will play an active role in society, develop as citizens, and occupy good positions in the job market. Unfortunately, this kind of education is for a minority. Nowadays, according to the government statistical bureau (IBGE) only 14% of Brazilians have computers at home or at school, and only 10% have access to the internet. And what about the rest of the country? What will happen to the millions of Brazilians who are outside the digital world? One person who is warning about the danger of digital exclusion is Rodrigo Baggio, president of the Council for Informatics Democratization, an NGO that is very active in the technological area.

BAGGIO: What happens is that people who don't have access to the technology remain on the outskirts of this new society, excluded from all the good things that new society offers in terms of leisure, entertainment, employment, income, and, most importantly, education. So we are living in an era in which legions of technologically excluded individuals are being formed. This is why it is so important for us to promote digital inclusion. We need to integrate these low-income individuals into the new society of information and knowledge.

REPORTER: Since the previous Administration, in the late 1990s, the government has been equipping public schools with computers. The big problem is the lack of trained instructors to teach the students. Some adolescents who live on the poor outskirts of São Paulo tell the story.

BOY: My name is Rafael Rodrigues Coelho Paulino, I am 15 years old. I am in the ninth grade of a public high school run by the state of São Paulo.

REPORTER: What is the name of the school?

BOY: The Joaquim Adolfo de Araújo School.

REPORTER: Don't you have computers in your school?

BOY: My school has them, but the students don't have much access to the computers there.

REPORTER: Are you taught how to use the computer at school?

BOY: Oh, no, no. I only used the computer there once for an assignment. Never since.

REPORTER: But isn't there a teacher there who explains things to you?

BOY: No. That's precisely why we don't have access. Because there is no teacher to give classes.

REPORTER: Have you spoken to the director there, have you asked to use the computers?

BOY: Yes, yes. But there just aren't teachers to give us classes.

GIRL: My name is Poliana Aparecida Coutinho e Silva. I am 15 years old. I'm also in the ninth grade.

REPORTER: And is your school a municipal or state public school?

GIRL: No, it is a private school.

REPORTER: And do you have computers at your school?

GIRL: No. There was a time when we did, but we don't have them any more.

REPORTER: Why? What happened?

GIRL: The computers began to have problems, and they had no way to replace them, and then the teachers left, too.

REPORTER: The Ministry of Education recognizes the problem. Américo Bernardes, director of the Ministry's national program for informatics in education says that the Ministry is trying to get the computers to function.

BERNARDES: If you distribute equipment without preparing and training teachers, the equipment produces much less than it really could. That is what the students are complaining about. We are tackling the training problem at three levels. First, we have to train personnel in equipment maintenance. Second, we have to train teachers. This means more than simply knowing how to use a computer, turning it on, and starting up a text-editor. Teachers must understand the importance of the computer in the learning process. Third, there is the administrative problem. School principals should lead the way in facilitating access to computers and getting teachers involved in the process. At this moment we are training six to seven thousand people for this program.

REPORTER: It will require a gigantic effort. But the good news is that the private sector and some government agencies are deeply involved in popularizing the technology. The federal government intends to install at least one center with computers linked to the internet in each of Brazil's six thousand municipalities over the next three years, and there are already excellent digital inclusion projects being carried out in needy areas throughout the country. This is what we shall check in tomorrow's report. See you then.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL): *I Want to be in the web.....Create my website, make my home page, how many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide?*

PROGRAM 2

Presenter: Nowadays more and more of what happens in the world, in economics, politics and cultural events, involves the use of the computer. A country that does not become part of the digital era, which we call the Information Society, is going to be left behind in terms of development opportunities. In Brazil at the moment only 10% of the population has access to the internet and its vast information and knowledge resources. The good news is that the government and the private sector has been mobilized to resolve the problem. Our reporter Márcia De Toni takes a look at some of the solutions under way.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL) – *Create my website, make my home page! How many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide?*

REPORTER: There is much that remains to be done before Brazilians get into the digital era. But some steps have been taken to bring the technology to low-income families around the country. In the city of São Paulo, for example, a total of 72 so-called telecenters have been installed in poor areas of the metropolitan region where they are used by 200,000 people. In the Cidade Tiradentes, the neighborhood telecenter has become a local attraction. Here is Jesolino Alves, who coordinates the telecenter project.

RECORDED AT THE TELECENTER

JESOLINO: The telecenter has twenty computers. Two of them are used to administer the center. The other eighteen can be used for computer courses or to access the internet and look for a job. They can also be used as text editors, to make a curriculum vitae, for example.

REPORTER: The center is full today. Are you running a course right now?

JESOLINO: We have introductory courses in computer use here every day. The first class begins at 9:00 am, and others start every two hours after that.

REPORTER: How many people have taken the courses since the center opened?

JESOLINO: We opened in June 2001. Some thirteen thousand people have done the course.

REPORTER: What is the importance of the telecenter for all these people?

JESOLINO: This is a one-stop center for resolving many different types of problems. It is not just a place to learn how to use a computer or get on the internet. People come here and find out that they can use the internet to obtain information on things like government and private sector services, social security and educational opportunities. So they come here where they can resolve a lot of problems and they don't have to go downtown.

REPORTER: Now I would like to talk to some of the people who are using the telecenter and get their opinions.

JESOLINO: Sure, just go ahead.

REPORTER: Can I talk to you for a moment? What's your name?

USER: Jair Nunes.

REPORTER: How old are you, Mr. Nunes?

USER: 51.

REPORTER: Are you retired?

USER: No, not yet.

REPORTER: And why are you doing the computer course? Are you looking for a job or just trying to learn something new?

USER: Well, I just never had a chance to learn something like this before. I cannot pay for a course, you know what I mean? So I am taking advantage of this opportunity.

REPORTER: What kind of work do you do?

USER: I am a construction worker. I can be a plumber, electrician, painter – just about anything that needs to be done on the job.

REPORTER: And why would you want to use a computer?

USER: For the time being there isn't any reason. There is just a desire to learn something. A big desire.

REPORTER: Ok. Thank you.

USER: You are welcome.

TELECENTER NOISE

REPORTER: Hello, can I talk to you? What's your name and age?

USER: My name is Arraci and I am 33.

REPORTER: Are you doing one of the courses here?

USER: The first time I did the introductory course. Then I did another course on research. Now I am doing one on HTML.

REPORTER: Do you have a job?

USER: No, at the moment I am unemployed.

REPORTER: What did you do before?

USER: I was a secretary.

REPORTER: Nowadays secretaries use computers a lot, don't they? Did you know how to use a computer when you were a secretary?

USER: No, I didn't.

REPORTER: Do you think that was the reason you lost your job?

USER: It certainly was one of the reasons. Because all the jobs available nowadays require a computer course. If you don't have one, you don't get a job.

REPORTER: In your opinion, what is the importance of this telecenter for the people here in the neighborhood?

USER: Oh, it's the best thing they have done. Before the center, the women stayed home taking care of children, and the young people just wandered around the streets. At least now you have a place to go and do something useful.

BACK TO THE STUDIO

REPORTER: The city of São Paulo intends to open another 35 telecenters in low-income neighborhoods by the end of this year. Meanwhile the federal government is planning to set up at least one telecenter in every municipality in the country. NGOs are also actively involved in the quest for digital inclusion. For example, the Committee for the Democratization of Informatics (CDI) has opened 836 computer and citizenship schools in 20 Brazilian states over the last 7 years. More than 400,000 youths from low-income families have gone through CDI courses. But the objective of those schools is not to just teach people how to play with a computer. According to the CDI president, Rodrigo Baggio:

BAGGIO: If the internet is used as a tool for citizenship it can be a digital bridge leading to social inclusion. We want low-income people to be capable of using information technology in a productive manner. That means generating knowledge and local content so they can expand the possibilities of new business and markets. It also means learning skills in order to meet and deal with other people. Finally it means having the ability to take advantage of the new technology and get what it has to offer.

REPORTER: There are 20 million people who are illiterate in Brazil. And according to IBOPE public opinion survey, only 25% of all Brazilians between the ages of 15 and 67 are capable of really understanding what they read, and able to write well – the rest are functionally illiterate. That is a shocking fact. How is a country with a weak educational system, grave problems in the health sector, plus a lot of people who do not eat well, supposed to make it into the digital age? And how are these people who can barely read and write going to use the information age to their advantage? Those are some of the questions we are going to talk about in tomorrow's program.

MUSIC – (by GILBERTO GIL) – *I want to be on the web... Create my website, make my homepage. How many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide?*

PROGRAM 3

PRESENTER: The “Revista Brasil” (Brazil Magazine) program has been presenting a special series on the new Information Society. But the big question is how do you insert a nation where 67% of the population is functionally illiterate into the digital era? Our reporter, Márcia De Toni, discussed the matter with experts and educators.

MUSIC (by Gilberto Gil): *Create my website, make my homepage. How many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide?*

REPORTER: In the 21st century, the digital era, only 25% of Brazilians between the ages of 15 and 67 are capable of reading something and really understanding its meaning. They are also unable to write well. As for the rest of the population, a survey by the IBOPE opinion polling organization found that 135 million Brazilians have difficulties with the written word. However, problems because of little education do not mean that a person cannot use a computer. On the contrary. Our reporter, Beatriz Pasqualino, found an illiterate person using a computer in a so-called Telecenter in a slum neighborhood known as Paraisópolis (Paradisetown) in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The computer user was having a lot of fun and especially enjoyed typing her name.

REPORTER: What’s your name?

STUDENT: Maria Batista.

REPORTER: How old are you?

STUDENT: 28.

REPORTER: How did your life change after you discovered this Telecenter?

STUDENT: Wow, a lot has changed. My formal education consisted of a grand total of 8 days in a classroom. After that my folks took me out of school and put me to work on the farm. But now I am learning some things. I know how to type my name, my husband’s name, the names of my two children, and the name of where I live: Paraisópolis.

REPORTER: Do you like to do things with the computer?

STUDENT: I do. I can only use the computer for half an hour, but it is a good thing.

REPORTER: What do you like to do most with the computer?

STUDENT: Well, the only thing I do is a little typing. The other day I wrote some things on a piece of paper as well. I copied “city,” “citizen,” and a lot of other words.

REPORTER: So, you are learning to write, as well as how to use the computer.

STUDENT: Yes, that’s what I’m doing.

BACK TO THE STUDIO

REPORTER: People who work with computers claim that they attract users of all ages – youths and adults. Computers can be used efficiently in teaching reading and writing. They can also improve the general level of knowledge in the population – not just for students. Sergio Amadeu Silveira is the director of the National Institute of Information Technology, which is housed in the federal government. According to Silveira, the only way Brazil can resolve its problem of inequality is through the use of communication technology.

SILVEIRA: We cannot miss this opportunity to mobilize the country. First, we have to train our teachers to use information technology. It is not enough to put computers in schools. We must have trained personnel to lead the way into the digital era. Second, taking into consideration that most Brazilians are not in school, that we have a serious problem with dropouts, we have to set up an enormous network of Telecenters. That will make it possible for all these people to access learning opportunities in an informal atmosphere. Hopefully they will learn to manipulate information, store it and, eventually, transmit it to other people.

REPORTER: Besides computers and the internet, schools and social movements are using other communication technologies to develop creative and intellectual abilities in poor communities. An NGO called Novo Olhar (New way of looking at things) in São Paulo is teaching children and adolescents from low-income families to create radio programs and use video cameras.

SOUND BITE: TEACHER AND STUDENTS MAKING A VIDEO FILM

SANTIAGO: Our idea is to use the courses we give as a pretext for discussing the daily lives of participating children and adolescents. In other words, we use them to raise questions about values, prejudice, violence and drugs. We keep everybody actively engaged in an ongoing discussion of these things. We want to turn them into citizens who see the world through different eyes.

REPORTER: Paulo Santiago is the founder of Novo Olhar. The organization has given classes in communication to some 2,000 youths from low-income families since . He says the students are weak academically when they enter the courses, but improve.

SANTIAGO: We get students in the eighth grade who really have a lot of difficulty understanding texts, let alone interpreting them. That means we have to make up for lost time. We also have students who are dropouts. In that case we want them to go back to school and we work hard on that. These young people feel the need to write and express themselves. There are many reasons for them to go back to school and we do what we can to enforce that. It is important for them to study and we have been successful in getting many to go back to school.

MUSIC PRODUCED BY NOVO OLHAR STUDENTS

REPORTER: It is unnecessary to say that children and adolescents are fascinated by microphones, cameras and images. But they also get excited about the opportunity to move ahead with their own future. In one of the Novo Olhar classrooms I spoke to youths from various poor neighborhoods who were learning how to produce music.

MUSIC UP – FADE UNDER VOICE

REPORTER: Marvellous... Let's talk to these girls in this Novo Olhar classroom – only girls because it looks like the boys didn't come to school today. But the girls were the big singers of the song we just heard. Please tell us your name, your age and where you live in São Paulo.

STUDENT: My name is Helen, I am 19, I live in Brasilândia [a slum area].

REPORTER: Why are you taking this course?

STUDENT: Amplifying music, understanding how it is produced, how you do it.

REPORTER: Do you want to be a singer? Do you work in that area?

STUDENT: Yes, I want to be a singer.

REPORTER: Have you already done some singing?

STUDENT: Yes.

REPORTER: Have you sung professionally? In a bar or somewhere, or not?

STUDENT: No. I have only done small shows. A little rap.

REPORTER: Oh, is that right? Well, let's hear something. A little rap...?

STUDENT: All right. I will sing a little bit of something I like. I think this is very beautiful. (singing) ... "I want to live in a better world, I want to feel peace between us.... But to do that we need to sing altogether with one voice. We have to sing... We have to sing We gotta sing with just one voice."

BACK TO THE STUDIO

REPORTER: Helen's dream, and the dream of other girls I spoke to at the Novo Olhar NGO is to be heard on the radio some day. As a matter of fact, in a country like Brazil where there are still few computers and video cameras, the good old radio remains important in poor communities. That is one of the reason for a blossoming of so-called community radio over the last few years. It has made it possible for new voices to be heard. And that is what we will be talking about in our program tomorrow.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL): *I want to be on web...Create my website, make my homepage. How many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide?*



PROGRAM 4

PRESENTER: Today, in the fourth program of the “Brazil in the Information Society” series, reporter Márcia Detoni checked out how the radio can help in the development of low-income communities.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL): *Create my website, make my home page, how many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide.*

REPORTER: The internet is viewed today as the principal communications technology for the exchange of information, interaction, and the construction of knowledge. But, in a country like Brazil, where only 10 percent of the population has internet at home and there are thousands of people who are illiterate or semi-literate, the radio is seen as an important tool in the development of needy communities.

SOUNDTRACK OF THE “FRIENDSHIP RADIO STATION”

REPORTER: Since 1995, “Friendship Radio” has been transmitting to five poor and quite violent districts in the northwest periphery of São Paulo, among them, Vila Guarani, Jardim Carumbé, and Brasilândia. The station, founded by a residents’ association, uses the microphone to discuss the problems of the region. Father Cilto Rosemberg is one of the founders of the “Friendship Radio”.

CILTO: As part of the process of democratizing communication, radio is a medium that allows the participation of the people, popular groups, associations, church communities, and organizations. So, it is a channel, a voice, that informs, integrates the region, and opens space for these organizations to announce their events, as well as report their achievements.

SOUNDTRACK OF “FRIENDSHIP RADIO”

REPORTER: The quality of the programs on community radio stations often leaves something to be desired, because the production of information is still something very new to the residents. But many NGOs, such as Cemina, headquartered in Rio, are investing in the training of popular communicators and stimulating the production of educational programs. Taís Corral is the coordinator of Cemina, an organization that has been using the radio for 14 years to discuss problems related to women.

TAÍS: There is no doubt in my mind that radio has a basic role to play in Brazil’s development. First because it reaches all over, and then, it facilitates interaction, because it is very easy to participate. All you need is a telephone line, and you can make contact with your favorite program, which is really a way for people to become involved in citizenship and public debate. Radio is perhaps the only means that really makes this possible.

REPORTER: Community radios have received a lot of criticism from commercial stations, which are afraid of losing their audience. But specialists in development acknowledge the importance of the new stations for the country’s development. One of them is Gilson Schwartz, from the City of Knowledge, an institute of advanced studies at the University of São Paulo.

SCHWARTZ: The more people communicate, the more they will be able to produce knowledge, to discover opportunities, to evolve as individuals. So, all movement in the direction of affirming the right to communicate represents movement on behalf of human development and the progress of humanity, of individuals and communities.

REPORTER: In some remote regions of the country, the radio is the only means of communication available. In the small city of Guaribas, in Piauí, 650 kilometers from Teresina (State capital), the population got together and managed to set up the Hope community radio station.

'HOPE RADIO' SOUNDTRACK: "3:35 in the town of Guaribas. Attention to this public service announcement ...

REPORTER: One of the founders of "Hope Radio" is Raimundo Ribeiro da Silva, director of a local school. According to him, the station, inaugurated in July, is providing a new impulse to the municipality of four thousand inhabitants, 70 per cent of whom are illiterate.

RAIMUNDO: This radio offers us innumerable benefits. First, because it is able to transmit useful information to the municipality, and, second, because young people have an easier opportunity to hear music and participate. Since it is a community station, young people have room to visit the station, to see new things, and to get together at the spot where the radio is operating. Nowadays it has become the meeting-place for the city of Guaribas.

HOPE RADIO SOUNDTRACK – NORTHEASTERN MUSIC

REPORTER: Guaribas is the pilot city for the Zero Hunger program, and Hope Radio arose at the request of the community itself at the moment when other federal government actions were implanted for the development of the municipality. At the moment, there is an effervescence of community radios in the country, and the government promises to expedite the granting of licenses for these stations to function in every municipality, an initiative highly regarded by the UNESCO representative in Brazil, Jorge Werthein.

WERTHEIN: I think the activity of community radios is very important. It is necessary to support these community radios and communication projects, so that different municipalities can have instruments of communication in their cities.

REPORTER: Gradually, we are beginning to communicate with one another more and better and to face up to the big challenge of the moment: to go from being mere consumers of information to becoming producers of information and knowledge. But this is a subject for tomorrow, in the last report in the "Brazil in the Information Society" series. Until then.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL): *I want to be on the web ... Create my website, make my home page, how many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide.*

PROGRAM 5

PRESENTER: Today in the last report of our special series on Brazil in the Information Society, reporter Márcia De Toni discusses with specialists one of the greatest challenges of the moment for countries all over the world: turning the vast quantity of information we get everyday from the media into knowledge.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL) – *Create my website, make my home page, how many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide.*

REPORTER: In the Internet there are pages and pages of information and we are daily bombarded by news and data from TV, radio and newspapers. It needs a lot of discernment to avoid drowning in this info-sea. For that reason it is not enough to fight for digital inclusion and access to information. We need to identify the information that can produce knowledge. Rodrigo Baggio, from the Council for Informatics Democratization (CDI) explains:

BAGGIO: From the moment we use information for productive action, qualitative action, we generate knowledge. And this knowledge can create new contacts, new work, new learning. One example that comes to my mind is the School for Informatics and Citizenship in the interior of Para State (northern region). The problem in this region was pollution of the river that was killing fishes. The students of our School for Informatics and Citizenship noted that if they moved the fishes to another area they could save them and reactivate the fishery and the local economy. So using the data bank and a text editor they started a series of awareness campaigns and recording of the fishes moved to other places, and more than 60 thousand fishes were saved by that local action. So this is a concrete example of information and knowledge developing a community and transforming lives.

REPORTER: The role of teachers in schools and instructors at informatics' centers like CDI is exactly to guide the students and the population in the search for the best information. Gilson Schwartz, academic director of Knowledge City, a center for advanced studies at USP (University of São Paulo), highlights that another fundamental step for development is to evolve from information consumer to producer of information:

GILSON: The key moment is when the person in contact with media such as Internet, TV or radio looks and thinks: "I am not just going to consume. I am going to produce." I believe this is the transforming moment. It is very difficult. We are used to seeing those technologies as "sources of" instead of "channel for". They are excellent sources of information. One already needs a lot of critical vision to separate the good from the bad, the useful from the useless. The crucial point is for each one of us to ask ourselves: Will I be able to use this for producing knowledge, to connect myself and become a citizen in the world, or will it be just one more source of information? This turning point from consumer to producer of knowledge is the key to permanent learning, a key to the constant production of a better self. From that comes personal development followed by community development and country development.

REPORTER: It will be a long time before we reach this turning point. But most specialists seem to be optimistic about the possibilities of Brazil slowly finding a place in the new Information Society. The UNESCO representative in Brazil, Jorge Werthein, thinks the country's awareness of the problem is positive:

WERTHEIN: If we compare Brazil to the rest of the developing countries, compared with the vast majority of them – without even mentioning Latin America – Brazil is doing quite well. The country has a very well developed technology and a good posture internationally on subjects such as Information Society and Knowledge. It has been recognized for that. There are technologies that have been widely used, such as distance learning via television, radio and Internet. I agree we should do more. But we are talking of a country of 170 million people. I think we should struggle for the inclusion of the rest of society and Brazil will get phenomenal results.

REPORTER: Extending the benefits of the new Information Society to 170 million people demands a lot of political will from the governments and a lot of mobilization and pressure from civil society. If that is not done we will see a big rise in social inequality. For all of us, the time has gone when a school or university degree was enough to get by for our whole lifetime. In this new Information Society we never stop learning and the ones not connected will face difficulties in the war for survival.

MUSIC (by GILBERTO GIL): *I want to be in the web.....Create my website, make my home page, how many gigabytes does it take to build a raft and a boat to sail this info-sea, to catch the ebb of the info-tide.*

END

MÁRCIA DE TONI is a 41-year-old Brazilian journalist with a degree in Media Studies from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and a degree in Law and Social Sciences from the Pontific Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul. She is the head of the Radio Department at Radiobras (Radio Brazil) and head of Radiobras São Paulo office. She has been in the media field for 20 years, reporting for several Brazilian and international news and broadcasting companies, among them the BBC World Service in London (1990–1999), the major Brazilian newspaper Folha de São Paulo (2000–2002) and the Reuters office in São Paulo (2002 – 2003).

Her main writing interest is reporting international current affairs and social and development issues. One of her reports for the BBC World Service, on drug addiction in Brazil, was awarded the UNDCP (United Nation Drugs Control Program) Brazilian National Journalism Prize in 1997. Another report for the BBC, on Education in Brazil, was nominated for the Ayrton Senna Media Award in 2000 and for the Embratel Media Award. Márcia is finishing a Masters' Degree Course in Communication and Development at the University of São Paulo (USP), where she also lectures on Radio History and Radio Documentaries and Features.



An Information Society without involvement?

By Ansbert Ngurumo, Dar es Salaam

As the World Summit on Information Society in Geneva draws close, what is Africa's place in the world of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)? Professor Guy Berger, head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa, is not optimistic.

He says Africa is not favoured in its involvement in ICT, as it has not generated any continental perspective to counter the imported outlook and approach in the entire concept.

"ICT is used to generate contents from the developed world, especially the United States," he says. In his view, even the politics of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has not helped to resolve the problem.

He accepts some of its good effects, but cites a number of limitations in NEPAD's documents that are likely to hinder ICT's potential in Africa. They include the document's over optimism on ICT's role, which limits Africa's right to free expression by insisting it should be "responsible expression".

The don points out that NEPAD's mention of the need for free expression was a positive step but it was deterred by the inclusion of the clause "responsible expression", which according to him is meant to muzzle the very freedom it is set to protect. But he mentions South Africa with confidence, saying it has exhibited commitment in practically promoting freedom of expression.

Regarding the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) the Professor is of a view that African governments are likely to compromise their free expression, as they are more inclined to see Information and ICT in terms of economics and investment, and to co-operate with what he terms as the "catch-up" mentality.

He points out that, after all, NEPAD and its e-Africa Commission are weak or relatively silent on the role of civil society, questions of content quality, cultural development, international inequalities and imperialism and the role of media and journalism.

Are Africans sidelined? Without Africans having a say and contribution and without their indigenous knowledge, wisdom and culture being equally valued, Africa's moral involvement in the World Summit on Information Society is eroded.

It is obvious that the poor will not be represented. The rich will have their convictions rubber-stamped, and it will end up being the Northern Information Society, which will be hard for Africa to handle.

To this notion, Ayenew Haileselesie, an Ethiopian freelance journalist remarks: "In these issues, Africa – underdeveloped as it is – should look into itself. It cannot compete with the developed world, for it has to address its internal problems of food and security, wars and conflict resolution and others."

He challenges governments and continental organisations to make ICT compatible with African needs. To Haileselesie, international debates such as the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) favour developed countries. African leaders should shun them and find their own mechanism of addressing Information Society problems.

However, Tanzania's Minister for Communications and Transport has different, optimistic views. He says Africa has a lot to gain and contribute. He takes Tanzania as an example, saying we cannot ignore strides African countries are making in the ICT sector.

According to him, Tanzania's situational review shows a growing fixed telephone network with a current switching capacity of some 235,000 subscribers. The network, operated by TTCL (a monopoly on Tanzania mainland) and Zantel as a duopoly in Zanzibar, has 100% regional coverage and over 80% district coverage. The present challenges of the network are low switching capacity, inadequate transmission capacity and reach and limited access networks (local loop) for provision of broadband services.

The country has a growing mobile cellular network, by four licensed operators, with about 750,000 subscribers. Mobile networks now have 100% regional reach and about 25% district coverage and also coverage of main highways/roads.

Collectively, the mobile and fixed networks give a combined teledensity for Tanzania of about 1.2% (12 phones for 1000 inhabitants). There are sixteen Data Service Providers and 23 ISPs. Their efforts put together gives Tanzania a growing IP-backbone, currently with 10 international data gateways/hubs, 50 Points of Presence (PoPs), with 75% regional coverage and about 20% district coverage. In terms of bandwidth, we have about 100Mbps local bandwidth for low latency applications and over 50Mbps international bandwidth for data and Internet communications.

Associated with the growing core and access networks are fully developed distribution channels and customer support expertise.

The minister also boasts of fast ICT diffusion via emerging cafes in the regions and districts, 24 television broadcasters with 100% regional and 100% district coverage, demand driven, 18 radio broadcasters with a reach covering all regions and districts and Inland fibre optic cables for high capacity transmission being built by utilities.

It is true, these resources have provided a variety of services to government departments, corporate customers, educational institutions, cafes and residential users. Sector players now manage businesses with a focus on cutting operational costs, expanding service reach/coverage, reducing service prices to customers, creating and delivering new services and supporting customers electronically.

Statistics also show examples in harnessing ICT for business and public service delivery, whereby several Banks now offer real-time e-banking services over Wide Area Networks (Virtual Private Networks) country-wide. Some of the banks offer electronic payment services using smart cards (CRDB Tembo Card).

Many business organisations now consider broadband data services over corporate WANs and VPNs as a necessity for profitable operations. Through these, businesses now use email communication and web interfaces as a superior way to speed up operations and to cut operational costs.

The Government has a national-wide electronic payment system.

Many universities are connected to the Internet. There is also a dream of diffusing Internet services into primary and secondary schools. Video conferencing and multimedia streaming services have started.

However, the country lacks an overall policy and poor harmonisation of initiatives. This has led to random adoption of different systems and standards, unnecessary duplication of effort, and waste of scarce resources, especially through the loss of potential synergies.

Tanzania embarked on the development of ICT about ten years ago. In April 2002, the government appointed the Ministry of Communications and Transport (MCT) as a National ICT Coordinator and a focal point for all ICT related issues.

According to the minister, the National ICT Policy is aligned to this vision statement: "Tanzania to become a hub of ICT Infrastructure and ICT solutions that enhance sustainable socio-economic development and accelerated poverty reduction both nationally and globally."

Whether this is what Africa needs to make an Information Society is still a question to address. There is still much to do and exhibit from a practical point of view.

In June this year, a government-owned newspaper, The Daily News, published a story saying (Tanzania's) President Benjamin Mkapa, had been invited to attend the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, Switzerland come December.

The story was lacking in one aspect. It did not tell the readers the essence of the summit and the president's physical presence there. Moreover, the writer never bothered to explain what the concept 'information society' was all about.

Two months later, I did a survey on whether Tanzania was an Information Society. Among 27 randomly selected interviewees, twenty admitted they did not know what was meant by the term or concept Information Society.

As I followed up my country's preparations for the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), I discovered that at global level, Tanzania was renowned as being quite actively involved in the Information Society (IS) issues. And while attending a training on Journalism and Information Society issues at Rhodes University early September this year, I found so much positive remarks on Tanzania from participants, regarding its endeavour to promote ICT.

However, there are more facts to look at. Tanzania has a good number of draconian laws muzzling press freedom, and has been sitting on media stakeholders' draft for the Freedom of Information Act for over two years now – without reasonable explanation. Even as the president prepares to represent Tanzanians at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), his country lacks a Freedom of Information Act.

Again, it has been proved true that the responsible ministry for ICT issues in the country is a poor communicator. It has not reached out to the public for contributions or comments on the ICT policy and the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva.

IS stakeholders are asking: what is the president taking with him to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)? What has his government forwarded to Preparation Committees?

This is one area where ICT activists and stakeholders would like to advise His Excellency to act: that prior to his trip to Geneva, let him convene a stakeholders meeting in Tanzania for a common and inclusive vision and statement at the summit. They would also like to pressure him to order release of the Freedom of Information Act draft, which has been in the Prime Minister's office for so long without explanation to the public. Can he ensure it is taken to parliament for debate and enactment in October?

There is more Tanzanians would like to request their president before he makes for Geneva. Would he assure them that he will not support any oppressive clause against freedom of expression in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration – whatever its coinage?

They would like to ask: How can Tanzania become an Information Society when there is a Broadcasting Law that restricts radio and TV stations from broadcasting beyond 25 percent of the country coverage from where they are stationed? How can they reach the rural areas where most people – over 80 percent – live?

Interestingly enough, the law binds local broadcasters as the giant foreign media like BBC, CNN, Deutsche Welle and others storm in and cover the entire country.

While Africa Services Statistics show that Gambia has an average of 14, Ivory Coast 13, Botswana 11, Gabon 7, Ethiopia 5 cities with Points of Presence (POP), Tanzania – with a population of 35 million – has only four, in the same category with Burundi, a much smaller country. Does that suffice to make Tanzania an Information Society?

The bone of contention is this: the Tanzanian government has been doing good preparations regarding the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), but it has ignored public participation. This is why the president has to save his face before making for Geneva. It is not too late to mend; at least in this regard.

END

ANSBERT NGUROMO studied Systematic Philosophy and Journalism, and has been a journalist since 1998, in different capacities ranging from reporter to news editor and assistant editor. In 2002, he was involved as monitor in the Media Monitoring Programme for MISA-TAN, the Tanzanian branch of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). Currently, he is a columnist with Mwananchi Wiki Hii, a weekly edition of Mwananchi newspapers, published by Mwananchi Communications Ltd in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He is also consulting editor for a newly launched monthly children's magazine published by the Youth Concern Trust (YUCOTRUST) in Dar es Salaam.

He also works as co-ordinator of the News Analysis Centre at IDEA in Tanzania. This is a centre for democratic and strategic management. He is affiliated to the African Economics Editors Network (AEEN) and the Water Media Network (WMN).

He has covered international conferences including the 2003 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, for which he was one of 50 winners of a World Bank Scholarship. He also participated in the Highway Africa Conference at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, in August 2003, for which he originally developed this article.

The original story was in Kiswahili, Tanzania's national language spoken all over the country by about 34 million people. The newspaper that published it is the main serious paper currently leading in circulation. Recent statistics put its circulation at 30,000 copies daily. The column in which the story was published is Maswali Magumu, which means "Hard Questions". It is one of central pieces in the paper, attracting a variety of serious and critical readers.

India's first computer-literate village

By Anand Parthasarathy, India

Malappuram Aug. 3. Ten days from today, Chamravattom village, in Triprangode panchayat of Kerala's Malappuram district, will stake a unique claim to fame: the scenic hamlet on the banks of the Bharathapuzha, is slated to become the nation's first 100 per cent computer-literate village. On that day, at least one member of every family in the village – there are 850 families – will have completed basic computer literacy training. He or she can now handle a personal computer, create and edit pictures, compose text using a specially-designed Malayalam language tool, surf the Internet, send email and make Internet telephony voice calls.

They have been learning these skills at the local "Akshaya" centre, a one-room facility equipped with five PCs, a server and a printer with a dial-up Internet connection. The exact day when Chamravattom completes its self-appointed task can be predicted with accuracy because for two months now, villagers have been keeping the centre busy with nine or ten 90-minute teaching shifts everyday, Sunday included. Every slot is booked in advance. Housewives take the afternoon slots. The men come late in the evening. And every one of them will complete 10 lessons each, using a specially-developed interactive CD-based tutor, attractively packaged with a Malayalam commentary, animated games to help illustrate the concept of tools such as mouse, keyboard and a microphone-headphone combo. After they have completed the 15 hours of instruction, the learners take an online test. And when they answer all questions correctly, the screen flashes the message they have waited to read: "Congratulations: you have attained computer-saksharatha!"

Chamravattom is only the first success story in one of the most innovative literacy campaigns carried out in this country. Four other clusters of villages are already vying for the honour of being declared the country's first computer-literate panchayat. Will it be Marakara, or Chelembra, Kootilangadi or Mampad? Competition is intense and sometimes Akshaya centres stay open after midnight to enable day-time workers to complete their lessons. The Padinjattumuri centre in Kootilangadi panchayat, has started a special late-night session exclusively for autorickshaw drivers who ply their vehicles all day – and learn computers at night.

All this activity is at present restricted to one district – Malappuram – where the State's computer-literacy campaign is being tried out. Indeed this was one literacy campaign inspired by the very people it is set up to serve. Exactly a year ago, the Malappuram District Panchayat approached the State Government for release of funds under the People's Planning initiative: "We want to lease 7000 computers so that every panchayat in the district will have access to computer technology," they said. After bouncing the proposal between departments for some weeks, the Government asked the State Information Technology Mission to help. The result was the Akshaya programme.

The chronically cash-strapped State could ill afford grandiose schemes – no matter how worthy. The Malappuram District Panchayat decided to involve budding entrepreneurs and created an attractive proposition: set up an Akshaya centre – one for every 1000 of the district's approximately 6.5 lakh families. No centre would be more than a kilometre or two away from anyone's home. Every centre would have a minimum of 5 PCs and would impart the 10-lesson, 15-hour training package charging the individual just Rs. 2 per lesson, that's Rs. 20 for the course [1,000 Rupees = c US\$22; 1 Rupee = 2 US cents, approximately]

But for every citizen trained, the panchayat would release Rs. 120 to the Akshaya Centre. To enable young entrepreneurs to come forward, the IT Mission persuaded some leading banks in the district – the State Bank of Travancore, Canara Bank, the South Malabar Grameen Bank and the Malabar District Cooperative Bank – to advance loans of Rs. 1.5 lakhs to Rs. 2 lakhs [1 lakh = 100,000; Rs1.5 lakhs = US\$3,300]. Since a minimum of Rs 1.2 lakhs would be payable to every centre by way of panchayat subsidy, the banks were not taking too much of a risk.

The IT Mission also organised a special Computer Show in the district, where prospective Akshaya Centre operators could see the hardware and obtain good deals. They represented such a big customer base that hundreds of PC makers turned up. Interestingly, over 80 per cent of the orders were won by Kerala-based assemblers from the small sector – indirectly boosting the local PC industry.

Today, across the breadth of this hilly district, long dubbed ‘backward’, you cannot drive more than a few kilometres without finding a brand new blue board which says “Akshaya e-service centre”. Incredibly, the core team behind Akshaya is just 20-strong. They include the coordinator, M.S. Vinod, who has moved from the State capital to Malappuram town a year ago – and has been too busy to return. The District Programming Officer, Anvar Sadath, himself the author of two popular computer texts in Malayalam, is now coordinating the release of Phase Two software tools – so that the centre can offer new courses after the basic literacy target is met. “By November we are confident that Malappuram’s target of 6.5 lakh computer literate families will be met,” says the Mission Coordinator, Geeta Pious. Work is going apace to extend the Malappuram experiment State-wide: From January, it will be replicated in all other districts over a two-year time frame. The task is exactly 10 times the size of the prototype – since the State has about 65 lakh households.

Till date the State has spent just Rs. 150 lakhs [US\$330,000] on the programme – mainly to support the small core team and partner agencies such as the Centre for Development of Information Technology (CDIT) and Keltron which have assisted in creating software tools.

The real money has come from the decentralised panchayat funding. When all the costs are totted up, it may emerge as one of the most cost-effective learning experiments anywhere – with a State’s people empowering themselves at the cost of about Rs. 100 for every family, paid out of their own tax payments.

ANAND PARTHASARATHY took his Bachelors degree in Instrumentation at Poona University (India) in 1970 and his Masters degree in Information Systems at Birmingham University (UK) in 1975. He served with the Indian Defence Research Department for over 20 years, as Systems Scientist and Programme Manager in the Indian Missile Programme before joining “The Hindu”, a leading Indian newspaper, as its Information Technology correspondent in 1994. He is currently the paper’s Consulting Editor (IT) based in Bangalore India. He has also reported regularly on environment issues in India and has written a monograph on the media role in the saving of the Silent Valley tropical rain forest in South India.

Shiroro: In the wake of the great flood

By Tadaferua Ujorha, in Niger State, Nigeria

PART 1

In Niger State if a man mentions that he is going 'overseas' this does not instantly imply that he will shortly board a flight to London or Washington. Rather this is a sad reference to the 400 communities or so, which lie within the otherwise idyllic valleys of the Niger and Kaduna rivers in the state. These communities are largely composed of rural and disadvantaged groups. Thus a visit to these communities is simply to make a trip 'overseas'. This is a strong metaphor for underdevelopment and it vividly underlines the communication crises in the area. There is some humour here, and much pain too, for the word implies some form of alienation, and disconnectedness. It is truly a very apt description of the quality of life found in the valley, and the way in which the area is quite practically cut off from Niger State, and the federation, by implication.

Recently, the valleys of the Niger and Kaduna rivers were inundated when the floodgates of the Shiroro dam were opened, and excess water was instantly released into the valley. It seems that the dam itself would have collapsed if the waters had not been released. In the wake of this, 25 communities were submerged and 14,000 persons were displaced, massive farms disappeared as the waters 'colonised' territory, houses collapsed, cattle, boats and many other properties vanished, and the communities were left with scars, both physical and psychological.

Many paradoxes prevail within the valley under consideration here, and these paradoxes justify the urgent call for the establishment of the Hydro-electric Power Producing Areas Development Commission (HYP-PADEC). The massive Shiroro dam sits in a corner like a behemoth, and it is a major source of electricity for most of the country, but the communities which form a perfect ring around the dam do not have electricity supply. The dam itself, and Zumba which lies within its immediate shadow, are the only places where electricity is obtainable, and this situation has immediate implications for development. At night the bright lights from the dam seem to mock the rather dark communities which play host to it.

The absence of electricity supply automatically means that many cannot watch television or even have access to education. The quality of education and even security must therefore leave much to be desired. Covering a vast and unbelievably green area, the valley does not provide a hint of a telephone service, or even the current mobile phones which could be very useful at times of a crisis such as this one. Massive NEPA towers dot the environment but these signify nothing to the inhabitants of the area. It is not surprising that the Governor of Niger State, Engineer Abdulkadir Kure recently told journalists that warnings of danger failed to get through to the communities because of poor communication facilities, which clearly shows that if the area is extended the benefits of electricity supply, for instance, then much would change for the people. This of course would be in the area of communication which is so important in an area such as the valley where the fluctuations in nature can affect man for good or for bad. Let the reader imagine a situation where the fluctuations of the River Niger can be viewed via the internet. This simply means that by this method people could be evacuated from areas which are most likely to be threatened by the floodwaters, and much could be saved and improved upon under these circumstances. This has important implications for development, the siting of industries, residences and much else. Development and communication are related pluses for any community.

At the village of Goffa, Daily Trust was shown six houses which had been damaged by the floodwaters. In one or two places sticks are used to support the houses to prevent them from falling outwards. In other places the huts had collapsed altogether, and there were signs from the fields that waters had clearly inundated the area until these had recently been drained off, or disappeared, owing to the natural process of evaporation. But the trip to Goffa is worth describing. The only proper road stops at a village from where one secures a motorcycle for the movement to Goffa. An undulating path leads one to Goffa, through small streams and wobbling bridges. If the rider is a kind of stuntman then you have to hang on tight as the journey progresses. Occasionally, hunters and farmers pass by, and the hills give promise of much fun for the tourist or adventurer. There is no light at Goffa, and the people keep up a continuing lament, but they are kind, very kind. It is nice to see how the beauty of fine manners have been preserved in this most neglected environment.

There is a second village which also goes by the name of Goffa also, where the principal inhabitants are fishermen. Here the fishermen indicate that they lost most of their canoes and engine boats to the flood. Soon they show this reporter the only net they have left. Clearly, they thirst for happier times. A similar situation also unfolded at Kwatan Galkogo, a neighbouring village.

At the village of Dnassa many engine boats, farming items, houses, animals and farmlands were lost to the floods, and many persons have had to migrate to neighbouring communities. There is a high level of internal migration within the valley, and this has negative implications for planning and development. The villagers had other complaints to make though. They stated that they need schools and hospitals. The former school has collapsed and its 420 pupils are now idle. There are no good roads and there is no electricity supply. They were very particular about this. The villagers added that they had no early warning from NEPA about the impending release of water from the Shiroro dam. All of a sudden they discovered that massive waters had come upon them. Another frightening paradox in the valley is the fact that the village of Shiroro which gave the dam its name is itself a symbol of neglect and want, despite lying within the very borders of the dam.

There are no proper roads connecting the nine communities which this reporter went to. In fact the best of the roads simply looked like glorified footpaths, and this is putting it mildly. To facilitate communications within the valley, the administration of Governor Kure has initiated a ferry service which does a shuttle between the communities in the valley. Here we have a physical illustration of the serious communications gap here, which is worsened by the low level of development. To an extent this has assisted communications within the area.

The trip through the valley has led to many discoveries as well: River Kaduna itself seems to be conveying a great amount of debris to places further afield. Mattresses, cups, spoons, plates, printed matter, and much else, occasionally passed our boat as we made for some of the islands in the valley. New islands have formed in the whole flooded area, because the released waters occupied low lying sectors of the land, and in the natural movement of the waters, new islands were formed. The immediate consequence of this is that many were dispossessed of their farmlands, and choice fishing areas. With the initial neglect of these communities, these are clearly the true dispossessed of the Shiroro valley.

Later as we were approaching Goffa by boat, the boatman pointed to a vast body of water before us, and he added that the whole area was his farm once upon a time. It was a bit of a surprise that he was not in tears, although all the signs towards this were there. Perhaps the vast waters beneath us were simply illustrative of a community in tears.

PART 2

Once in a while nature seems to make a golden turn in favour of those who are in need. Galkogo is one community where such remarkable truism is being played out on a daily basis. Gold abounds in the area, and many have been thrust into great wealth on this account. On the way there, by means of a motorcycle, which traversed a narrowing and muddy path, Daily Trust encountered young girls of primary school age panning for gold in a stream. Perhaps they should have been in school, but here they were in life's own golden school. They had spades and all the vital patience which the task requires. In Galkogo itself those who have succeeded in mining have bought motorcycles and generators. To a degree the quality of life has radically altered. Here the people seem to be a bit more enthusiastic about life, and this is quite natural.

In an interview with Daily Trust, Comrade Mohammed Erena, the Secretary to the Niger state government stated that mining for gold in the area is an illegal activity, but he said that solid minerals belong to the federal government. In his words: "The solid minerals belong to the federal government, and the state cannot go into it, but we can hold these areas in trust for the federal government. We know there is gold. The United Nations once sent a team of geologists last year, and they did a survey, and though their survey was on water and water related issues, in the process of doing that, they came upon gold, and they informed us that the gold we have around this area is of commercial magnitude. According to them if real mining commences there, what was obtained in South Africa would be a child's play." There is a mass video centre in Galkogo too, and it seems to illustrate the new self-confidence inspired by a number of mining activities in the area.

Most of the nine flooded areas covered by this reporter are Gbagyi speaking communities and the inhabitants are largely farmers, and a number of hunters and fishermen are present too. One community which graphically illustrates the crisis which manifested in the wake of the floods is Jiko. A trip by Land Rover gets one to Guni, from where a boat ride is necessary to get to Jiko and the neighbouring village of Manta. Boat rides are the regular means of transportation and your pilot may fall asleep sometimes as mine did. Jiko provides evidence of much devastation. There are scenes of flooded farms and withered crops. Maize, Banana and Plantain fields have all been destroyed, and in some cases it is necessary for the farmer to carry out an emergency harvest. Indeed all crops here look quite sad and forlorn. The villagers complain about the dam which has turned out to be a curse rather than a blessing. At Manta, the local situation even before the flood, left much to be desired. The village clinic is in poor health, and it looks unbelievably inadequate. There are two beds there. One has no pillow case or bed sheet, while the other is made of poor cane. The walls are badly in need of paint, and another section of the clinic has a ceiling which looks positively rotten. On the whole the clinic does not seem fit enough to carry out its role. Clinics in the valley generally fit this description. The nearby primary school was recently renovated by the Emirate Tax Fund, and a former block of classrooms had collapsed, Daily Trust is told, which justified the renovation exercise in the first instance.

The District Head of Manta lamented that there is poor communications between the Shiroro dam and his domain. He stated that they were informed by NEPA that in two weeks time waters would be released from the dam, but he was surprised to see that the waters came much earlier than expected. It also seems that the few islands within the valley are significant to the numerous communities of farmers and fishermen, but the villagers complain that these little islands come under much buffeting from the dam waters, and sometimes these islands are thoroughly inundated. Jiko and Mantu provide grim pictures of the flood and its impact within the Shiroro valley.

Perhaps one sign of the neglect the environment has endured, is the plaque of the foundation stone for a bridge which is supposed to link the communities in the valley. Laid by General Abdulsalami Abubakar in May 1999, no work has yet taken place there. In fact the plaque was surrounded by weeds, and grass had to be cut so that a picture could be taken. Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP) an Abuja based NGO some years ago did a thorough study of this valley and their observations are documented in the work titled 'Damned by the Dam'.

However, in a number of places one came across young farmers busy at work. There is a conscious effort to keep hope alive here. Then there is the unpleasant sight of sticks raised to support buildings which had been buffeted in the wake of the flood, but which today are still standing, almost miraculously.

There is no sign of electricity in any of the communities visited. Roads are non-existent, and even the effort to improve one self is limited by the quality of communication facilities. For instance pupils at the primary school at Manta have to go to Gurmana, some 50 kilometres away whenever they have to write the Common Entrance Examination. Sometimes they need to go to Erena which is a total of 70 kilometres further. The situation is always worsened if there is the slightest problem with their boats, and this is the basic means of transport and communication in the valley. Of course if there was electricity supply, this would mean the possibility of e-mails and information, which means that some journeys may not have been undertaken. The words of the District Head of Manta are quite helpful in this matter.

"I was born here but I have never seen a flood as serious as this one. Floods have changed so many things for us. Now we no longer harvest fish in abundance as in the early days. Formerly, our markets used to burst with fish. We then had fish in excess of the local demand, and then we used to transport the remaining fish to Minna and then these were great in number. Today, this is not so. The government should please help us."

Comrade Mohammed Erena, secretary to the Niger State Government shed light on recent events in these communities when he told Daily Trust that most of the communities living downstream are very close to the river bank, and this is because some of the people find it difficult to leave the very special spots where their ancestors had once lived.

On the resettlement of communities which played host to the dam initially, he said "We have a situation where majority of the communities that were resettled, were not even provided with basic amenities like electricity and water supply. Even schools for the children of these resettled communities were ignored. Even in the so-called resettled areas, you would find a lot of contradictions in the sense that you would encounter a resettled community not able to enjoy facilities provided. For instance, as for the NEPA Secondary School in Shiroro, not all members of the community have the opportunity to send their children to that school. We battled with that aspect for long, and it was just recently that NEPA began to live up to expectation. We have just started talking to NEPA about the electrification of some of the communities that were resettled many years ago, and nobody bothered about linking them with electricity, not to talk of a portable water supply."

He decried the absence of roads in the area. Indeed this reporter was able to get to many of the communities because the Secretary to the state government was kind enough to provide a Land Rover, a driver and an amiable guide in the person of Sanusi Mohammed, Special Assistant to the SSG.

Commenting on communications within the valley, Comrade Mohammed Erena had this to say "Even with the Shiroro dam, you cannot talk of a telephone linkage as such, talk less of the other communities. But recently the local government ministry decided to tackle head on the problem of communications, at least in terms of telephone lines. The wish is to have a rural telephone system. We are hoping that in the very near future, most of these remote local governments would have access to rural telephone lines, so that we

would be able to communicate with them easily, because there is an obvious communications problem.” Indeed much property would have been saved if electricity supply and its benefits which include televisions, computers etc had been a regular feature of life in the valley. A better informed and ready citizenry would have been living in the valley.

Given the accumulated and complex problems suffered by communities located close to where hydro-electric power structures exist, there has been a call for the establishment of a body which would look into the problems suffered by these areas. Communities in the states of Niger, Kwara, Kebbi and Kogi are the special areas to be focused on by this body. This body is to be known as the Hydro-Electric Power Producing Areas Development Commission (HYPPADEC). The National Assembly has passed a Bill in this respect, and it is hoped that President Olusegun Obasanjo would endorse the Bill shortly. If these floods, bad roads, poor communication facilities and years of official neglect etc would lead to the establishment of such a unique structure, which has serious implications for life, development and communications in the area, then the flood itself, terrifying as it was, may have been ringed by beams of hope.

END

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He is interested in researching how modern communications systems expand the frontiers of oral literature in African society. Oral literature has a rich and poetic character, and this research will show how modern communications systems are playing a vital role in enriching and sustaining contemporary verbal systems, and this is an essential part of social and cultural development.





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