DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA INNOVATIONS IN AFRICA

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'MEDIA'   >>> 'DEMOCRACY'

- Usual point of departure …
- Media provides the necessary information for citizens to make informed choices

- BUT
- Assumes
  - a top-down view of media +
  - a representative style of democracy

Media & Democracy – a shifting terrain

- Concepts of both 'media' and 'democracy' are ever evolving, the terrain is constantly moving – two seismic plates colliding with each other in ways that impact on both.

Teasing out 'Media'

- Mainstream media were historically divided into different interest groups – aligned with different political parties, ethical/tribal divisions
- Still the case in many countries (e.g. Kenya)
- Different viewpoints and agendas were seen to be 'balanced out' by diversity of ownership & interests
- However, still top-down, non interactive, non-participatory

Teasing out 'Media'

- Historically democratic model was "you vote, we rule", plethora of independent presses kept communication open. This has changed. Free fast access to information now happens on the Net.

Teasing out 'Democracy'

- Representative democracy – or –
- Participative democracy ?

- Vote and wait another four years and vote again
- Or

- Vote and then take part in the active participation of democratic ethos

Democracy In Africa

- Nascent – not what it is in developed countries
- E.g.. Laws in Zimbabwe prohibit public gatherings
- DRC – democratic elections in
- Thus not a truly democratic country, yet the media still do have a role in developing a democratic milieu

Embrace Democracy 2*
(Don Tapscott, 2009)**

Don't broadcast to the Net Geners.

Think interaction, not unidirectional communications.

Think enablement, not control.

*with apologies to Net 2!
** *Grown up Digital*, McGraw-Hill, New York

Accountability of Government

- Government must be

accountable to its constituencies
- Needs to illustrate responsiveness

Responsibilities of Media

- In turn, media need to understand the changing nature of democracy in Africa, especially with regards to majority rule and the problems of protecting minority rights

Media legitimacy depends on creating trust, acting   with

integrity

- Honesty, transparency and accountability =   consideration of citizens (as opposed to audiences)
- Constant scrutiny and media savvy means that readers/ listeners/ viewers/ bloggers are not going to let politician or the media get away with too much for too long
- Rebuilding integrity is harder than losing it!

Media Innovations

- What do we mean by 'media

innovation' in the African context?

- Not a clear distinction between 'new' and 'traditional' media
- Important role of community media
- Need for diversity WITHIN media – including non-commercial media
- Need for language diversity within media
- Important role of externally produced media (e.g.. Zimbabwe)

Public Service Media

- Entertain, Inform + Educate
- Diversity of ownership

- Diversity of Content
- Universal access (coverage – distribution)
- Universal access (talking the right language on the right platform)

Content

- Access to information and education on a wide variety of topics
- 'Citizen Education' not narrowly defined as political information or politcal campaigns
- Economics, global climate change, agricutlure, health etc. – are all essential for full participation in civic and national

life.

'Alternative' Voices

- Community Media – including radio and forms of tradition communicative practices - remain important
- The media monopoly of government-owned media is breaking up in some countries: e.g. Kenya, Zambia, Rwanda, Nigeria
- However, Community Media often not robust
- Nevertheless, Syndicate called for the licensing of more community radio stations throughout Africa.

'New Media'?

- What constitutes 'new media'?
- A process of labeling – distinguishes digital, electronic media from print and broadcast
- Does not imply that 'old media' are redundant
- Radio/ newspapers remain important for old and new constituencies
- Digital divide emphasises importance of thinking about entire media ecology, not just electronic media

'New Media' in Africa?

- Stress limitations of digital divide
- Cellphones have the greatest penetration of all new media
- What

New Generation – New Politics?

- Baby boomers historically politically conservative
- Born into post-war plenty – dominant economic milieu expansion and inflation
- Absolute belief in 'The Market' (Thatcherite position)
- Net generation more cynical –

lived through the 'bust' after the boom and low-level continuous warfare (Middle East, terrorism)

- Tend to be more consumerist, collaborative, socially interactive
- Prefer win-win solutions than attempts at 'all out victories'

Case Study: Obama on the Net

- Faced with Hillary Clinton's major donor base, Obama needed an alternative strategy
- Barack Obama: A candidate and a campaign that echoed Net Gen norms, the millenials bottom up

digital superstructure was there to be mined
- Net Gen want a say in government, demand transparency
- They have the tools to organise and communicate using the Internet. They can make effective fast political impacts

Normative views of the Media

- Four models:
  - Commercial role (investigative journalism)
  - Facilitative role (active in stimulating civic rights)

- Reduced role (minority media that must serve specific social groups; includes 'alternative media')
- Collaborative role (relationship between the media and government/state around specific social campaigns – e.g. HIV/AIDS; Voter Education etc.)

'Collaborative Media'

- E.g. given: *Daily Dispatch* in East London
- Faclitates civic forums in Duncan Village
- Identified key problem areas at the local level
- Used this to create greater intra- and inter-community knowledge

and rapport
- Brought these issues to the attention of the local and national government
- Precipitated intervention on the part of Government to resolve problems.

Limitations of Collaborative model

- An unequal partnership – state always stronger the media (especially at the local level)
- Works well with tightly defined national crises in which there is a shared understanding of the

desired outcome
- Media can be co-opted by state for purposes that are

Government ownership of the media

- Where do issues of ownership and diversity of the media come in when the government owns the media and controls the content?
- Importance here of the role of civil society and NGOs – pressure groups within the society
- Relationships between media (journalists) and the media

should be adversarial – therefore a 'third force', i.e. civil society, is necessary

Political Realities, 2

- Frustrating for journalists to work in situations in which what I learnt in journalism schools needs to be 're-learnt'
- In the African context of democracy power plays important role – there are no equal partners at all – the state is far more powerful
- In countries where there are private media – e.g. Kenya – two press houses – support particular

Tribes, communities

Example of African Media Landscape

- DRC over 50 television stations – 50 radio
- Government
- Opposition
- Religious
- Government – news – 80% is Ministerial coverage
- Opposition – if no political event – cover other stories

Structure vs. Agency

- What potentialities do journalists

have within the tight structure of media

- Can the newspapers provide a direct conduit of people's responses to daily life?
- Don't do because of routines of journalists/ practices don't provide for the needs of innovative
- What are the news values that drive journalists
- Do journalists believe that democracy is about creating conflictual stories

Look at political realities

- Collaborative role in Nigeria
- What we read/ see is controlled with Government
- Media people are paid to tell the story the way the government wants
- Has no legitimacy – people believe that such collaborative efforts are the stories that are paid to place story

Development Journalism in Ethiopia

- Problem comes when you speak about success stories and not the follow up

- I' the employee of the government – this is my bread and butter

Professional Ethics

- If no one is there to enforce ethics, the government will take over
- Current trend is that journalists can be bombed or harmed
- But there is a move to understanding on the part government
- Most important part is self regulation

Commercial Media?

- How can commercial media be used to facilitate democracy
- In most African countries the government is the biggest advertisers – therefore forced into a collaborative relationship with the state –
- The government always comes on top

- Many journalists cover politics because that is where the income arises
- Those issues where everyone agrees there can be collaboration – otherwise there can't be a

collaborative relationship

- Botswana – the struggle is usually within the political realm itself – government and opposition – television reaches most people
- Where television is   concerned – agree to share space
- In politics there is a struggle for media attention
- Opposition targets the civil service as their main constituency – uses internet and mobile phones to target them – messages are not subject to censorship

- Good examples of new innovations that deal with the situation on the ground

Structural constraints and commercial reality

- The drive for circulation – just to stay afloat
- Newspapers and television goes from infortaintment
- News is considered as what sells –

- Media have responded to the demands of the market rather than the demands of the political

requirements
- News values – newsmakers are the elite – including the political elite
- The man on the street is crowded out by the political elites
- Not necessarily that the journalists don't want to report on ordinary people – they are constrained by the structural constraints that work against ordinary people.

- The prevalence is for commercial stories – not only political stories
- Many media houses cannot

survive without the support from the government

- Newspapers that take their local communities seriously increase their circulation

Citizen Journalism

- Mobile phones and cellphones – this is where many people get their news rather than from the mainstream media
- Kenya – new constitution – media houses support the constitution in its entirety – for this the civic journalism   is important.

Alternative voices

- What do we need by alternative voices
- Not only people outside government?
- Government and opposition?
- Botswana – newspapers were trying to take community news onto the front page –
- Now structure of the newsroom – move political stories into the editorials by 'experts' – raise the circulation of newspapers

- Nigeria 194 radio and television stations in Nigeria

- Nearly 80% government
- Difference between ownership pluralism and diversity and content pluralism and diversity
- Need to balance developmental stories   with spectacular stories

Tabloid Newspapers

- Surpassed mainstream newspapers
- Human ... fascination with the spectacular – celebrities and
- Community newspapers – free – but not large readership

- Television satellites break the monopoly off state media in

some African countries

Conclusion

- Media have the opportunity to create an enabling environment for citizens to participate in, and enhance democracy