

Media, Empowerment and Good Governance: Some dissonant concepts

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Mediae Board Meeting

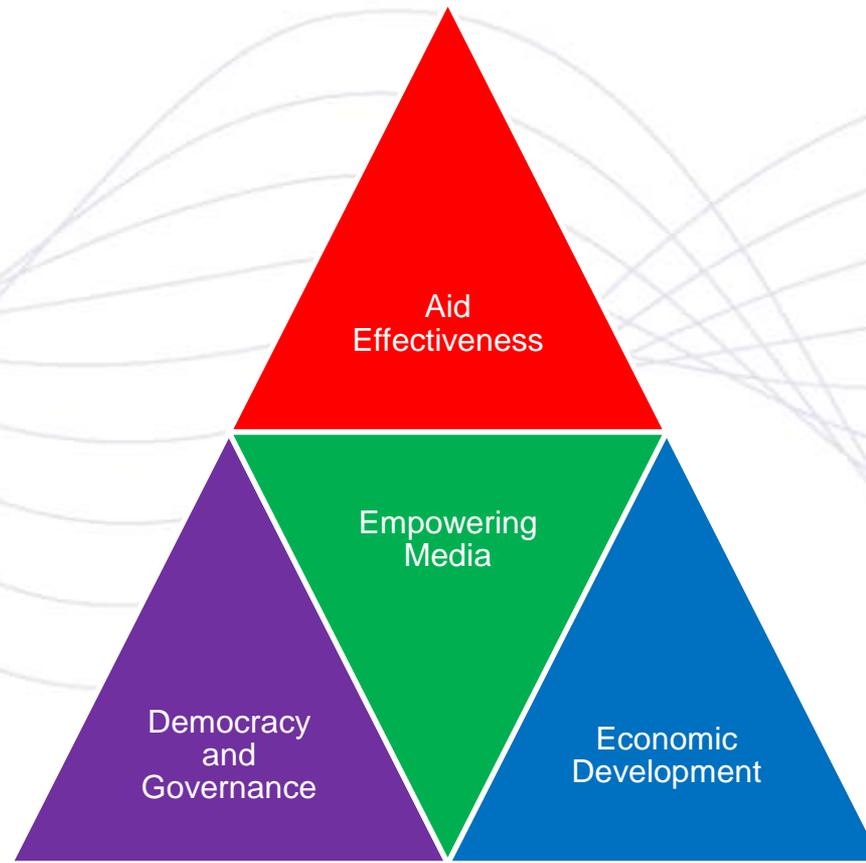
Our Foundation: Democratic Development through Active Citizenship

- We see development as a process that fundamentally depends on active citizenship;
- Democratic citizenship depends on access to information on the issues that shape people's lives;
- Citizens cannot hold authority to account without the capacity to articulate and communicate their perspectives in forms that will be heard;
- Democracy cannot function without spaces and places for citizens to participate in informed, open public debate.
- We work with media and communication partners to bring about more informed citizenries, more accountable government, and a democratic culture underpinned by public debate and dialogue.

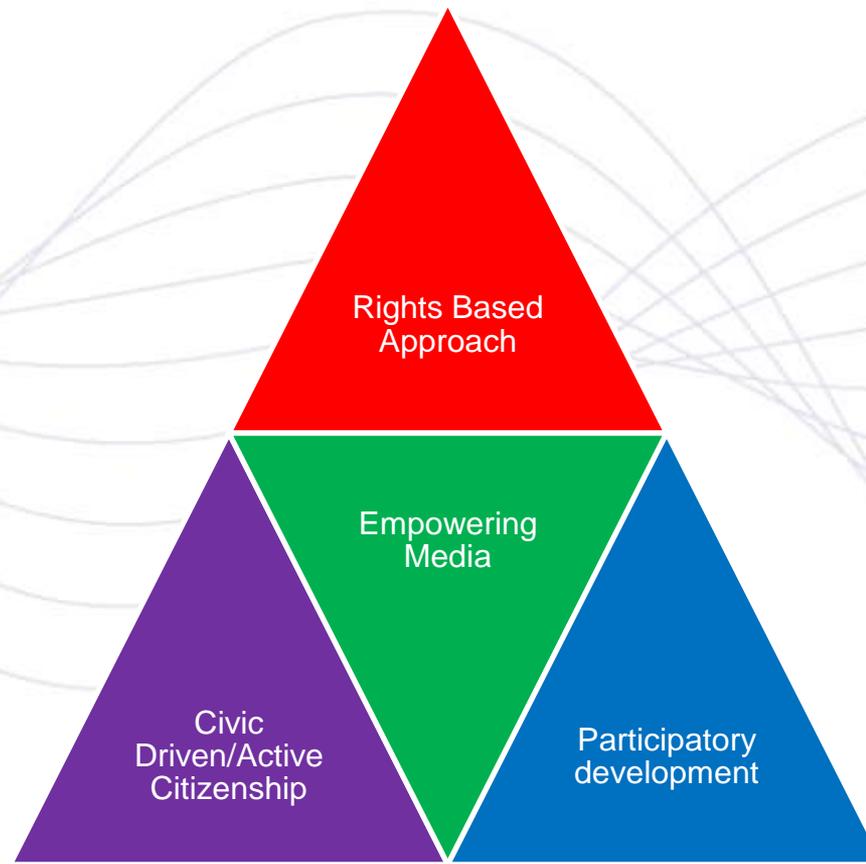
Media, Empowerment and Good Governance: the visible consensus

- A broad policy consensus that media is critical to good governance:
 - Accountability
 - An informed citizenry
 - Platform for public debate
 - Cultural and identity formation

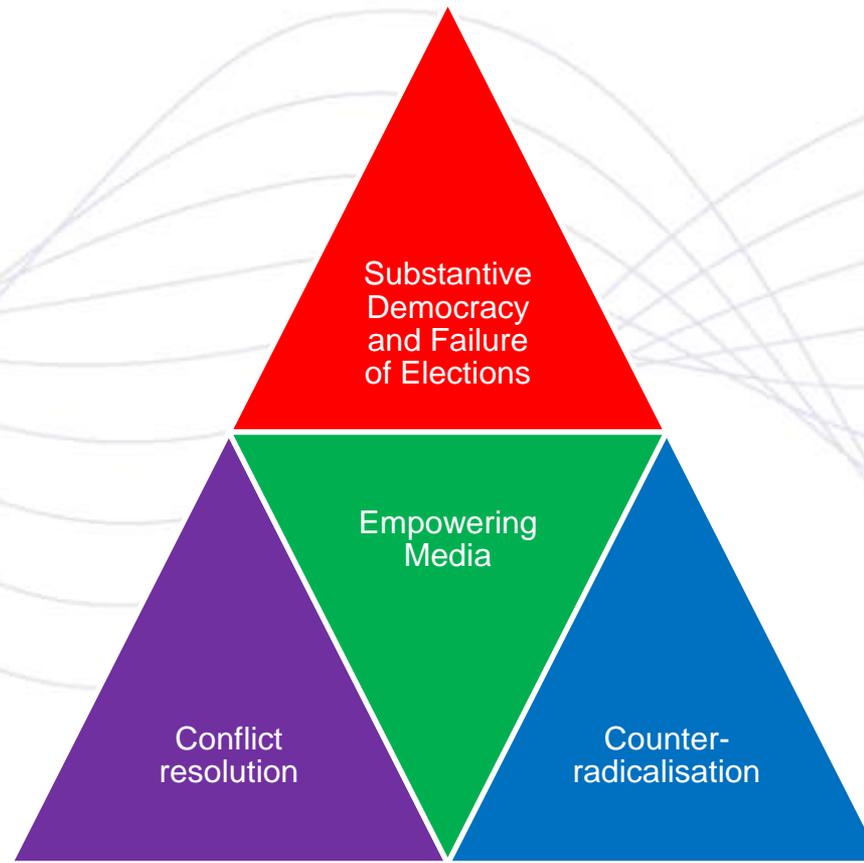
Media, Empowerment and Good Governance: an apparently unifying consensus



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Media, Empowerment and Governance: a growing consensus

“Elections work to discipline governments in two dimensions: honesty and effective policies, both of which are very important. But, they only work if life is breathed into those institutions, and the process of breathing life into those institutions is basically having an informed and organized society. A free and active media delivers both of those. It informs the society and it helps the society to organize around things that really matter.... There is a really good case for public money to go into this effort.”

*Professor Paul Collier,
Remarks made at Salzburg Seminar, July 2008*

A Growing Consensus? Drivers of increased policy attention

- Aid Effectiveness and Democracy debates converging
- An increased focus on citizen agency, civil society – informational processes with strong media potential
 - Accountability Movement
 - Democratic Ownership increasingly seen as key to development
- The impact of social media and ICTs
- Increased focus on political economy in the governance agenda (from public administration to making politics work for the poor)
- Perceived successful impacts of media/comm. in development projects
- Increased money funding media and communication in governance projects – but no coordination
- Well organised sector (CI, GFMD) with more effective advocacy initiatives

Motherhood and Apple Pie? The engagement gap

Perception among senior governance actors that:

“There is an ‘engagement gap’ between the value assigned to the role of media in governance and the practical provision made for it in development planning, thinking and spending”

Factors shaping the engagement gap:

- Continued conceptual difficulty
- Unsympathetic aid architecture
- No institutional home within democracy/development systems
- Messy, political and difficult
- The gap between media research and development research

There is no consensus on media's role in governance and empowerment

Dominant
Development
Paradigm: State
Capability



Media valued in
making state
responsive and
accountable

Alternative
Development
Paradigm: Citizenship
and Civic Action



Media ideally
underpins informed
and active citizenry
and civic engagement



Fragile States: Where the consensus shatters

- Fragile states research frequently sceptical of citizen “empowerment”
- *We argue that promoting unconditional freedom of public debate in newly democratizing societies is, in many circumstances, likely to make the problem worse. Historically and today, from the French Revolution to Rwanda, sudden liberalizations of press freedom have been associated with bloody outbursts of popular nationalism. The most dangerous situation is precisely when the government's press monopoly begins to break down. During incipient democratization, when civil society is burgeoning but democratic institutions are not fully entrenched, the state and other elites are forced to engage in public debate in order to compete for mass allies in the struggle for power. Under those circumstances, governments and their opponents often have the motive and the opportunity to play the nationalist card.*

» Snyder and Ballentine, *International Security*, 1996

Fragile States: Where the consensus shatters

The problem with the standard approach to development is that the typical recommendations aim to introduce unmodified elements of open access orders into developing societies. These elements – property rights, the market, institutions of the rule of law, and democracy – can fail when inserted into limited access orders without taking account of the problem of the endemic distribution of the potential for violence.

Douglass C North,

Limited Access Orders in the Developing World, Sept 2007

The Fragile States Agenda: fragmented media in fractured states

- Strong tradition within fragile states analysis that “unsophisticated” liberalisation of media undermines state stability and can foster conflict;
- Most fragile states are fractured states – media and communication trends are towards ever greater fragmentation:
 - General trend towards ever greater media liberalisation and fragmentation (165 radio stations in Uganda, vernacular language radio stations Kenya, explosion in print, radio and to a lesser extent television).
 - Increasing ubiquity of mobile telephony and associated social networking;
 - Exploding blogosphere and social media;
- An unprecedented opening of democratic space;
- But evidence that media and communication congregating on either side of fracture points in fragile societies.
- Media increasingly being captured by political, religious, ethnic and other forces in society.

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CASS SUNSTEIN

WEDNESDAY, 1ST JULY 2009



Cass Sunstein — co-author of the hugely influential Nudge and an adviser to President Obama — unveils his new theory of 'group polarisation', and explains why, when like-minded people spend time with each other, their views become not only more

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Conclusions

- There is no clear consensus on the value of citizen empowerment in delivering development outcomes, and especially on the value of media in enabling it – media's capacity to empower valued by different people for different reasons;
- There are dangers in being too normative – media research needs to be compelling and convincing to those who do not share its normative assumptions
- Policy actors are as interested in when media and communication goes wrong as when it provides positive impact – a research agenda rooted in what happens when media do NOT play governance/empowerment roles in society may be worth considering.
- Media and communication is where much of the argument on different approaches to development will be fought out in the future – democratisation of communication not only unstoppable, but marks a departure point from 10000 years of state/social development.