Media and communication in governance: It's time for a rethink

James Deane

1. Introduction

Governance strategies have been generally poor at integrating media and communication issues into their analysis, research and strategic plans. This article considers the reasons for this, some of which are rational. It argues that the impact of changing media and communication landscapes on governance outcomes is increasing, that the way in which the media is conceptualised in relationship to governance needs a rethink and that governance policy needs to find better ways of prioritising it.

The article makes four main points:

- Any debate about the role of media in governance is likely to be contested and divided into arguments around effectiveness (does supporting the media lead to improved governance outcomes?) and values (is supporting the media inherently associated with a normative, democratic, "Western" framework?). This contestation makes it especially difficult for media issues to be properly integrated into governance strategies. This difficulty should be confronted rather than ignored.

- The current consensus-based development system is dependent on reaching broad agreement among highly diverse political cultures. Such a system does not provide an effective platform from which to devise meaningful strategic action on an issue as politically charged, and apparently divisive, as integrating support for free media into development strategies. The very limited capacities of those parts of the development system supporting the media are a symptom of this problem.

- Governance actors focus on supporting effective institutions. Where governance strategies do include the media, they are often designed to support more effective and sustainable media institutions. This focus is important and necessary but limited. Some of the greatest media and communication changes shaping governance outcomes are being played out at the societal rather than institutional level. Media support strategies need to adjust to this reality.

- The transformation in people's access to media, information and communication continues to accelerate with both positive and negative consequences for governance. It is not clear that these changes are leading to more informed societies which, for most governance actors, is why a free and plural media is most valued. Supply driven strategies (such as improving access to governmental and institutional information and data) are not necessarily being complemented by increased citizen demand for such information.

The article concludes by suggesting some ways forward.

2. The role of media in governance

The role of the media and freedom of expression in relation to governance is difficult to summarise, with debates reaching back millennia. As Francis Fukuyama documents, Emperor Qin – the founder of the first unified Chinese state in the third century B.C. – saw control of ideas as fundamental to his state building project.

"If such conditions are not prohibited, the Imperial power will decline above and partisanships will form below", wrote Li Si, Qin's Chancellor in 213 B.C. "It is expedient that these be prohibited. Your servant requests that all persons possessing works of a literature, the Shith (Book of Odes), the Shu (the Book of History) and the discussions of the various philosophers should destroy them" (Fukuyama, 2011: p. 130). Four hundred Confucian scholars who resisted were reportedly buried alive.

Two millennia later, the extreme opposite approach to statebuilding was articulated by Thomas Jefferson in his famous quote, "If I had to choose between government without newspapers, and newspapers without government, I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter".

Any development discussion on the role of media in governance is inextricably enmeshed in a set of debates about effectiveness, and a set of debates about values. The debates about effectiveness tend to revolve around the tension between the efficiency and stability of government (with open liberalised media systems often being accused of undermining both), or alternatively around the accountability, sustainability and responsiveness of any governance system (with a free media often being upheld as a guarantor

of all three). The debates about values are about how much any governance system should enshrine a respect for human rights and dignity, political freedom, and democracy. This brief article does not try to reconcile these tensions but does argue that any attempt to deal with the role of media in development does need to ensure that such tensions, often submerged, are surfaced, examined and interrogated.

Currently, the role of the media in governance strategies is inchoate in the development system. Relatively small sums are spent on media support,[1] there are very few donors who have departments or specialists working on the issue, the role of media and communication is rarely prioritised in development research or among development think tanks, and there is substantial divergence among development actors about what the media, in governance terms, is actually expected to deliver in terms of results.

There are, in simplistic terms, four reasons why development actors currently invest in media support or believe support for media is important.

1. To build an independent media sector as an intrinsic good in and of itself, essential to the functioning of a democratic society and a key platform for freedom of expression (democratic and human rights objectives).

2. To enhance the accountability of governments to citizens, often in order to improve service delivery and state responsiveness, improve state-citizen relations, support more informed democratic/electoral decision-making, or shift social norms to decrease public tolerance of corruption or poor governance (accountability objectives).

3. To improve debate, dialogue and tolerance especially in fragile or conflicted societies, increase the availability of balanced, reliable and trustworthy information, reduce the likelihood of hate speech or inflammatory media likely to exacerbate conflict, enhance social cohesion or build the legitimacy of weak governments in fragile contexts (conflict and stability objectives).

4. To create demand for services (such as health or agricultural services) and use the media as an instrument to achieve development objectives including working to shift behaviours (e.g. improving uptake of immunisation) or changing the social norms that prevent such uptake, such as distrust of vaccinations. (communication for development objectives).

These areas are not mutually exclusive, but they do tend to reflect the sometimes siloed thinking that prevents joined-up strategic programming across governance spheres. Strategies to support the media within the context of democracy and human rights bring together donors, media and development actors who share normative assumptions about its importance.

Those working in the conflict and stability field tend to be more sceptical and questioning about the value of investing in the media, more rarely making it a priority (except to invest in strategic communications to attract loyalty). Those focused on accountability are interested first and foremost in results (is an investment in the media better than an investment in, say, an independent judiciary?), rather than democratic concerns.

3. Media and governance: an institutional or societal lens?

This problem is exacerbated by conceptual difficulties of defining what we mean by media. To take just two examples, do we use an institutional lens, looking only at those broadcast, print or online entities which have a clear organisational foundation and which clearly act, as a set of institutions in relation to the state or other loci of power? Or do we use a societal lens, looking at all the ways in which people actually access information and communicate in the 21st century? If the first, a governance support strategy would put in place a set of measures designed first and foremost to support the institutional independence, professionalism and sustainability of media in the country. If the second, a strategy would understand first and foremost how people were accessing information and using communication and, depending on what people (especially, perhaps, poor people) said they wanted (for example, more trusted and relevant news or platforms for debate), put in place a programme to support that.

Whichever lens we look through reveals a picture of extraordinary change. The number, diversity and character of media institutions is exploding, especially in the developing world, sometimes releasing phenomenal and positive democratic energy, and sometimes resulting in highly polarised, factional and occasionally hate-filled public spheres. In Afghanistan, for example, the number of TV and radio stations has expanded by around 20% per year, and there are more than 75 terrestrial TV stations and 175 FM radio stations. Growth in other countries, such as neighbouring Pakistan, has been faster still.

From a societal perspective, viewed through the lens of how people access information and the choices available to them, we have reached a situation which has never existed before. One characteristic is access to satellite as well as domestic media, but the more powerful one is that for the first time in history, humanity is soon to become almost ubiquitously connected, with almost everyone on the planet having some kind of access to a mobile phone. The extraordinary decentralisation of communication is fundamentally shifting political and economic relationships, disrupting power relationships between institutions and networks, elites and masses, old and young, and states and societies. As this article argues, both lenses remain relevant, profound changes are taking place, they have important implications for governance policy, but they are complex, contrary and, of course, highly context specific.

An institutional lens

Much current governance thinking would suggest we should continue to view the role of media through a traditional institutional lens.

"Political institutions that distribute power broadly in society and subject it to constraints are pluralistic. Instead of being vested in a single individual or a narrow group, political power rests with a broad coalition or a plurality of groups", argue James A. Robertson and Daron Acemoglu at the start of their book, *Why Nations Fail*. In its conclusion, they ask "What can be done to kick-start or perhaps just facilitate the process of empowerment and the development of inclusive political institutions… one actor, or set of actors can play a transformative role in the process of empowerment: the media. Empowerment of society at large is difficult to coordinate and maintain without widespread information about whether there are economic and political abuses by those in power." (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012)

It is tempting, given such analysis and the focus of so much governance efforts to invest in the creation of "effective institutions", to suggest that the media should become a far greater priority than it currently is.

A good deal of evidence suggests that independent media systems provide the most effective check on governmental power and are inherently powerful disruptors of exclusive institutional arrangements. A famous paper by John McMillan and Pablo Zoido drawing on the experience of an apparently democratic 1990s Peru found that:

"In the 1990s, the secret-police chief Montesinos systematically undermined [all the democratic checks and balances in the country – the opposition, the judiciary, a free press] with bribes. We quantify the checks using the bribe prices. Montesinos paid a television-channel owner about 100 times what he paid a judge or a politician. One single television channel's bribe was five times larger than the total of the opposition politicians' bribes. By revealed preference, the strongest check on the government's power was the news media." (McMillan and Zoido, 2004)

A DFID 2015 review of the evidence around corruption argued that, while there was only a "small body of evidence relying primarily on observational studies making use of statistical analyses", that evidence "consistently indicates freedom of the press can reduce corruption and that the media plays a role in the effectiveness of other social accountability mechanisms." (DFID 2015)

So far so impressive, but arguably history can only tell us so much about the role of the media and communication in a very different 21st century. Acemoglu and Robertson, like other giants of political science, including North et al. (2009) and Fukuyama (2011), root much of their analysis in the lessons to be learned from human history. There have been acknowledged

and well-studied governance dsjunctures attributed to historical changes in communication technology (the printing press, the innovations of radio and television, and now the Internet) but it is not clear how much the lessons of human history prepare us for understanding the governance implications of a ubiquitously connected world.

A societal lens

The limitations of such an institutional lens are highlighted by the most recent and often cited example of how shifting media and communication landscapes helped spark transformative change – the 2011 Arab Revolutions. These were, of course, rooted in economic and political marginalisation of an increasingly young, more educated and deeply frustrated people living in governance systems that were insufficiently concerned about or capable of working in their interests. But they were substantially sparked by fresh access to independent satellite media which disrupted their government's monopoly on information, and enabled by access to new technologies allowing people to connect and organise outside of government-controlled spaces.

These changes in the media and communication environment were not, however, principally institutional or organisational in character. In none of the Arab Revolution countries did the institutional character of the media substantially change in the run up to the revolutions. State broadcasters did not become substantially more independent, restrictions on non-state media were not noticeably less severe (often the opposite), newspapers did not (with some exceptions of growth in online news media), enjoy a fresh lease of life. What changed was access to communication technologies, especially mobile telephony, and access to independent broadcasters like the BBC and Al Jazeera through the rapid spread of satellite television. The media did not become more important as a shaper of governance outcomes because media institutions within the countries performed differently. They changed because societies were able to access information from outside their societies that revealed a different reality to the one covered by their own media, and because society had a new means through which it could communicate with itself unmediated by government or other controls.

Those revolutions have led to mixed political outcomes, ranging from the chaos of Libya to what is seen as the renewed authoritarianism in Egypt[2] to the fragile but emergent democracy of Tunisia, but all of the new regimes (or in the case of Libya, factions competing for communicative as well as political power) have been characterised by a strong approach to controlling or liberalising or co-opting media and communication systems. The argument here is not that these changes in the media and communication landscapes lead to some set of uniformly positive outcomes. Rather that such shifts are profound, they have important repercussions for governance and they cannot easily be viewed through a traditional institutional lens.

While peering through a narrow institutional lens gives too limited a field of view, so too does discarding it. In Afghanistan in 2001 there were no media. Today, substantially due to investments by the international community, it has one of the most vibrant and plural media in the region. The broadcast spectrum has become saturated because of the number of broadcasters vying for their position on the airwaves. These are playing an important role in shaping a new democratic culture and fostering an improved climate for accountability.

In the case of Afghanistan, the performance and political economy of media institutions in the country matters very much. They will do much to determine the prospects for the sustainability of the political settlement and for political stability in the country and shape the kinds of accountability the media will exercise on government and on behalf of different sections or interests in society. To take just one issue, the second-largest donor to media in Afghanistan, after the United States, is (at least by many accounts) Iran (Page and Siddiqi, 2012). Factional, warlord-controlled media are on the rise. The mainstream media is increasingly politicised and the state media remains in the service of the government rather than the public (President Ghani has signalled that this may change).

In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, much of the governance analysis of the media has focused on its capacity to improve state-society relationships, making the state more accountable and more responsive. However, one of the greatest challenges facing the country lies as much with society as it does with government. It is how the citizens of a deeply divided nation that has suffered decades of conflict can rebuild a sense of shared identity and common purpose. To do that, there will need to be the kind of dialogue that enables the fractured communities of the country to encounter, debate and better understand each other. The platform for the kind of national debate and dialogue necessary for that to happen is only likely to be provided by reform of arguably the most important media institution in the country, the state broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA). Such reform is likely to be challenging but, in common with concerns over the rest of the media, has not featured significantly in donor or development plans or debates over the transition in the country. Any discussion on the development of effective institutions in a country like Afghanistan would seem to be incomplete unless it incorporates some analysis of what the role of the different media institutions are in its future, and how they can best be supported.

In most societies, the media has a significant effect on governance outcomes but that effect is diverse, complex and open to different interpretations. The divisions and conflict in Iraq have been fuelled – but also sometimes ameliorated – by the deeply polarised ethno-sectarian character of much of the media in the country. The rapid liberalisation of the media in Kenya in the first decade of this century led to a huge increase in

the number of media institutions in the country, including the emergence of local language radio stations. For some this liberalisation led to hate radio and the fuelling of violence around the 2007/8 elections – but for others laid the groundwork for the astonishing creative digital and media economy and vibrant democracy that has emerged in recent years. The extraordinarily vibrant and muscular media in Pakistan is, particularly at provincial level, one of the most powerful guarantors of accountability of state to citizen.

So the shifting way in which societies access media and communication through new technologies is increasingly important, but the role of traditional media institutions in society still matters and in many countries matters more than they ever have in shaping governance outcomes both for good and ill.

What may matter most, however, is whether societies are in fact become more – or less – informed as a result of these changes. It is the contention of this paper that in the 21st century, good governance outcomes will depend strongly on the existence of informed societies. Without an informed society, democratic politics will be stranded as citizens find themselves bereft of the kinds of information they need to exercise a vote or exert political influence of the kind likely to advance their concerns and interests. Without an informed society, neither economic nor political systems work well. An informed society is inherently threatening to and undermining of exclusive institutions and an inherently powerful creator of conditions necessary for inclusive institutions to emerge. Without an informed society, people cannot be central to future development efforts. As the UN High Level Panel on the post 2015 framework argued, "People must be central to a new global partnership. To do this they need the freedom to voice their views and participation in the decisions that affect their lives without fear. They need access to information and to independent media."(United Nations, 2013)

The transformation in media systems and in information and communication technologies are leading to increased societal access to information but there is little evidence to suggest that this is always translating into more informed societies. An informed society depends on citizens having access to a media that is independent of undue control, that they can trust and is reasonably accurate. Attempts to control, co-opt, manipulate and intimidate media and other communication systems are increasing and arguably succeeding. Governments have always sought to control and often monopolise the media and continue in many countries to do so. Increasingly, government attempts to control the media are being complemented by those of factional, ethnic, religious, financial and other actors who are investing substantial resources and efforts in either creating or co-opting media and online spaces to advance their own interests at the expense of the public interest (Deane, 2013). Evidence is mounting that people in many societies, especially in fragile states, do not have access to a media they trust or which they feel is making them more informed (Dowson-Zeidan et al., 2014).

The international development community does not obviously attach a clear priority to supporting the conditions for more informed societies to emerge. The strategies needed to support more informed societies are shrouded in contention and a lack of consensus. The danger remains that governance actors will simply ignore the issue as too difficult, too politically complex and too sensitive to confront. If they do so, they risk ignoring a central means through which governance outcomes will be shaped in the 21st century.

4. What is to be done?

This article started by arguing that support for the media, or broader strategies capable of bringing about more informed societies, are not well prioritised in governance action or thinking.[3] Before making suggestions what might be done to change this, it is important to acknowledge there are sometimes good reasons why this does not happen already.

Most development action is governed by consensus, whether defined in the Millennium Development Goals and what will replace them later this year, or through the many other development agreements reached through the UN, the OECD or other international actors.

There are four reasons why it is difficult to galvanise a consensus round the role of the media in governance and why, consequently, it tends to be a relatively low priority in governance strategies and policy.

The first is political. Some developing country governments see support for media as an excuse to impose conditions on development assistance. Specifically, some associate media assistance with an assertive democracy promotion agenda that was especially prevalent in the United States and elsewhere in the 1990s and 2000s. Attempts by western donors to integrate the media into donor strategies aimed at fostering accountability are met with resistance by some emerging development partners. UN actors often find it very difficult to prioritise media support in country support strategies if governments oppose such support.

The second, and closely linked, reason is architectural. A central principle of the development effectiveness agenda, and the development architecture that supports it, is country ownership of development support strategies. Aid is determined principally by what developing country governments say they need in order to advance the interests and well-being of their people. For the reasons outlined above, country governments very rarely request support for the development of a free and plural media. Indeed, given the kind of evidence from Peru cited by McMillan and Zoido (2004), the more a government does not want to be held to account the more resistant they will be to any attempt to support the media. The international development system has relatively few ways of capturing and crystallising demand from people or others outside the government (such as from national media outlets).

The third problem is evidential. While there is a great deal of evidence on the role of media in democracy and governance, the evidence base for the impact of media support programmes is less compelling (and certainly less well organised). Donors and development actors looking for clear research telling them what they can expect to achieve from investing in any particular support strategy to media can be frustrated, especially when so few have their own mechanisms for evaluating the investments they do make in this area. This evidence base is improving rapidly (my organisation, BBC Media Action, now invests 10% of its budget in research), but there remains work to be done here.

Fourth, the media is particularly unamenable to the kind of organisation necessary to deliver quantifiable results most donors need to justify the funds they invest. Unlike other national institutions designed to provide a check on power, like the judiciary or the parliament, the media is neither unitary nor formal in status, but, rather, an intensely, complex, competitive, adaptive and rapidly changing institutional ecosystem. While it is true that evidence exists that a television station is many times more effective at holding government to account than (for example) a judiciary, it might be simpler and easier to track results of a programme designed to support judicial reform than media reform (and probably easier to secure government backing for such a reform process). The complexity of results-based management of media support can be more complex still if some of the most independent actors are informal bloggers and citizen journalists rather than formal news outlets. Nor have media actors typically organised themselves easily into the kinds of umbrella associations often established by other areas of civil society. Also, unlike support for elections, which can at least in theory be targeted on a semi-regular schedule, support for the media is a continuous rather than event-focused process.

These are some of the operational difficulties inherent in getting more concerted and effective support to media. There are other reasons, however, why the consensus required to underpin real development engagement in this area is becoming more, rather than less, difficult to secure.

5. The difficulties of reaching consensus on media support

It is arguable that the last quarter of a century, at least since the fall of the Berlin Wall, has witnessed an historically unusual level of agreement over the importance of democracy and fundamental democratic principles to effective governance. Support for the media has not only been an important plank of democratic assistance strategies, especially in the US, the EU and some European donor countries, but the central thrust of development efforts has been firmly situated within a framework of democratic advancement.

While no Millennium Development Goal focused on issues of political freedom, the UN Millennium Declaration argued that freedom was the first of a set of fundamental values on which human progress rested, arguing that "Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights" (United Nations, 2000). In its section on Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance, it committed UN member states to "spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development", and to ensure the "freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information" (United Nations, 2000).

In 2015, however, the assumptions underpinning the role of media in the context of development are increasingly under attack. Western influence is waning and there is increased resistance by many developing countries to donor support to this area. The democratic energy unleashed by the Arab Revolutions, themselves significantly enabled by people's fresh access to independent media and communication technologies, for a while seemed to provide fresh impetus and arguments around democratic renewal and the centrality of media and communication to positive political and economic change. Such energy has been sapped as authoritarianism or chaos has – with a few notable exceptions such as Tunisia – ensued. While there has been a strong focus on increasing access to information and other accountability and transparency initiatives, highlighting the role of media within governance and development frameworks has been a struggle, including within the Busan Partnership Agreement for Effective Development Cooperation.

Alternative models of development, often supported by Western donors, are gaining traction. In the 21st century, there are developmentally efficient governments where it is firmly the state that is driving the development process. Ethiopia and Rwanda are the most often cited examples of these, with China being credited as the development model these countries have chosen to follow. These are governments that are typically determined to control how citizens access information and communication and go to some effort to muzzle the media, deter freedom of expression and retain state control of communication infrastructures. While these states are, like China, also embarked on a strategy that envisages increasingly ubiquitous access to digital communication, it is not clear what, over time, the political and governance implications of such rapid increase in access to communication will be.

There are other reasons too why more political forms of governance support, such as media assistance, may find it difficult to command attention in the future. Increasing attention is being paid to "working with the grain" of existing country-based cultures, systems and norms. In his new book *Working*

with the Grain: Integrating Governance and Growth in Development Strategies, Brian Levy (2014) argues that the "appropriate point of departure for engagement [with developing countries] is with the way things actually are on the ground not some normative vision of how they should be and a focus on working to solve very specific development problems – moving away from a pre-occupation with longer term reforms of broader systems and processes, where a results are long in coming and hard to discern." (Levy, 2014) The book goes out of its way to stress the importance of democratic values but, given that much media support has been implicitly or explicitly underpinned by a normative vision of the importance of a free and plural media to an effective and functioning democratic system of government, it might be expected that such issues will fail to find favour in the current climate of governance support priorities.

The post 2015 development framework does provide some prospect of these issues at least being flagged as an issue of concern. Goal 16 focused on improved governance, including a target to increase "public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements". There are welcome proposals to include a measurement indicator of the number of journalists attacked or killed as a barometer of success in this area.

In summary, the prospects for improving the prioritisation of media support and other governance-related strategies that can enable more informed societies look mixed. This paper suggests that they should not be and that issues of media and communication should feature much more substantially in future governance debates.

The next section outlines why, in a 21st century which is already being defined by the transformation in people's access to information and communication, and shaped by the character of the media people have access to, governance debates need to engage, embrace and respond to these changes or risk becoming increasingly detached from how governance outcomes are increasingly being shaped, particularly at societal level. A fresh, less normative but more strategic approach to understanding and, where appropriate, supporting the role of media and communication in enabling more informed societies should be a major priority for the future.

6. Some suggestions for the future

How people communicate and how they access information is likely to shape political and governance outcomes as never before, and the influence on governance outcomes (both positive and negative) of information-empowered societies seems likely to escalate further. This is as true, if not more so, in fragile states. The ways in which information is controlled or liberated are likely to play out very differently in different countries. Impacts can be democratically, socially and economically liberating or can have the

effect of enhanced political polarisation, extremism and violence. While this chapter hasn't the space to document all the ways in which shifts in access to and control of information and communication are likely to impact on governance, few believe that these impacts will be unimportant.

What is difficult to discern is a clear, focused, evidence-led response from the governance community to these issues. And, because any discussion of the role of media and communication is inherently political, value laden and difficult to pin consensus around, it is unlikely that such issues will easily and clearly be prioritised in, for example, the post-2015 development framework. We need to find fresh ways of thinking, discussing and generating action around these governance issues, some of which will be characterised by consensus and some of which will inevitably mean different development actors pursuing different strategies.

Some suggestions for the future are briefly outlined here.

Navigating difference: a post-2015 development consensus will be reached, but it will be implemented by development actors with fundamentally different value systems, political and development beliefs and heritages and approaches to governance. As this paper has argued, the role of the media in society has a tendency to expose differences particularly starkly. The solution to this is not simply to expect agreement from different actors, or for actors to abandon or dilute their fundamental beliefs (such as the importance of political freedom) when they design their development strategies. These issues and differences need to be surfaced, debated and tested rather than masked by the natural tendency of development actors to achieve consensus. This should not prevent consensus and agreement being reached between different actors but issues that escape the consensus – such as the future of the media, communication and an informed society – should be explicitly flagged and approaches devised that reflect their importance.

Acknowledging the problems of a normative approach: this author strongly believes in the importance of a free and plural media, freedom of expression, and open communication systems to human dignity and to sustainably successful systems of democratic governance. Such beliefs have informed much media support to date. However, such normative assertions are not necessarily the most useful departure point for an effective governance strategy in this area, particularly given criticism that overly normative approaches have had led to negative governance outcomes such as the emergence of hate media (Deane, 2013). An approach rooted in evidence and experience is needed, and one that acknowledges the harm that the media and communication can wreak, as well as the promise they hold. Acknowledging that an overly normative approach can be ineffective is likely to lead to a more thought-through strategy. This has its limits. For many of us – including myriad actors and partners in developing countries – issues of political freedom, freedom of expression and a free media are not amenable

to consensus or even negotiation. If the development system cannot agree on integrating these issues into the international development consensus, then it needs to find a way of acting on them outside of that consensus.

Working "with the grain" has its limits: this article agrees that it does make sense sometimes to "work with the grain" of developing country political systems. Media support initiatives are particularly vulnerable to the charge that they start with a set of assumptions of how they think things ought to work rather than how power, politics and government is in fact organised and how change can be best achieved. Such concerns have their limits. Geoffrey Nyarota, Zimbabwean editor and one of the most respected African journalists of his generation in the 1980s and 1990s, wrote his memoirs being "often the lone voice of dissent against a government that had betrayed its people" (Nyarota, 2006). Those memoirs recounted bombings of his offices, death threats and imprisonment as well as famous exposés of government corruption. He entitled them *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsman*. Ultimately, issues of freedom of the media, freedom of expression and widespread access to information are issues of principle. Increased accountability needs mechanisms and people who can work against the grain of power and those people can survive only when principle is upheld. It is not the preserve of governments to deny such freedoms. Young, often politically and economically marginalised, people across the developing world are taking advantage of access to independent media and new communication technologies to assert their rights and voice their demands. The demand for freedom of expression is increasingly coming from people within developing countries, not simply from a set of democratic actors in the West, and those development actors who want to support those demands will continue to do so. Some of this debate falls within the realms of development effectiveness and a debate over what works and what does not. For many, including this author, that conversation has its limits. There are universal values and principles, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that captures a pre-existing consensus that deserves to be vigorously defended.

History has its limits: much of the most respected and insightful political science literature has rooted its analysis and conclusions on the lessons from human history of how political order and successful political and economic systems have emerged. It is not the place of a short article like this to question such analysis, but governance strategies should give some consideration to the possibility that a fresh set of conditions exist that have not existed before in history. Such ubiquitous access to information and communication has never existed before and we are, quite probably, entering uncharted territory when it comes to the impacts on governance outcomes. That makes an investment in research and evidence even more important.

The need for evidence and analysis: while media support organisations are producing increasing amounts of evidence and analysis in this area, there

is much more limited research and evidence emerging from governance researchers and policy institutions. The evidence-based guidance available to governance cadres in development agencies remains limited and insufficiently useful to guide day-to-day decision making.

Bringing together media and new technologies: this paper has made little distinction between traditional media, digital communication technologies or indeed other forms of communication (such as traditional informal communication networks). What matters most is not the technology through which information and communication travels, but how people are informed and the effects of information flows and sources on state-citizen and other relationships in society. A fragmented analysis that looks at the role of media and new technologies in isolation from each other is not necessarily a useful lens through which to approach these issues.

Thinking politically, doing development differently: much current governance attention is focused on understanding the political economy of the countries in which development support takes place, and in finding new approaches to development that recognise political complexity. The issues highlighted in this paper could usefully be more prominently featured in and contribute to those debates.

A clarity of focus and a governance forum: if the arguments advanced in this paper are accepted – that the issue of an informed society is an important but relatively neglected component of governance thinking and that the difficulty of achieving consensus in this area suggests that the issue will not be automatically prioritised through conventional development mechanisms – something specific needs to happen to take forward the issue. A new mechanism or forum will be required to establish a clear governance framework, research agenda and clear guidance to development actors in this field.

The media needs support: journalists are being killed in record numbers, freedom of expression is under attack as never before. The recent horrific assassinations of Charlie Hebdo staff in Paris provide the most visible and one of the most shocking illustrations of what happens to journalists who upset those who have guns and those who have power. A governance community which prides itself on thinking more politically cannot pretend that these issues are of no concern to development thinking or action. Moreover, while perhaps a decade ago the market was increasingly providing the conditions for independent media and journalism to survive and thrive, increasingly there is a market failure when it comes to the kind of journalism that can hold power to account and best support an informed society. Market failures which result in negative development outcomes are what the aid system exists to solve. For all the political complexity, messiness and difficulty in reaching consensus-based action, this is an issue that the development system can no longer ignore in the way that it has.

Notes

1. See for example Myers (2009).

2. See for example: http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/09/egypt-s-resurgent-authoritarianism-it-s-way-of-life.

3. It is important to acknowledge the substantial emphasis on increasing access to information, especially by increasing the supply of information (for example through open data or budget transparency initiatives), and the investment in the digital economy, especially infrastructure initiatives designed to increase access to mobile telephony and the internet. However, meeting the demand for information from people, and ensuring the existence of independent media and communication systems likely to the lead to more informed societies are not well prioritised in governance strategies.

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