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RACHAEL BORLASE/BBC MEDIA ACTION

COUNTRY CASE STUDY: **UGANDA**

Support to media where
media freedoms and rights
are constrained



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Front cover

A mother of triplets speaks to a journalist from Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio Station in Western Uganda.

Right

A BBC Media Action researcher conducts a focus group discussion with female radio listeners in Nebbi, West Nile Region.



▶ Executive summary

Observers within and outside Uganda express increasing concerns for the future prospects for its democracy.

Western donors have played a critical role in Uganda's economic and political life since 1986, when President Yoweri Museveni captured power, by inspiring and financing key reforms. At a time when Uganda's reputation as a beacon of transformation is under sustained scrutiny, this case study focuses on one aspect of governance reforms:

how donors can support the media to play its envisaged role in democratic governance.

Through a series of interviews and discussions with media practitioners, academics, representatives of civil society and donor organisations and other experts, the study captures perspectives on the media and its role in governance in Uganda, and on donor-funded media development initiatives over the past decade.

Although interviews tend to yield opinions, it is possible to draw general conclusions from the more than 25 interviews carried out for this case study, which revealed views consistent with previous reports about the Ugandan media and a recent report by the World Bank.

The case study finds that Uganda's media scene is dynamic,

with hundreds of radio and TV stations and newspaper titles, and plenty of public dialogue – especially on radio. It also finds a steady growth in the use of the Internet and social media.

Observers within and outside Uganda express increasing concerns for the future prospects for its democracy, particularly on whether power is becoming overly centralised in the Presidency and the Government. The media are still perceived as being key institutions that could help to hold the Government to account. However, while the media scene is hailed as vibrant, there are concerns about media self-censorship and the future of public affairs journalism, as the Government targets critical voices through legislation, prosecution and the persecution of journalists.

The media landscape is also fractured: Freedom House ranks the media environment as “Partly Free” as the urban, middle class and elite-oriented national press does challenge the Government. However, the rural media (mostly FM stations) that serve most of the population are increasingly vulnerable to political censorship. In rural areas in particular, discussions that criticise the Government are severely restricted by state representatives.

The media faces widespread public dissatisfaction with its editorial and ethical standards – a result, in part, of a lack of newsroom training and mentoring mechanisms and the profession's inability to retain experienced staff on low wages.

Most interviewees believe that few Ugandans appreciate the democratic mandate and function of the media as an embodiment of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression. This increases the vulnerability of the media in a climate where critical voices are threatened by the State.

Donors have seen media development as part and parcel of governance programming – as a tool to grow the demand-side of democracy and accountability. Donor support to this area has shown an unusual level of coordination. Major donors to media development in Uganda have included Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, operating under the Deepening Democracy Programme (DDP) basket fund since 2006. These have been joined by Austria and the European Union under the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) – an extension of the DDP that seeks to harmonise international and national efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights. USAID has also supported large media projects in northern Uganda and, while it does not pool its money with the European donors, it does meet regularly with the DGF.

Most funding has gone to capacity building programmes for media practitioners and media houses, especially in rural areas. In Uganda, as in a number of other countries, donors who try to support the media primarily as a means to enhance accountability face difficult dilemmas. Support to media in rural areas is necessary if diverse voices and opinions are to be expressed, reflecting society at large. But media in rural areas rarely have sufficient institutional strength to resist co-option by strong political forces (either government forces or other political or factional interests). The more urban and elite-oriented media have stronger institutional foundations that are better able to resist threats to their independence, especially if they are supported through training and other programmes, but they tend to be less reflective of the whole of society.

Donors have channelled much of their support to the Ugandan media through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that deliver projects involving practitioners and media houses. With widespread scepticism about the efficacy of short workshops, many NGOs appear to be shifting to longer-term relationships such as mentoring. They are, however, competing with one another, which undermines efforts to act together decisively on certain issues. Many interviewees acknowledge the need for more robust research on the impact of donor support for media initiatives, but anecdotal and ad hoc assessments remain the norm.

This case study outlines the country context and the media context before analysing the operations of key bodies that fund media development, as well as NGOs working in the

media sector. It provides an analysis of key findings, with implications for future media development interventions.

The research for this case study suggests that, beyond supplying information, the media needs to improve its capacity to explain and analyse, and be bolder in its defence of basic freedoms and institutional governance.

The case study concludes that the structure of the political economy of the media in Uganda requires donors to take a more institutional approach, putting strong media houses at the heart of media development initiatives to improve democratic accountability.

As well as a greater emphasis on longer-term initiatives, there is a need for a mechanism to coordinate competing media NGOs to minimise duplication, enhance cooperation on key issues, and optimise benefits for the sector and for the country as a whole.

Background and methodology

This report is one of a series of case studies examining support to, and development of, the media in countries where media freedoms and rights to information and communication are restricted – with a particular focus on people, politics and media. Five case studies focus on Bangladesh, Cambodia, South Sudan, Syria and Uganda. They consider the impact of both policy and practice, and are intended to feed into decision-making at both levels to enable delivery of more focused and effective media support.

Three central questions guided case study research:

- What is the state of media freedom and public dialogue in the country?
- Who is supporting the media (i.e. donors and international civil society organisations) and how?
- What has been the impact of this support?

There were two phases of research: desk research and a series of in-depth interviews in Uganda and with international stakeholders. Desk research collated and synthesised existing literature to: outline the political and social context; document key media support interventions; and review existing audience and media research in each country.

Studies draw on substantial desk research and in-depth interviews conducted over a period of up to nine months. Semi-structured interviews with key media and development stakeholders gathered information on a variety of approaches to, and expectations of, media support. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and in-country where possible.

The Uganda case study draws on interviews from 25 people representing, or associated with, at least 23 different organisations, including donor agencies, civil society organisations, media houses/agencies, training institutions, professional associations, and statutory bodies. It also involved an informal but informative group discussion with young professionals with a passion for media development. Part of the study is also informed by a field visit to two former BBC Media Action partner radio stations where in-depth interviews were carried out two years after the projects concluded. Despite several attempts, it did not prove possible to interview an appropriate Government representative.

► The country context

Right
Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni makes a point during a pre-election press conference.

One aspect of Museveni's promised "fundamental change" was freedom of expression and the media.

Uganda has been transformed from a country tormented by a troubled past to one praised for its promise, with impressive economic growth. Since its independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda has endured a military coup followed by the dictatorship of Idi Amin (uprooted by invasion from Tanzania in 1979), disputed elections in 1980, and a deadly five-year bush war that brought Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) to power in 1986. Uganda also had to contend with a brutal 20-year insurgency in the North, led by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

As he took power, Museveni swore this was no mere changing of the guards, but a fundamental transformation. Although political party activity was largely banned for the next 20 years, a new Constitution was adopted in 1995, and the environment for public dialogue was a vast improvement on that allowed under previous regimes. Museveni won contentious elections in 1996 and 2001, despite allegations of voting malpractices. Instead of preparing for retirement, however, Museveni allowed Parliament, dominated by his NRM, to change the Constitution to remove a



PETER BUSOMOKE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

two-term limit on the presidency. He is now in his fourth term in office.

Over the past decade, amid growing competition within the ruling party and between it and other political parties, there has been a gradual retreat from the air of freedom that defined the first decade of the NRM administration. As a result, the past five years have witnessed increasingly angry and sometimes violent demonstrations that have been met with lethal force by the State.

Donors, or 'development partners', have played an important role in post-1986 politics in Uganda. On taking power, the Museveni Government implemented many donor-pleasing economic and political reforms, including IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes. Impressed, western donors rewarded Uganda with loans and grants and, until a few years ago, funded more than half of the country's budget. However, as the country's economy has grown, tax revenues have increased and Uganda's reliance on donors has fallen. Uganda has discovered significant oil deposits in the west since 2006, with production expected to start within three years.

Such developments have coincided with a more robust stance from the Museveni Government towards donors, although geo-political strategic relations with the west appear healthy, given Uganda's deployment of troops to Somalia under the donor-funded African Union Mission and cooperation with US troops who entered Uganda in 2011 to support the hunt for LRA rebels. To the extent that Uganda's reforms were informed by a desire to please donors, an oil boom could remove this incentive, with negative implications for basic freedoms.

One aspect of Museveni's promised "fundamental change" was freedom of expression and the media, to which we now turn.

► Uganda demographics

Population	35,873,253 (July 2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Baganda 16.9%, Banyakore 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%, Langi 6.1%, Acholi 4.7%, Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Bunyoro 2.7%, Other 29.6% (2002 census)
Religions	Roman Catholic 41.9%, Protestant 42% (Anglican 35.9%, Pentecostal 4.6%, Seventh-Day Adventist 1.5%), Muslim 12.1%, Other 3.1%, None 0.9% (2002 census)
Languages	English (official national language, taught in grade schools, used in courts of law and by most newspapers and some radio broadcasts), Ganda or Luganda (most widely used of the Niger-Congo languages, preferred for native language publications in the capital and may be taught in school), other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Swahili, Arabic
Literacy	Total population: 66.8% Male: 76.8% Female: 57.7% (2002 census)
Urbanisation	Urban population: 13% of total population (2010) Rate of urbanisation: 4.8% annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)

Source: CIA World Factbook¹



► The media context

Who owns and runs the media?

Commentators on the Ugandan media often take a historical perspective to show how far the country has come. Between the 1960s and the early 1990s, radio and television were typically under state control. Although private print newspapers and magazines existed, investigative or critical journalists were murdered, prosecuted, or otherwise persecuted.²

Under Museveni, new publications flourished and a scent of media freedom wafted through the capital, Kampala.³ 1993 saw the liberalisation of the electronic media and the advent of private radio, with private television stations following later. Uganda was an African trailblazer in terms of private media, and a key beneficiary of the innovation, creativity, quality and independent muscularity that this brought to the media scene. Today, the vast majority of media houses are private⁴, but they are also increasingly politically-aligned and/or owned by business people primarily to make money.⁵ This matters when there

are commercial and political pressures on critical media practitioners.

New FM radio stations have thrived in a country where 60 per cent of the population get their information from the radio. Popular, interactive, and critical radio programmes and talk shows discuss a range of issues, from governance to sexuality. The market-leading, state-owned *New Vision* newspaper has taken fairly independent, and often critical, editorial positions, although commentators perceive a growing alignment with the NRM Government. But it is the independent, city-based newspapers like *The* (now *Daily*) *Monitor*, *Crusader* (now defunct) and later arrivals such as the *Observer* and *Independent*, or even the often saucy *Red Pepper* tabloid, that have formed the vanguard of a lively national press.


One concern from various commentators is that newspaper circulation remains rather low. But many point out that the national press play a critical role for two reasons: first, because the Kampala press sets the agenda for national

Below

People read a newspaper while waiting in line at a polling station in Uganda's capital Kampala on 18 February 2011 to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections.



ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Increasingly, freedom of expression seems to depend on topic, medium and location. 

conversations and second, many radio stations across the country review the national papers and discuss their major stories with listeners who call in.

State media consists mainly of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) radio and television stations, which cover 80 per cent and 60 per cent of the country respectively. Although UBC is supposed to be a public service broadcaster, it is seen as functioning more like a state broadcaster, controlled and influenced by the government of the day.⁶ The NRM Government also has a controlling stake in the Vision Group, the country's leading media house, with newspaper titles as well as radio and TV channels.

In terms of international media, Ugandans have a close relationship with the BBC and, to a lesser extent, the Voice of America, Deutsche Welle and CNN. Al Jazeera has also been making significant inroads. Many Ugandans follow continental and global news on the BBC's English and Swahili Services, which are available on FM radio, and interest grows whenever there is a broadcast on Uganda.

Stations like the BBC and Al Jazeera have frequent discussion programmes and vox pops: the BBC's *Africa Have Your Say* programme and *Africa Debate*, in addition to its regular *Network Africa* and *Focus on Africa* programmes; Al Jazeera's *The Stream*, and Voice of America's *Straight Talk Africa*, hosted by Ugandan-born Shaka Ssali. Ugandans can use these programmes to share views with a larger audience, and even more people join the debates by telephone, text and on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Media freedom: an illusion?

Compared to many African countries, the media scene in Uganda impresses at first glance. This is not just because of the buzz from some 240 radio stations and dozens of regular print publications and TV stations.⁷ The interaction between radio stations and their listeners, the breadth of topics discussed, and the seemingly fearless language of the independent press, all paint a picture of freedom and vitality.

All of those interviewed for this study agree that Uganda has had relative freedom of expression and high levels of public dialogue in the past decade when compared with past regimes and with other countries in the region. Increasingly, however, freedom of expression seems to depend on topic, medium and location.

There are fears that the actions of the State over the years – including arbitrary closure of radio stations (with four radio stations closed following demonstrations in Kampala in September 2009), physical attacks on journalists by security forces, prosecution of media practitioners, and the spectre of draconian legislation – are all pushing media practitioners into self-censorship on key governance questions and individuals. This appears to be affecting

electronic media more than the mainstream press, and rural media houses more than those in Kampala. One leading Ugandan media expert has described media freedom as “an illusion”.⁸

Freedom of expression, including press freedom, is guaranteed by the Constitution,⁹ and the country's post 1995-media legislation was seen as fairly progressive, including the Press and Journalist Act of 1995 and the Electronic Media Act of 1996, both amended in 2000. However, this may be because controversial clauses in the laws have not been enforced, such as the requirement in the Press and Journalist Act that journalists must be licenced by the Media Council and must hold journalism degrees or diplomas.

In October 2011, the Amnesty International report ‘Stifling Dissent: Restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Uganda’ accused the Government of trying to suffocate critical voices, including media practitioners, with intimidating prosecution and draconian legislation.¹⁰ This was one of a number of publications that have made similar allegations, including reports by the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (2007),¹¹ Human Rights Watch (2010),¹² Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (African Media Barometer, 2010),¹³ and Freedom House (2011).¹⁴ The annual Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, concurs: in 2011, Uganda came 139th out of 179 countries in terms of media freedom, having moved steadily down the rankings from 96th in 2010, 86th in 2009, and 52nd in 2002.¹⁵

Public officials have often dismissed such findings. Last year Amnesty International quoted a representative of the Broadcasting Council defending alleged interference from state officials with radio stations as “normal interventions to enforce the minimum broadcasting standards¹⁶ and ... justifiable in the context of the developing media industry in the country.”

“You have a fairly progressive Constitution that grants liberties and rights of political association, of expression, etc. and then you have seen, over the last ten years in particular, attempts by the Government to claw back many of those freedoms,” says Daniel Kalinaki, managing editor of the *Daily Monitor* newspaper. “We have had the abuse of the law governing the broadcasting sector by arbitrary closure of radio stations and very overt manipulation, censorship, and attempts to influence the content.”¹⁷

Niels Hjortdal, Head of Programmes at Danida-HUGGO, the donor funds-managing unit, acknowledges that Uganda has a relatively vibrant press, but says: “There are certain dark clouds hanging low over our heads.”¹⁸

In an environment with increasing self-censorship, it could be argued that some foreign correspondents have become more assertive, asking tough questions of the top political leadership without fear of being branded as biased towards the opposition. Predictably, the Government has, in recent years, become more wary of independent



TRYGVE BOLSTAD/PANOS

foreign journalists, with President Museveni branding them enemies of Uganda's development in 2011.

At the same time, in keeping with Uganda's international image as reformist and progressive, the President has been more readily available to foreign media than to local journalists. It could also be argued that foreign media coverage of violations in Uganda – including violations of press freedoms – could have had a moderating influence on the Government.

The media policy landscape

Several interviewees point out that recent laws, such as the 2010 Regulation of Interception of Communication Act¹⁹ and the Anti-Terrorism Act,²⁰ have threatened Constitutional rights to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. But the latest uproar relates to two pieces of proposed legislation: the Public Order Management Bill (POMB), now before Parliament, and the Press and Journalists (Amendment) Bill (PJAB). The latter surfaced in 2010 before vehement and concerted outcry from such organisations as the Article 29 Coalition and Freedom House forced it, temporarily, off the table. It is still reported to be under consideration by the Government and would require a newspaper to obtain an annual licence from the

Media Council on condition that the newspaper does not publish material that endangers national security, unity, stability or foreign relations.

There are also increasing cases of journalists on duty being physically assaulted²¹ by security personnel and officials of the ruling party, and having their equipment confiscated. In a report in late 2010, the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U) said it had recorded at least 50 cases of violence against journalists that year, with most violations committed by police officers (16) and members of the public (13). Violence was particularly pronounced in 2011 during the election season, the Walk-to-Work protests against soaring commodity prices and other disturbances. In one incident reported by HRNJ-U in early 2011, six reporters were assaulted by alleged supporters of the ruling party's mayoral candidate in Kampala. Another journalist, Julius Odeke, was shot while covering electoral disturbances in Sironko district in eastern Uganda.²²

Paul Mukasa, Secretary to the Media Council, the statutory regulator charged with ensuring ethical and free media practice, is less concerned about the current situation: "I would rank Uganda as one of the countries which enjoy a greater element of freedom of expression... You have seen journalists being taken to court... What is important is the

Above

Vision newspaper printing press, Kampala.

process of law to be followed. For example if a journalist is attacked, what happens? Is it done with impunity? If a journalist transgresses, what does the State do? Do they detain him without trial or do they go to court?"²³

■ ■ The State has been prepared to endure criticism from Kampala's bigger and more sophisticated media houses, as long as it is kept away from the voting majority in the countryside. ■ ■

On the proposed laws, Mukasa suggests that the Government felt that there was too much media freedom²⁴ and that part of the motivation behind the PJAB was to find the right balance. He stresses that the Media Council has no problem with media freedom, provided aggrieved parties can get redress from the independent courts.

The judiciary has been a cornerstone of Uganda's relatively free media environment. In general, Uganda's courts have upheld constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and dismissed cases against journalists – the notable exception being the imprisonment of the *Shariat* newspaper's Haruna Kanaabi for sedition. In 2004, for example, the Uganda Supreme Court nullified, on appeal, the penal code section on publication of false news. In 2010, the Constitutional Court nullified the law on sedition.²⁵

While these are significant victories, they should be seen in the context of the relationship between the Government and judiciary. When judges, many of whom qualified before Museveni came to power, have ruled against the Government in critical cases, the President has accused them of fighting his Government. At one time, he vowed to fill the judiciary with young people friendly to the ruling party. That could have implications, in future, for the judicial protection of media freedoms. Critical media practitioners have already found themselves the targets of suspicious court charges that, commentators say, lead to self-censorship.^{30 31}

There's Kampala and then there's the rest

Some independent commentators feel that the way in which the world sees the Ugandan media is a kind of mirage perpetuated, in part, by favourable comparisons with past regimes and with other African countries.³² In reality, they argue, Uganda's media sector is shrouded in a deceptive duality that allows the State to block mass discussion and scrutiny of the country's political affairs, while portraying itself as a tolerant champion of basic freedoms.

On the one hand, the largely vibrant and relatively assertive national press and electronic media based in the capital Kampala have been allowed relative freedom (until recently). On the other hand, rural radio stations may be barred from hosting an opposition politician or discussing certain sensitive topics, depending on the opinion of local security personnel, the instructions of the stations' owners, or the views of Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), who are employed by the President's Office and often seen as the President's eyes and ears on, for example, local security.^{33 34 35}

This sense of 'safe' and 'unsafe' territories and topics runs through most of the interviews conducted for this study. As James Tumusiime, managing editor of *The Observer*, puts it, "Uganda is a one-city country".³⁶ The diplomatic community and the outside world that follow the Kampala-based media houses marvel at its vibrancy, which makes the Government look progressive. However in the rural areas, where 80 per cent of Uganda's 33 million people still live, RDCs and security chiefs remain "demigods",³⁷ and freedom of expression is often limited to topics and individuals that are acceptable to state and ruling party officials or to NRM-leaning radio station owners.

It appears, then, the State has been prepared to endure criticism from Kampala's bigger and more sophisticated media houses, as long as it is kept away from the voting majority in the countryside. Some commentators have argued that the PJAB would apply the same controls used on electronic media to the print media.³⁸ This suggests that, with rural and electronic media under control, the State could be moving to rein in what has been a relatively outspoken national press.

Media regulators

Uganda's Media Council and the Broadcasting Council have long been the principal regulatory bodies for the media, established by the Press and Journalist Act and the Electronic Media Act respectively. Appointments to both bodies, plus funding and remuneration, are determined largely by the relevant government ministers,²⁶ and few observers see them as having any meaningful autonomy.²⁷

The Media Council is mandated to uphold ethical standards and licence Ugandan journalists, who must be enrolled members of the National Institute of Journalists, and accredit foreign journalists. It is supposed to issue journalists with practicing certificates but this does not happen in reality. In some cases the function of the accreditation of foreign journalists has been usurped by the Media Centre, which comes under the President's Office (one example was the Media Centre's decision to expel Blake Lambert, the Canadian correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor* in 2006).²⁸ The Council is also mandated to arbitrate disputes between the public or the State and the media. Of 22 cases listed on the Council's website by February 2012, seven had been brought by the State. Given that the State has closed media houses in the past, there are fears that the arbitration role may be failing. But as Secretary Paul Mukasa says, the Council's disciplinary committee can only arbitrate the cases that are brought before it.²⁹

The Broadcasting Council, with powers to control and supervise broadcasting activities, is also deemed by those interviewed for this case study to be under considerable government influence, with the law requiring it to comply with any "directives of a policy nature" from the Minister for Information. The Council is now, however, in transition, and has merged with the Uganda Communications Commission to form the Uganda Communications Authority (UCA).

► The media and public dialogue

In addition to contributing op-eds to traditional newspapers, many ordinary Ugandans have proved eager to call in to radio/TV stations to comment or ask questions during daily or weekly shows. This convergence of (mostly mobile) phone use and FM radio to expand public dialogue has been a cornerstone of Uganda's vibrant media scene.

In the late 1990s, noticing their listeners' penchant for having their voices on air, radio owners took public dialogue to a new level; they took their microphones to where the people congregate, broadcasting what came to be known as *Bimeeza* (discussion tables) broadcast live from public places such as pubs and restaurants. Like the studio talk-shows, the *Bimeeza* often featured panellists and a moderator; but a major advantage was that anyone could walk in and participate, unlike talk-shows that are often dominated by 'experts', and to which only those who have enough phone credit, and the luck to get through, can contribute.

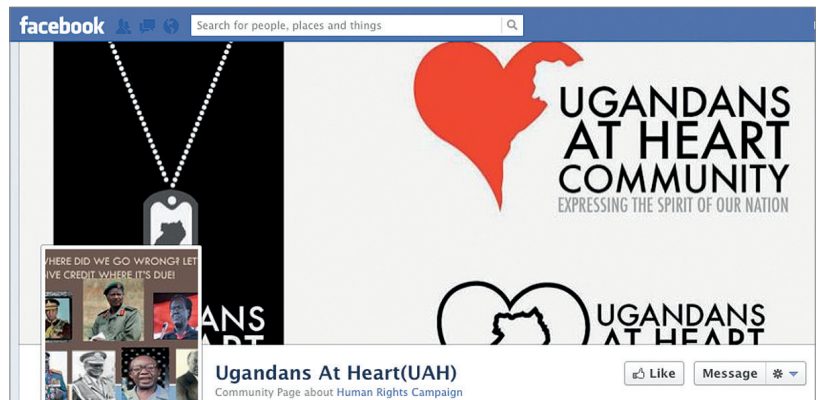
A recurring issue during interviews for this case study was the banning of the *Bimeeza* in September 2009 as the Government faced street riots in a protracted dispute with the Buganda Kingdom, representing the largest tribe in this diverse country. The reason given for the ban was that the broadcasts did not have a sufficient "legal and technical framework" to operate and that they contravened the Electronic Media Act.³⁹ While various commentators acknowledge that some *Bimeeza* debaters used the fora for abusive or sectarian attacks, they also argue that this gave the State an excuse to stifle criticism.⁴⁰

Ironically, as if to pre-empt lingering calls for the *Bimeeza* ban to be lifted, the Government has since started its own *Barazas*, public discussions modelled on the banned *Bimeeza*. But as Mathias Mulumba Mayombwe of the Uganda Media Development Foundation (UMDF) points out, the marked involvement of state or ruling party functionaries in the organisation of the *Barazas* means they lack the aura of freedom radiated by the *Bimeeza*.⁴¹

While there is still plenty of public dialogue in various media, those interviewed raised questions on its quality, with increasing interrogation of its content. What were people actually talking about? Did they feel free to say what they feel? How did the authorities react? And what is the outcome of all this talk – does it enhance accountability or is it just a way to vent popular anger and frustration?

In the past there was a feeling that Ugandans could talk about anyone and anything. Now, however, many people feel uncertain about the benefits of public dialogue on key issues, and limited in what they can say freely.

"You can say anything until you say sensitive things to do with certain people. If you are going to talk about the first family... if you are going to talk about military deployment somewhere, then you are definitely stepping on wrong grounds," says Kampala-based journalist/trainer Charles Odongtho. "If you don't tackle sensitive issues that will affect the strength of government in power, you can also say you are practising your media freedom."⁴²



Public dialogue goes online

In Uganda, as in many other countries, the year 2011 demonstrated the great potential of social media for public communication and discussion. During the 2011 elections and the Walk-to-Work protests, some of the most animated debates and real time information were found on Facebook and Twitter.⁴³ Notably, even journalists with major media houses were much more outspoken on social media than in the more cautious mainstream media.

The African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) has already created a closed group where media practitioners discuss issues relating to their profession. Given the lack of a powerful professional journalism association, this group has achieved something new: getting hundreds of journalists from different media houses to talk to one another on a regular basis.

Uganda has one of the world's youngest populations, with one in two Ugandans aged 15 years or younger. In 2010, access to, and use of, the Internet was not enormous – hovering between 10 and 13 per cent.⁴⁴ As Kampala-based editor and regular blogger Rosebell Kagumire says, it is mostly the younger people – students and professionals – who are embracing social media. But its use is expanding to the business community, especially as the mobile phone becomes an important Internet tool. Kagumire sees Twitter as a growing discursive platform, where people share views on such governance issues as poor social services and corruption.⁴⁵ Facebook groups have also drawn in people who are interested in particular issues, such as the Mabira forest controversy with campaigners aiming to preserve the forest from a sugar company. One group, Ugandans at Heart, with a reported 15,000 members, says its overall goal is "to empower Ugandans and shift power from the leaders to the people themselves or communities".

While one could dismiss such fora as being limited to the urban elite and having no impact on most Ugandans,⁴⁶ they could become significant as cheap Chinese smart phones bring the Internet to more users. The importance of social media was shown when the Government asked Internet Service Providers to shut down their social media services during the Walk-to-Work protests, even if this request was not enforced.⁴⁷

Above

Like many social network sites, 'Ugandans at Heart' is a popular forum for debate on key issues.



SVEN TORFINN/PAFOS

► Donor responses and media support

Above

A woman watches a large widescreen TV showing Chinese state broadcaster CCTV as she works in the canteen kitchen of a Chinese company in Kampala.

All the donor representatives interviewed for this case study emphasised the importance of free, effective media for governance programming, with a free media vital for “demanding accountability and stimulating demand for accountability.”⁴⁸ Donor countries want to use their taxpayers’ money to support Uganda’s development and see the media as crucial in holding Uganda’s leaders accountable to their public. By extension, therefore, an effective Ugandan media would help to ensure taxpayers in donor countries that their money is being well-used.

Donors support media development because they envisage Ugandan journalists playing the watchdog role played by media in western countries. Donor support to media

has, therefore, been part of programmes to strengthen democratic governance institutions, fight corruption in the public sector, or empower Ugandans to demand accountability. The media has also been seen as a tool to promote peace and development – especially in northern Uganda, which endured nearly two decades of war.

During interviews for this case study, however, it became clear that donors have not given media development the detailed, coherent attention given to sectors like education and health. One reason could be that, unlike most other sectors, there is no single entity that can effectively aggregate, articulate and represent the interests of the media sector. Some donor representatives said they

wanted to support the media, but were undecided on how. Others were reported to be “not very interested” in programmatic specifics of media support, beyond wanting freedom of expression to be protected.

The major sources of funding for media development have included both bilateral and multilateral donors interested in governance issues, as well as various western foundations and agencies with a democracy agenda. Over the past six years, they have included the European Union, USAID, and the Deepening Democracy Programme (DDP), a five-year, \$18 million basket managed by Danida-HUGGO and funded by Denmark, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden and Norway. These six donors have, since July 2011, been joined by Austria and the European Union to form the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), a \$93 million governance programme to run until December 2016.

Other funders include Germany’s Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation), Freedom House, the International Republican Institute and the Open Society Initiative for East Africa (OSIEA). China, whose interest in Africa continues to grow, has been involved mostly with state media. According to the UBC website, the Chinese Government gave UBC a grant (to be finalised by the end of 2012) to set up a “second television channel and a radio channel in Jinja” in eastern Uganda. A Chinese company, the Export-Import Bank (EXIM), was also reported to have signed a \$74 million deal with UBC for Uganda’s migration from analogue to digital broadcasting. That project, however, was then suspended, under investigation by Parliament and the Inspectorate of Government. UBC’s website also reports a “technical grant” from the Government of Japan to improve its transmission.⁴⁹

Most donor support appears to be channelled through local or regional media-related NGOs and professional associations that can present specific proposals to meet the donors’ funding criteria. The process has been that donors extend grants to the NGOs which then implement approved projects. To date, much of this media development support has come in the form of capacity building and enhancement projects through training in journalism skills and values funding for the production of public affairs programmes and news reports, and – in some projects – provision of radio station equipment.

The donor-funded NGOs are, however, competing with one another, and both donors and NGOs feel that some form of coordination would be helpful to avoid duplication and optimise overall sector benefits.⁵⁰ Donors have led the way on this issue, through initiatives like the DDP and now the DGF, but their attempts to harmonise media support appear to be more of a quest for operational, rather than philosophical, coherence.

With the formation of the DDP basket fund, which included capacity building for the media, it was necessary to impose some order on competing NGO applications for funding. However this effort has only involved large bilateral and

multilateral donors, with many other agencies still dealing with NGOs and media houses directly. Nevertheless, such support could draw comparisons with the Tanzania Media Fund (TMF) across Uganda’s Southern border. Like the DGF, the donor-funded TMF gives reporting grants and fellowships to individuals for media-related work, as well as to institutions, upon approval of applications.⁵¹

At the same time, the broader institutional framework (DGF) under which this support falls is a collaboration between donors and the Ugandan Government. On the one hand, this may be an advantage, as it provides a forum where donors can broach thorny media-related issues with the Government on a regular basis. On the other hand, much depends on relations between the media sector, the donors and the Government, in an environment where the latter is accused, increasingly, of targeting critical voices. For now, though, there have been no major difficulties, with the donors supporting media NGOs in their opposition to hostile media legislation, such as the PJAB.

Current media support initiatives

In her 2011 report, *Developing Independent Media as an Institution of Accountable Governance*, Shanthi Kalathil identifies civil society (including advocacy NGOs and professional associations) as a cornerstone of a vibrant, democracy-enhancing media sector. Among other functions, NGOs and a media-literate public “can also act as the first line of defence when journalists and other media sector professionals are harassed”.⁵² This is true in Uganda, as elsewhere. The HRNJ-U, for example, has distinguished itself by cataloguing attacks on press freedom with a frequency and promptness rarely seen before. In addition, civil society has tried to come together as a whole in times of major threats to freedoms to criticise perpetrators, especially state organs.⁵³

NGOs also play a critical role as partners for donor entities in the implementation of media development projects. Some media professionals would like a more direct interface between donors and media houses but, as one donor put it, NGOs have the advantage of “speaking the language” of donors on such issues as project planning, monitoring and evaluation. Among the more active media NGOs operating in Uganda today are: Panos Eastern Africa (PEA), the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME), the Uganda Radio Network (URN), the Independent Media Council of Uganda (IMCU), Makerere University, Department of Journalism and Communication (DJC), the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ), the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA), and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), among others.

Most donor support appears to be channelled through local or regional media-related NGOs and professional associations that can present specific proposals to meet the donors’ funding criteria.

Examples of media support initiatives

Uganda Media Development Foundation (UMDF)

UMDF was founded in 1994 by journalists to promote “a pro-active media that participates in the democratic and development processes in the country”.⁵⁴ It aims to build the capacity of media practitioners through on-location training, seminars and mentoring. Coordinator Mathias Mulumba Mayombwe says UMDF offers “mid-career” training for untrained journalists or trained journalists who need refresher courses.⁵⁵ It chooses a thematic area each year, with the current menu including: Corruption, Human Rights, Investigative Reporting, Political Reporting, Court Reporting, Gender Issues, Conflict Sensitive Journalism (CSJ) and Peace Development. UMDF ran a Peace, Development and Electoral Journalism Project in 2010/11 funded by USAID, which included peace-promoting PSAs, community meetings and 24 seminars for journalists and radio owners and managers.⁵⁶

Mayombwe says UMDF emphasises rural radio stations because journalists around Kampala are well-served. But UMDF also recognises that many better-trained journalists are likely to be working in the capital. So it provides on-location training, where trainers spend “a day or two” at a particular radio station, and mentorship relationships that follow on after the training. UMDF’s other funders have included Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the EU and the Austrian EED (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst), which supports the current CSJ project.

Panos Eastern Africa (PEA)

PEA is one of the oldest media NGOs operating in Uganda, emphasising issues and voices that rarely emerge in mainstream fora. Part of the Panos global network founded in 1986, PEA covers nine countries, with its regional headquarters in Kampala. Its programming spans: Media Pluralism and Development, Governance and Globalisation, Pastoralist Communication, Gender, Environment and Conflict, and Health Communication. Its media development interventions have revolved around training for media practitioners, providing reporting grants, establishing rural press clubs, supporting radio stations to promote rural discourse for political accountability and research and documentation. Major donors to PEA have been Sida, Danida, the Deepening Democracy Programme (DDP) basket fund and the EU through the European Development Fund (EDF).

Recent flagship projects include the Rural Radio Debates, with PEA supporting some 20 radio stations to produce and broadcast community debates. PEA’s Acting Executive Director Peter Okubal says that with about 60%⁵⁷ of Ugandans relying on radio as the primary source of news, and with the impact of bad governance felt by voiceless rural citizens in particular, these debates aim to build civic consciousness and promote accountability.⁵⁸ Feedback from participating radio stations⁵⁹ shows that the programmes have boosted their editorial capacity, listenership and advertising revenue, while ensuring that the voices of marginalised groups, like rural women, are heard. In 2011, PEA announced a two-year Media for Democratic Governance and Accountability Project (MDGAP), with funding

of €209,581 from the EDF. The project is expected to work with radio stations, newspapers and TV stations on initiatives to enhance capacity to demand accountability.

African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME)

ACME is one of Uganda’s youngest media NGOs, founded in September 2009. Steered by former senior editors/media trainers, ACME aims to promote excellence in media and help the public to appreciate and engage with media. Its programmes include: research and advocacy on contemporary media-related issues, continuing and mid-career training, media monitoring, reporting grants, and media literacy.⁶⁰ Executive Director Peter Mwesige (PhD) says ACME’s programmes have been funded by DDP, the Population Reference Bureau, the Fund for Global Human Rights, the Revenue Watch Institute, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, with Freedom House the only provider of institutional funding.⁶¹

Its major initiatives have been training on covering elections (in preparation for the 2011 elections) and oil, as Uganda will begin oil production in the coming years. In 2010, ACME hosted an international task force⁶² on Freedom of Expression in Uganda, which urged the State not to muzzle the media. Under DDP contracts, ACME developed guidelines for media coverage of elections, trained talk show hosts to moderate political debate, and hosted a dialogue to review media coverage of the elections. Again with DDP funding, ACME hosted a 2010 roundtable on the proposed Press and Journalist (Amendment) Bill, drawing on lessons from Ghana.⁶³

ACME has initiated a lively Facebook forum, Uganda Journalists (UJ), where media practitioners can monitor and comment on each other’s work. With more than 400 members at the time of writing, UJ could be Uganda’s most active forum for cross-media peer review and self-regulation.⁶⁴

Uganda Radio Network (URN)

URN looks, on the face of it, looks like another news agency. But it has received pivotal donor support and could represent a step in the right direction for future donor engagement, according to some observers. It was founded in 2005 with support from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and the Danida-managed Election Support Programme. URN provides tailored training for journalists from various parts of the country so they can produce stories that meet set standards. These stories are uploaded on the URN website for use by any of 54 subscribing radio stations.

URN’s approach emerged from bitter experience. Prior to the 2006 elections, URN trained about 200 journalists on election reporting. A subsequent study revealed that only 20 of those trainees actually wrote stories during the elections – and barely half of these were of good quality. It was then that URN started thinking about a new approach, which appears to be serving them well. “We thought, ‘there must be something wrong’”, says Executive Director Samuel Gummah.⁶⁵ “The training was not contextualised enough for people to react to their environment.”

URN also produces *National Perspectives*, a weekly one-hour syndicated talk-show on topical issues. Intended to be aired once a week by 34 stations, some stations have been known to run this popular show three times each week.

URN has received funding from the Deepening Democracy Programme, with donors still keen to help it become self-sustaining. Journalists who contribute stories to URN are paid better than they would be by radio stations in their home region,⁶⁶ and this, combined with URN's strict guidelines on quality, creates an opportunity for high quality content from all corners of the country.

Independent Media Council of Uganda (IMCU)

The IMCU was formed in 2006 by 42 media houses in response to a clamour for tougher media regulation. It aims to promote journalistic responsibility and high ethical standards, and thereby deny the State an excuse to interfere with media independence. IMCU has been supported by various donors, including UNESCO, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and the DDP.

Its major achievements have been the production and distribution of a code of conduct, and training sessions on ethics. Beyond that, it appears to have stagnated, dogged by lack of interest among its founders. As Henry Kasacca of FES asks: "If this Media Council is supposed to protect media houses [but these very media houses] are not interested in it, how much support can you, as FES, give it to help it take off?"⁶⁷

According to IMCU board member Rose Mary Kemigisha, a Human Rights Officer at the Uganda Human Rights Commission, media houses have not only failed to pay the annual subscription fee of US\$100,000 (\$40), they lack an appreciation of the concept of self-regulation.⁶⁸ Many people reportedly believe that the IMCU will fail unless it has the power to punish poor practice. However, IMCU has not received any complaints to consider, and has not even held the requisite number of board meetings.

Some observers feel that IMCU could have been more proactive, or done more to popularise the self-regulation concept among journalists. Executive Secretary Haruna Kanaabi concedes that the Council has faced challenges in promoting its activities. However, he says that, with funding from GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation), IMCU has developed a monitoring tool that will allow a more proactive approach.⁶⁹ In 2012, IMCU has planned training for editors and programme managers to promote self-regulation within media houses, if funds expected from UNESCO become available.

Makerere University, Department of Journalism and Communication (DJC)

The DJC's latest capacity-building initiative is the post-graduate diploma in investigative journalism, with funding worth US\$588 million (\$255,652) from the DDP for two

years. According to Assistant Lecturer and Coordinator Marjorie Kyomuhendo, the proposal for the diploma emerged from the Uganda Investigative Journalism Awards, coordinated by DJC, following concerns that many of the stories submitted had major flaws.⁷⁰ The response was to improve training. This points to other possible interventions: with many of those entering journalism from journalism training institutions, should more support be channelled to those institutions? Pascal Mweruka, News Editor with Masaka-based Radio Buddu, finds that graduate interns lack practical skills, and yet their internship is taken as a formality. There should be, he argues, longer and better-monitored practical training.⁷¹

The Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U) and the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA)

The HRNJ-U has emerged as a vocal and persistent campaigner for press freedom. At a time when threats and attacks on journalists are raising concerns, HRNJ-U's work exposes violations, such as those in rural areas, that would not otherwise reach the national or international news. HRNJ-U Coordinator Geoffrey Wokulira Ssebagala says the organisation has received support from the Open Society Initiative, IFEX, USAID, Freedom House, the Media Legal Defence Initiative and Danida. This support, in response to specific requests, has gone to advocacy, protection, litigation and institutional development.⁷²

UJA is supposed to be the leading professional association for journalists in Uganda, with 860 members according to its President Joshua Kyalimpa.⁷³ But it faces serious challenges to its credibility following chaotic scenes during the last elections, amid allegations of UJA manipulation. This may explain why the UJA has been shunned by senior editors and journalists. Kyalimpa says the executive is working on a plan to re-brand the UJA, which would include inviting senior journalists to serve as advisors.

Below
Website of
The Human
Rights
Network For
Journalists
– Uganda.



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Magistrate Apologizes For Detaining Journalist
Masaka, 22nd June 2012: A Masaka-based Magistrate has apologized for arresting and detaining a journalist early this week...Full story here | More photos

A Masaka-based Magistrate has apologized for arresting and detaining a journalist early this week. Doreen Ajuna, a Grade One Magistrate arrested and detained Namuwonge Hahifah, a reporter with the government media outlets; Bukedde Television, Bukedde Newspaper and Bukedde FM on June 19th during a court

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Public Quiz This Week



RACHAEL BORLASE/BBC MEDIA ACTION

Above
Radio journalists and community leaders discuss the media's role in governance in rural Uganda, Kagadi.

While donors have a duty to ensure that money is well spent, they may have to develop more flexible funding criteria to encourage innovation and practical solutions.

Many CSOs appear to have focussed their support largely, but not exclusively, on media practitioners – reporters, editors and producers – on the basis that journalists need skills, a grounding in values and refresher training to do a proper, professional job. As a result, so much of this capacity building has been in the form of training seminars for practitioners that some commentators question their efficacy. Some argue that, with many journalists

now joining the profession as degree- or diploma-holders or students, a skills or ethics session at a town hotel for a day or two may not make much impact, if other attendant issues are not addressed.

“They [donors] need to do a study on whether training itself is sufficient to improve the media; because I have gone to South Sudan and they do it. The donors almost fund a radio station,” says Kyadondo East MP Ibrahim Ssemujju Ngandaa, a former journalist and media trainer. “So, beyond training, [donors] must ask the question, ‘is training alone

sufficient to improve the media?’ Once they answer that, I can see them moving beyond and begin doing some work.”⁷⁴

In fact, some work has been done at local level, including under the USAID-funded Northern Uganda Transition

Initiative (NUTI) and two BBC Media Action projects funded by the European Commission (EC) and Austrian Development Corporation (ADC). Here, radio stations in northern and north western Uganda have received transmission and studio equipment, on top of long-term training for staff. In this case, the projects aimed to build the technical (and business capacity) of media houses to reach bigger audiences with quality public affairs programmes. Another example would be the DDP-funded Uganda Radio Network, a news agency that carries stories from across the country, now used by 54 subscriber stations. Other projects have included journalism awards, such as the Uganda Investigative Journalism Awards implemented by Makerere University and reporting grants such as those offered by PEA and ACME to enable journalists to cover neglected or costly stories.

When it comes to research on the media, the picture is mixed. All donors and NGOs acknowledge the importance of research on the media as a programme area and to inform project design. But the emphasis varies from organisation to organisation and, at best, research is an area for potential growth. One donor remarked that one does not need a major study to know what problems face the media – a view that seems common. There continues to be such a reliance on anecdotal evidence and ad hoc assessments to shape interventions that people like trainer Wilson Kaija, who worked formerly with BBC Media Action in Uganda, stress the urgent need for donors and NGOs to base their work on scientific research.⁷⁵

One related issue is who ‘owns’ media development initiatives. In theory, NGOs write the project proposals and should, therefore, influence the kinds of interventions that are made. However, at least two interviewees expressed frustration that donors are sometimes inflexible and that they even call the shots because they pay the piper. While donors have a duty to ensure that money is well spent, they may have to develop more flexible funding criteria to encourage innovation and practical solutions.

Ibrahim Ssemujju Ngandaa, for instance, recalled how the Uganda Parliamentary Press Association once proposed that donors equip a mini-newsroom for journalists at Parliament, only to be told that the only available money was for seminars. “So in one seminar we go to Hotel Africana and they give us 48 million [\$20,000] Ugandan shillings” he says. “we needed [only] half of that to set up a newsroom that would benefit us and Ugandans. But they are willing to spend more...”⁷⁶

► Research: key findings

For all the apparent vibrancy of the Ugandan media industry, frank discussions with practitioners reveal a journalism profession in peril. As revealed in the research for this case study, many stakeholders are concerned about the actions of the State and its agents, which constrain the media's operational space. But at least three of the interviewees argue that state machinations are not the most urgent of concerns when it comes to the journalistic malaise.

There are several other challenges facing the profession. One is an increasing crisis of quality. While most interviewees appreciate the efforts journalists make to do a decent job under difficult conditions, there is widespread concern about falling standards of investigation, analysis and solid reporting. There are increasing concerns too about sensationalism and fairness and, as one diplomat put it, "basic" things like giving an accused person a right to respond.⁷⁷ Some find this particularly troubling because today's journalists, especially those in the major media houses, are better trained than they were, say, 24 years ago, when Uganda's first journalism degree programme opened.

Many link declining standards to "defection from the newsroom"; no sooner do journalists gain some experience than they join other, presumably better-paying, professions such as public relations. The success of the market-leading Vision Group in retaining experienced staff suggests that other media houses could do more to keep their employees, including paying them decent wages.

Journalists' salaries are a source of widespread concern, particularly in some rural radio stations that, according to some interviewees, pay their reporters as little as \$0.20 per story. As Paul Mukasa of the Media Council points out, poor pay is difficult to tackle because the country has no minimum wage. Yet it feeds into a broader discussion about journalists being paid off or demanding 'facilitation', such as transport, which is now a regular feature on social media and other fora and reflects a lurking crisis of credibility.⁷⁸ The African Media Barometer (AMB) 2010 stressed the gravity of a problem that undermines the profession's quest for respect:

"There is corruption in Ugandan newsrooms, and some media houses acknowledge as much. *Daily Monitor* and *New Vision* have recently been placing notices in their papers warning the public and providing telephone hotlines and email addresses through which to report any offending journalist. On 12 February 2010, *Daily Monitor* put out a full-page notice titled "Protecting the Integrity of Our Journalism". It said in part: 'Widespread corruption within some newsrooms appears to be a major aspect of the perceived erosion of journalistic integrity... We would like to emphasise, in particular, that our editors, reporters/correspondents and photographers are expressly barred from soliciting, accepting money or any form of payment or inducement for publication of news, opinion, or feature in any of our media'".⁷⁹

Journalists were alarmed at reports that the Government planned to pay media practitioners on a regular basis to get positive coverage, seeing such payment as an insidious carrot that will choke would-be critical voices into convenient silence.⁸⁰ Interviewees also fear that big companies are using their huge advertising budgets to suffocate negative coverage. All of this leads them to conclude that the "economic threat" to media freedom is bigger than the political threat.⁸¹

Other challenges include the failure of media stakeholders to engage on key issues, such as self-regulation, with little interest in the independent Media Council set up with donor support.

Ultimately, Uganda has a media sector that faces serious challenges but seems ill-prepared to confront them. At the same time, foreign donors, who now fund about one third of the national budget, see media development as an area that still merits their support.

■ ■ ■ The economic threat to media freedom is bigger than the political threat. ■ ■ ■

Below
A BBC Media Action Researcher speaks with radio listeners in Mbale District.



BBC Media Action... two years later



DAVID MUSIME/BBC MEDIA ACTION

In 2009 and 2010, BBC Media Action supported six rural Ugandan radio stations to improve local coverage of governance and human rights issues. Journalism mentors were based in partner stations over several months to help overcome the struggles rural broadcasters face in reaching audiences and holding local leaders to account. The use of interactive radio to bring leaders closer to listeners, combined with in-house skills training and infrastructural support, helped station staff produce more accurate and balanced programming. BBC Media Action research found that at the end of the project all six stations felt their knowledge and reporting of governance issues had improved, and that they were better at serving and involving communities. Audience research found that listeners felt programming was more relevant to their needs, more informed about governance-related issues, and more connected to decision-making processes.

Two years on, this case study revisited staff and management at two of these stations, Signal FM and Radio Pacis, to find out if the improved programme quality had been maintained, alongside their ability to engage with local decision-makers and the public. Radio Pacis staff felt that their skills and the quality of their programmes continued to improve. This was not only because of supportive station management, but also because Radio Pacis continued to be partners in similar media development projects with Panos Eastern Africa (PEA).

Staff at Signal FM on the other hand, continued to face serious challenges and had not received any intensive support since BBC Media Action had left. Of the five reporters trained in the newsroom, for example, only one still works at Signal FM. Lack of management support, and an inability to retain staff means that the station faces the same obstacles it has always faced. "We know that we are supposed

to cover stories that affect the people, and it needs us to go to the grassroots, to the people, to get their views....but you find that there is no money and you end up doing these usual stories where you can reach fast", says the News Editor.

Despite the project's strong emphasis on building bridges between local decision-makers and media houses and on innovation, hostility from local leaders and self-censorship remains a problem at both stations. "Some issues which are deemed controversial are left out to avoid censorship by leaders" revealed a programme host at Radio Pacis.

This follow-up research points to an improved understanding of, and enthusiasm for, media's role in reporting democratic processes. But a restrictive political and economic environment still determines what media can and cannot do. Barriers may be lowered temporarily by support for media interventions, but the long-term impact on progress and change is questionable. Media support organisations need to consider moving beyond impact evaluations at the end of projects, and look at long-term sustainability within a context of political economy. The research also reinforces the fact that one-off projects are not likely to yield long-term results.

Left

Community leaders learn interview techniques for radio at a studio in Mbale.

Some issues which are deemed controversial are left out to avoid censorship by leaders.

Below

A reporter from Kyogo Veritas interviews a young woman on International Women's Day in Soroti.



RACHAEL BORLASE/BBC MEDIA ACTION

► Where do we go from here?

In exploring how well the media was playing its 'democratic' role, one of the questions discussed with interviewees was the core function of the media in democratic governance in a country like Uganda. One argument that emerged was that besides the 'traditional' information and education roles, including acting as a watchdog and providing a forum for debate, the media in a democratising country should play what *Daily Monitor*'s Daniel Kalinaki calls an "almost activist role" in protecting basic freedoms and championing constitutional rule and institutional governance. Samuel Gummah of URN adds that because civic institutions like political parties are so underdeveloped, Ugandan media should step in to aggregate public opinion to give a sense of the direction the country should take on key issues.⁸²

The gist of this delicate, nuanced argument is that the media cannot restrict themselves to being mere chroniclers or amplifiers for political actors. Instead, in the process of boldly explaining and analysing the news, media become quasi actors in their own right, even if their motivations are different. There is a need for caution, though. As Peter Mwesige warns, the invitation to play "an almost activist role" does not mean that the media should jump into bed with this or that political actor.⁸³ Professional values such as fairness, balance, objectivity and a genuine commitment to the truth should be upheld, whether in the USA, UK or Uganda.

Creating public dialogue without a public

A recurrent theme during interviews was that most of the country's many radio stations focus on music and entertainment rather than news and public affairs programming. Such concerns are commonplace in any study of media in any country, as is the so often cited reason (strongly rejected by Gummah⁸⁴) that this is what the audience wants: the commercial success of FM radio suggests that those who run the stations are right on the money.

While entertainment is a legitimate item on the media menu, it is worth exploring the civic relationship between the Ugandan public and the media. Do the public see the media and its freedom as an extension of their individual freedoms? Do they see the media as working for them to hold leaders to account? With a few exceptions, the common view expressed by interviewees was of "a disconnect" between the media, as an embodiment of freedom of expression, and the public that the media are supposed to serve. It is, one editor noted, not uncommon, to hear people say something like "Why do you question the President?"

There is a sense that, in a country with a history of autocracy and where public discourse on human rights is relatively new, freedom of expression is simply not grounded enough. Neither does it help, as two interviewees suggested,⁸⁵ that Uganda is a patriarchal society, where the father at home,

the head teacher at school and even, in some cases, the boss at work, is questioned at your own peril. At the same time, one would ask, how has the media aligned itself? With the public or with big business and the political classes?

This means that the media role, such as holding political leaders to account, may only be appreciated by a minority whose fortunes do not depend on political patronage, and may explain why press freedom lacks defenders. It may also invite more consideration for issues like media literacy and civic curricula and how these can best be approached as programmatic areas, as Shanthi Kalathil suggests in a recent World Bank report.

"Media literacy for the general public is not a primary concern for many donors, but it is an important part of a healthy, independent media sector," Kalathil says. "If training media professionals and other activities is the supply side, supporting the public's appetite for high-quality news is the demand side."⁸⁶

Building strong media houses

One recurring proposal to address the deteriorating quality of journalism is for donors and NGOs to work more with media houses – rather than individual practitioners – as the primary focus of intervention. The rationale here is that it is not efficient to train journalists if their media houses do not allow or inspire them to apply the acquired skills in practice. Nor, as the DGF's Simon Osborn says, does it help to train journalists today who are almost certain to leave the profession tomorrow.⁸⁷

With various interviewees making the same point in different ways, it is clear there is a strong case to rethink the present system, which, with worthy exceptions, presupposes that all is well in Uganda's media houses, and that these media houses are passionate about their role in governance.

"We really need the support but that support should look at the existing environment and then work out things that will lay a strong foundation for the development of the media in this country and not just to leave it to the business community who are interested only in profits," says Haruna Kanaabi of the IMCU and EAMI. "And I would like to see support to different media houses to grow: let us have showcases."⁸⁸

Those interested in promoting courageous journalism that holds power to account on behalf of the population would do well to promote strong, courageous media houses that see good journalism – rather than profit – as their core business and ultimate prize.⁸⁹

"If I had a fund, that is where my intervention would be – to provide a kind of shock absorber that would free all these commercial media to let loose the professional talent to do the things that they would love to do," says Gummah of URN, echoing *Daily Monitor*'s Kalinaki, who argues:

It is not efficient to train journalists if their media houses do not allow or inspire them to apply the acquired skills in practice.

“[Donors] need to support journalism and support media houses that are doing journalism. If anything, they need to insulate journalism from business, and by insulating it from business they will be insulating it from politicians as well.”⁹⁰

These views tally with Kalathil’s argument that: “It is advisable for donors to support small independent media to offset the potentially negative effects of political and economic pressures on the mainstream media.”

Yet Hjortdal and the NUTI project admit that donors would be conscious that significant capital investments could invite accusations of interfering in private sector, or even political, competition.⁹¹ This is a valid concern, but calculated exceptions – such as when the failure of a crucial media outlet would damage citizens’ access to independent information⁹² – could be made in the interest of democratic governance and access to independent information in restrictive societies.

Taking a long-term view

Shanthi Kalathil argues that for a media sector to buttress good governance, it must have several interdependent and functioning components; these include infrastructure, a progressive regulatory environment, and a media-literate

society. “High editorial standards and professional journalists are equally crucial, but they cannot function without a well-managed, economically sustainable organisation behind them,” she says.⁹³

Interviewees often voiced the need for donors to take a long-term view, rather than focus on the short-term, ‘number-crunching’ workshops. ACME’s Peter Mwesige (PhD) argues that the cause-effect relationships of media development and advocacy work may not be immediately obvious; therefore only a patient, long-term approach has a chance to engender significant shifts in the media culture.⁹⁴ Donor organisations may, therefore, need to take a critical look at what has been done, listen more to media houses and organisations, and be more open to novel approaches.

At the implementation level, all NGOs suggest they are moving away from the ‘workshop syndrome’ to build medium-to-long-term mentoring relationships between trainers and trainees. This is particularly the case with electronic media, although ACME’s mentoring also includes print journalists. In general, it appears that in terms of skills development, it is the quality of such relationships, and the level of support that the media house can provide to nurture these relationships, that sets some initiatives apart.

If workshops don’t work, does mentoring?

Several media development projects have shifted away from standard training workshops to work *within* the structures and day-to-day operations of partner media houses.

This mentoring approach to media support, delivered by BBC Media Action, PEA, ACME, and UMDF in various media outlets across Uganda is based on the premise that there is greater chance of skills enhancement if training is hands-on and tailored to reflect the specific needs and realities of a particular media environment.

How these capacity building initiatives have been designed and implemented varies from a couple of days spent by trainers in rural radio stations, to long-term in-house training spanning several months. Though there is a lack of research to demonstrate that in-house mentoring yields more lasting results than journalism workshops, there are cost benefits to working within existing structures and using the technology available to journalists in their everyday work. Mentoring is also rooted in the idea that trainers build professional relationships with the people they work with that last beyond one-off interactions. “The journalists send the work they have done after the training and we follow that up through online trainings. The stations send in scripts before they go on air, and after the programme has been done we also get recordings of that work and we send back comments,” says UMDF’s Mathias Mulumba Mayombwe.⁹⁵

Mentoring’s flexibility also means that media support projects can adjust to the dynamic nature of Uganda’s media environment. In 2009, when the Government banned live out-of-studio radio broadcasts [*Bimeezas*], many partner stations of BBC Media Action’s HRGGP project were fearful to continue broadcasting interactive radio programmes about political and rights-based

issues. Though not ideal, rather than abandoning project goals altogether, BBC Media Action-supported mentors worked with station staff to produce pre-recorded talk shows that producers of governance-related programmes on the stations felt they could cover “to keep programmes running”. Special mentoring on Uganda’s media regulations was also incorporated into training plans to help rural reporters learn about the laws that govern their profession, and their journalistic rights.

ACME has provided an interesting hybrid that includes print journalists. Through a project funded by the Revenue Watch Institute, ACME trained two groups of Ugandan journalists in formal workshops, which were then followed up with mentoring over a six-month period. A trainee and a mentor discuss a story idea, story focus, ethical issues, sourcing, etc., with the resultant story published by the journalist’s media house. Such initiatives help to bridge the gap between concerted in-house training and mentorship.

Despite positive feedback from the results of mentoring, former BBC Media Action Senior Trainer Wilson Kaija continues to be sceptical about its long-term impact. “They [managers, owners] still run these stations as business entities, as political tools. Until that is changed, the mentoring alone is not going to deliver much.”⁹⁶ Kaija, along with many other experienced journalism mentors in Uganda, stresses that media support projects need to have a more holistic understanding of particular media environments. Rather than focus interventions on particular events such as elections or a conflict, projects need to be informed by a holistic view of how media houses, and their journalists, operate within their particular – and ever changing – political, economic and social environments over time.

Building greater harmonisation and coordination

Joshua Kyalimpa of the Uganda Journalists Association expresses frustration at the rivalry between NGOs, suggesting that some pull each other down as they compete for donor funding.⁹⁷ One donor representative further said, without wanting to go into details, some had gone as far as writing “dossiers” about one another. The NGOs we spoke to admitted there was no formal system to share information or best-practices, largely because of such competition. Other interviewees cited apparent duplication of efforts among different organisations.

All of this points to the need for some form of harmonisation and coordination in the funding mechanisms. While blaming dollar-dangling donors for fanning inter-NGO rivalry, Kyalimpa proposed a national media fund along the lines of the Tanzania Media Fund (TMF). It may be too soon to seize the TMF model; some observers argue that the search continues for a better compromise between disparate interventions and a potentially constraining bureaucracy. To this end, it may be worth watching the progress of the looser DGF experiment, and seeing what lessons can be drawn from it.

This report has examined the context in which the Ugandan media operates, and some of the major actors and efforts supporting media development. It has explained the dichotomy of the industry, with many of the major, English language, city-based media houses

relatively free and brave enough to speak truth to power, while much of the rural and electronic media must walk on eggshells.

International support to the media in Uganda has an unusual level of coordination across many of the country’s leading donors and there are promises that coordinated support will continue – and perhaps even be enhanced – over the next five years. However, a central dilemma remains about where efforts are best placed.

Though urban media outlets have the foundations necessary to withstand state pressure, they are often catering to elite audiences and do not represent the richness and diversity of much of Uganda’s underserved population. Rural media houses, such as radio stations, while better connected to their audiences and representative of Ugandan’s diverse population, are much more vulnerable to intimidation and less likely to sustain changes once external funding support and capacity come to an end.

Ultimately, this case study points to a widespread belief that donors and NGOs see the media as critical to democratic governance. If so, they need to consider lending longer-term support to media houses that are already passionate and principled about journalism and the fostering of inclusive and responsible public debate.

Support to the media in Uganda has an unusual level of coordination across many of the country’s leading donors and there are promises that coordinated support will continue.



Left
A reporter from Buddu FM interviews okada drivers in Masaka.

Appendix

Examples of key funding sources for media development

Organisation	Background	Support
Danida Human Rights and Good Governance Office of the Danish embassy in Uganda (HUGGO): Deepening Democracy Programme (DDP), Democratic Government Facility (DGF)	<p>DDP has been the largest single donor to media development in Uganda, with five pillars: boosting electoral integrity; the party system; Parliamentary oversight; and autonomy, civic engagement and free media.</p> <p>Has had an \$18 million basket fund since 2006, pooling resources from Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK. Around 14% of this went to media organisations.</p> <p>Has been replaced by the DGF, with a budget of \$93 million over five years and a focus on voice and accountability, and rights, justice and peace. It retains the support of the DDP donors, plus Austria and the EU.</p>	<p>DDP support was largely demand-driven and included support to:</p> <p>Uganda Radio Network, which trains media practitioners, runs an electronic news agency and produces the <i>National Perspectives</i> radio programme; the Monitoring of Media Coverage for the 2011 Elections in Uganda Project; Panos Eastern Africa's rural press clubs, and the Rural Radio Debate project; Makerere University's Department of Journalism and Communication; and training/assessment work by the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) in 2010/2011 on media coverage of the elections. DDP also supported Article 29 Coalition's attempt to forge cooperation among media organisations on press freedom.</p>
European Commission	<p>A key funder to media development over the past decade, with support coming under the broad governance category. Has supported two long-term capacity building projects implemented by BBC Media Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committing €7 million in 2006 to its Human Rights and Good Governance Programme (HRGGP) in partnership with the Government. The three-year project: Strengthening Democracy through the Media in Rural Uganda, aimed to build the capacity of key governance institutions. • The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, which funded BBC Media Action's 2007-2008 Communicating Justice Project to help journalists in Uganda boost public debate around transitional justice. <p>In 2011, it was announced that five organisations would receive a total of almost €1.6 million, part of the bigger Democratic Governance and Accountability Program (DGAP) funded by the European Commission (EC) under Round 10 of the European Development Fund.</p>	<p>Under the HRGGP, BBC Media Action received €500,000 for support to six rural radio stations to produce interactive programmes engaging leaders and audiences in discussions on local governance issues.</p> <p>Under the DGAP, €209,581 went to Panos Eastern Africa to implement a two-year media capacity-development project working with 14 media houses, including 10 radio stations.</p>

USAID's Northern Uganda Transitional Initiatives (NUTI)

According to Michael Ronning of USAID in Kampala, media forms only part of USAID's Democracy and Governance (DG) support in Uganda, and DG itself is the least funded component of USAID's country programme.⁹⁸

However, the NUTI project aimed to help media in northern Uganda improve coverage of peace, recovery and development between 2008 and 2011. This \$23-million programme began as people returned to their homes after more than a decade in displacement camps.

NUTI provided transmission and studio equipment and media training for practitioners in Radio King in Gulu, Pol FM in Kitgum and Luo FM in Pader. NUTI's evaluation report says the three stations helped to improve and increase communication between local leaders and a population returning home.

NUTI also supported the Northern Uganda Media Club (NUMEC), now one of the best press clubs in the country, 18 months since funding ended. NUMEC President Moses Odokonyero says the club prepared for the donor's departure by raising funds using the facilities and skills left by the donor.⁹⁹ This could offer useful lessons for sustainable donor-funded development.

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)

FES, a German political foundation operating in Uganda since 1967, focuses on supporting a functioning multiparty political system, working with NGOs, political parties, trade unions and youth.

In the past year, FES committed around €30,000 to its media-related activities in Uganda, with the bulk going to the Independent Media Council (IMCU). There is however, frustration that the IMCU has not taken off because of lack of interest among media practitioners and houses.

Support to media has gone to public debates and dialogues, including those organised by Makerere University's journalism department, on the role and regulation of the media in a democratic society. Support has been provided to the Independent Media Council of Uganda (IMCU), as well as the African Media Barometer, a regular analysis of media performance by local professionals in several African countries, including Uganda.

FES is also working on a programme to mentor students interested in critical journalism.



NICK RAISTRICK/BBC MEDIA ACTION

Right
BBC Media Action
workshop with staff
members of Kagadi-
Kibaale Community
Radio in Kagadi.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁸ Interview, December 2011
- ¹⁹ Practitioners say the Act limits their ability to get information from confidential sources as there are no stringent controls to avoid unauthorised interception and misuse of information. (<http://www.acme-ug.org/component/k2/item/16-parliament-passes-law-to-intercept-communications-following-uganda-attack>)
- ²⁰ Section 9 (1) of the 2002 Anti-Terrorism Act prescribes the death penalty for anyone convicted for publishing material that promotes terrorism, while section 3 (1) would compel journalists to divulge confidential information during terrorism investigations.
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- ⁵¹ Source: <http://www.tmf.or.tz>
- ⁵² Kalathil, op. cit., p.10
- ⁵³ An example is the Article 29 Coalition, formed in reaction to the the emergence of PJAB.
- ⁵⁴ Source: <http://www.umdf.co.ug>
- ⁵⁵ Interview, op. cit.
- ⁵⁶ Source: <http://www.umdf.co.ug>. Electoral reporting was timed to coincide with the run-up to the elections in early 2011.
- ⁵⁷ Figure attributed to the 2006 Uganda Demographic and Household Survey.
- ⁵⁸ Interview, December 2011
- ⁵⁹ Source: <http://ruralradiouganda.wordpress.com/>
- ⁶⁰ Source: <http://www.acme-ug.org/programmes>
- ⁶¹ Interview, op. cit.
- ⁶² The delegation included representatives from Freedom House, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Media Foundation of West Africa, the Media Institute of Southern Africa, and Article 19.
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