Curbing corruption and fostering accountability in fragile settings: Why an imperilled media needs better support

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BBC MEDIA ACTION

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD

Contents

Box 1: Definitions

Media

In this paper, "media" generally refers to all forms of digital or analogue communication through which people access information, except interpersonal communication. This paper particularly focuses on:

- Independent journalism.
- Independent platforms for public debate and discussion, drama or other content.
- Initiatives that act as a check on executive power or shape social norms in ways that increase accountability.

"Independent media" refers to media that works principally in the public interest and is reasonably free of influence from government or other political, commercial, factional or other interests.

This paper does not focus on online advocacy or civil society platforms and initiatives, except in relation to partnerships between such initiatives and the media.

Corruption

Any definition of corruption is problematic. For reasons of concision, this paper has not sought to break down the diverse relationships between the many different forms of media and corruption. Corruption takes multiple forms in multiple contexts, ranging from high-value theft to small-scale bribery, and from international money laundering to local abuse of office.

While acknowledging these complexities, this paper starts with Transparency International's definitions:[1]

- Corruption: "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain", covering everything from petty corruption to grand larceny
- Grand corruption: "acts committed at a high level of government that distort policies or the central functioning of the state, enabling leaders to benefit at the expense of the public good"
- Petty corruption: "everyday abuse of entrusted power by low- and mid- level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens, who often are trying to access basic goods or services in places like hospitals, schools, police departments and other agencies"

Accountability

"Accountability" is a means through which those with power, including those who are corrupt, are held responsible for their actions. BBC Media Action's full definition is "the extent to which people, groups and institutions are able to hold government and other power holders responsible for their actions, and the extent to which government and other power holders provide a public account of their decisions and actions".

The term implies both a:

- Political dimension, such as the influence required by the media to hold executive power to account
- Social dimension, such as the capacity of the media to influence social norms and public tolerance – or intolerance – of corruption or abuse of power

Fragile state or setting

"Fragile states" are countries where government and governance is weak, where the rule of law does not run across the country and where there is tension and conflict in society. According to The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "A fragile region or state has weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions, and lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive relations with society. Fragile states are also more vulnerable to internal or external shocks such as economic crises or natural disasters."[2]

BBC Media Action's work often focuses on fragile states and settings that are also fractured, where the existence of different politics, religions or ethnicities makes relationships between communities especially difficult, and where the building of shared identity can be especially challenging.

Executive summary

This paper argues that an independent media is one of the most effective assets available to society to curb corruption and foster accountability. Drawing on BBC Media Action's own analysis and research as well as other evidence, it argues that independent media is deeply imperilled and often poorly understood, especially in fragile states and by the international development sector. Development strategies have rarely prioritised support to independent media. Unless this changes, corruption can be expected to continue to increase and the accountability of states will diminish.

Effective media support strategies will require more than an increase in financial contributions. They will require the development of more coherent, context-specific and evidence-based strategies rooted in learning from what works and does not.

The paper has been written principally for decision makers in donor and other development support organisations concerned about the development costs of corruption who do not currently prioritise support to independent media.

Part 1 provides a summary of the evidence base supporting the media's role in tackling corruption. It concludes that the capacity of the media to hold power – including corrupt power – to account is consistently proven, both historically and recently.

Part 2 argues that, while there have been notable major investments in local or national media from a small number of donors, the development system as a whole has weak capacity and a poor record in supporting this area. Without action, the incentive systems that shape development priorities make it inevitable that such support will continue to be marginal.

Part 3 describes the increasing economic and political challenges facing the media in fragile states and argues that the media is losing its independence and its capacity to act as a check on corruption and foster accountability. It argues that while the resources available to support media independence and uphold media's capacity to serve publics remain low, many

of those who do not want to be held to account are investing heavily in order to control or intimidate independent media. Corruption and the consequences of corruption are likely to increase in the future as a result. One important consequence of corruption is public disenchantment with democratic politics, which sometimes translates into increased radicalisation. Furthermore, efforts by some governments to close down the media in the name of fostering stability may in fact have the opposite result of fuelling support to extremism.

Part 4 looks at ways of supporting media capable of tackling corruption, including through online platforms, investigative journalist networks and other media support approaches. It argues that successful media support strategies are likely to use a range of approaches and a mix of digital and analogue media platforms, grounded in strong contextual analysis and research. It argues that many initiatives – especially networks of investigative journalism – are generating great impact globally and in some countries, but they do not provide a panacea in fragile and closed settings where such efforts are especially vulnerable to co-option and intimidation. Drawing on the work of BBC Media Action, this section also argues that, especially in fragile states, important progress can be achieved by fostering a culture of accountability and influencing social norms.

Part 5 provides some policy conclusions. It argues that the development system has not prioritised support to independent media and that there is little to suggest that this situation is improving. As well as arguing that free and independent media needs increased support in the development system, it contends that attention needs to be focused on ensuring that such support is effective. Successful strategies will need to be context-specific, evidence-based, underpinned by clear theories of change and address both political and social aspects of corruption.

Part 1: The effectiveness of media in checking corruption

The international development community has invested significant effort in recent years in improving the accountability of states to people, and in tackling corruption. These strategies have had mixed results.

A review of the evidence commissioned by DFID in 2015 concluded that "direct anti-corruption interventions, which were especially prominent during the 1990s and 2000s, including efforts such as Anti-Corruption Authorities, National Anti-Corruption Strategies, and national anti-corruption legislation… were found to be ineffective in combating corruption". [3]

In contrast, the DFID-commissioned review found that a free media has a clear effect in reducing corruption, alongside measures such as improving procurement. It observed, "There is a small body of evidence relying primarily on observational studies making use of statistical analyses. This evidence consistently indicates [that] freedom of the press can reduce corruption and that the media plays a role in the effectiveness of other social accountability mechanisms".[4] The same paper concluded that when media freedom is curtailed, corruption tends to rise, finding evidence of "restrictions to press freedom leading to higher levels of corruption in a sample of 51 developed and developing countries".[5]

Other reviews reinforce the media's impact on reducing corruption even more emphatically. In 2015 Alina Mungui-Pippidi published the results of a major analysis of the data available on corruption. It found, in common with the DFID review, that many strategies deployed by development actors to combat corruption over recent years have proved of limited effect but that the role of a free media, alongside civil society actors, had among the greatest effects in limiting corruption. Mungui-Pippidi concluded, "We found evidence that a society can constrain those who have better opportunities to spoil public resources if free media, civil society, and critical citizens are strong enough." [6]

This is not surprising. The argument that a free media provides a critical bulwark against corruption and a principal guarantor of government accountability has been a key pillar of democratic theory for centuries, stretching from Alexis de Tocqueville[7] in the 19th century through to Amartya Sen's iconic Development as Freedom,[8] which argued that famines do not happen in democracies with a free press. Important evidence also suggests that those who are corrupt or fear being held to account are willing to invest more heavily in the media than any other institution of accountability (see Box 2).

The arguments and evidence supporting the role of the media in ensuring accountability were elegantly laid out in 2001 by Tim Besley, Robin Burgess and Andrea Prat in a paper prepared for the World Bank.[9] They concluded that "a free and independent press working in conjunction with democratic institutions can make governments responsive to citizens' needs… our central conclusion is that free and independent media should not be viewed as a luxury that only rich countries can afford."

This analysis[10] and the linkages between the media, corruption and development is rarely disputed by development actors. This evidence has not been enough, however, to ensure that support to independent media becomes a priority in development support strategies.

Box 2: The effectiveness of media as a check on corruption – as measured by the corrupt

There are many indicators used to measure the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts but, this paper argues, the most telling is among the most difficult to measure – namely, how much concern is expressed by those who are or who wish to be corrupt. If corrupt people with power are unconcerned about any particular anti-corruption intervention or institution, it is reasonable to conclude that the intervention or institution is unlikely to be effective.

Securing data on what corrupt people are, or are not, concerned about is not easy – but it has been done. The results suggest that a free media can represent a stronger check on corrupt authority than any other democratic institution.

In 2004, John McMillan and Pablo Zoido published a paper that drew on some of the most useful data possible - detailed records of payments by a corrupt executive, in this case from 1990s Peru.[11] It analysed the prices that President Alberto Fujimori's secret police chief, Vladimiro Montesinos Torres, was prepared to pay to ensure that democratic institutions did not threaten the corrupt exercise of power.

The authors found that "The typical bribe paid to a television-channel owner was 100 times larger than that paid to a politician, which was somewhat larger than that paid to a judge. One single television channel's bribe was five times larger than the total of the opposition politicians' bribes. The strongest of the checks and balances on the Peruvian government's power, by Montesinos' revealed preference, was the television." Ironically, it was the action of one television station that had not been bribed that led to the toppling of the regime when it played a tape of Montesinos bribing a politician.

Part 2: Existing development support for independent media

There are two ways of gauging support to a particular sector. The first is the financial resources provided to it. The second is the degree of strategic attention paid to it.

The OECD and US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) worked together in 2015 to calculate the amount of funding allocated to media support by OECD donors. That report concluded "there is still much work to be done with respect to boosting support for independent media, which occupies a still-miniscule fraction of donor attention and funding."[12] It calculated that in 2012 (the most recent date for which all the relevant data was available), just over $17 billion was allocated by bilateral and multilateral agencies to supporting "governance and peace in developing countries". Support to the media and the free flow of information represented less than 2% of this amount, and an even tinier fraction of total development funds.

The simple problem of funding is one challenge. Another is how effective that support is. Very few donor coordination mechanisms at country level are designed to improve strategic or coherent support to a free media. Outside of UNESCO, which has a limited country presence, no UN or other international organisation, nor any donor, is routinely tasked with understanding or providing a point of coordination for support to independent media.

The incentives that drive development priorities at country level also tend to impede support to a free media. Most official development funding in recent years, including that allocated to fragile states, has been governed by aid effectiveness agreements that prioritise sensible principles such as "country ownership" (whereby country governments determine their priorities and donor governments try to support those priorities).[13] Governments tend not to ask for support to free and independent media – and aid effectiveness agreements, such as those agreed in recent years in Paris, Accra,[14] Busan[15] and Mexico,[16] tend not to even mention the role of the media.[17]

Encouraging progress was made with the agreement of a "governance goal" in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which prioritises ensuring "public access to information and protect[ing] fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements". Recommended measurement of this target includes explicit mention of tracking attacks on journalists. It remains to be seen, however, whether this will translate into the kind of strategic support strategies that are required to support a 21st century media capable of checking corruption.

At an international level, several private foundations - such as the Open Society Foundations - do prioritise support to the media but, as the need increases, such resources are increasingly stretched. Linkages between private foundations and the bilateral and multilateral development system are also sparse in this area. According to the OECD/NED report, "there is no major evidence of collaborative work or coordination among foundations and development agencies in this area". Across the entire bilateral development system, there are perhaps half a dozen head office posts that specialise in support to independent media. Such a lack of capacity means that generating priorities and strategies

based on what works and does not work in such a fast-moving environment becomes challenging. This problem is exacerbated by insufficient academic and other research available to policy-makers to help guide effective spending on sustaining, or strengthening, independent media.

This does not mean that nothing is being done or accomplished. BBC Media Action, for example, is a beneficiary of major investments from many donors, especially from the UK government. The US, EU, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and Denmark have also been notable in their support to independent media and organisations that support them. However, such support is under intense pressure. Even in countries that have prioritised media support – such as Norway, which in 2016 published a new strategy to support independent media[18] – resources are stretched as funding is focused on fresh issues like the current refugee crisis.

Corruption is on the rise. One of the most effective mechanisms to curb corruption is an independent free media. Support to independent media, both financially and economically, has been a low priority in recent years. The next section examines how and why this lack of support matters.

Part 3: Independent media is in peril

Independent media is in crisis, especially in many fragile states. Some of the challenges facing the media, such as the terrifying number of attacks on journalists, are well documented. "Conditions for the media deteriorated sharply in 2014, as journalists around the world faced mounting restrictions on the free flow of news and information – including grave threats to their own lives", assessed Freedom House's 2015 review of freedom of the press.[19] That review found that only 14% of the world's population lived in a country with what it considered to be a free press.

Other challenges are more difficult to track, but include: the threat to the economic foundations and business models capable of supporting an independent media (and the often deliberate attempts to undermine those foundations in fragile states); the legal and

regulatory efforts designed to shut down the media, often in the name of deterring terrorism (which, this paper argues later, may have the opposite effect); and the increasing economic and political investments being made to co-opt – and often corrupt – the media by those who want to avoid scrutiny. In many fragile settings, the prospects for the media being in a position to deter and curb corruption are diminishing.

While the international community has tended to deprioritise support for independent media, growing evidence suggests that the capacity of independent media to maintain its independence is diminishing, and the propensity of the media to become co-opted – and sometimes corrupted – is increasing.

Analysis by BBC Media Action of media landscapes in fragile states[20] such as Afghanistan,[21] Iraq,[22] Somalia,[23] Kenya,[24] Pakistan,[25] those countries who experienced the Arab uprisings[26] and elsewhere suggest that those who do not wish to be held to account have invested heavily in ensuring that traditional and online media is not independent and instead reflects and protects their interests.

Media co-option ranges from that common in many societies, such as the heavy influence on the media exerted through companies, political parties and governments through to outright takeover of the media by specific interests. In some of these states, commentators have pointed to the emergence of "ethno-sectarian" media empires, and what are described in Afghanistan as "warlord" media. The picture across these states is complex and not uniform but, while the international community has tended to deprioritise support for independent media, there is growing evidence that the capacity of independent media to maintain independence is diminishing, and the propensity of the media to become co-opted – and sometimes corrupted – is increasing.

Such co-option takes many forms, not all as visible as violence or intimidation. Economic investments can take the form of factional actors creating their own media, subsidising it heavily and squeezing out independent media with less financial muscle. They can exercise influence through networks of patronage, such as through board membership of major media organisations, or by making corrupt payments to journalists or broadcasters for

favourable media reporting (so-called "brown envelope" journalism), or using their economic power to stifle dissenting media, such as a government refusing to take out advertising, the financial lifeblood of many independent media organisations.

Independent media is increasingly threatened by the introduction of new laws hampering its capacity to act independently. Thomas Carothers and his colleagues at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace have documented the increasing restrictions placed on democratic actors, including independent media, around the world, often with the justification of increasing stability or countering terrorism. "More than 140 governments have passed new counterterrorism legislation since September 11, 2001," they argued.[27] "In many cases, these measures fail to provide precise definitions of the types of acts and organizations they are meant to target, instead referencing ambiguous concepts such as 'public order' and 'public safety' that can easily be abused to restrict the freedom of association and freedom of speech of all civil society organizations."[28] Such measures may prove counterproductive – there is increasing evidence that corruption is a principal driver of radicalisation and instability.[29] Closing down one of the few mechanisms proven to deter corruption is likely to fuel, rather than hamper, radicalisation.

What is more, the economics of independent media are in crisis even in countries with advanced and sophisticated advertising markets as the internet increasingly draws advertising income away from news media. Media independence is generally far more at risk in fragile states with weak economic bases and where markets work according to political, rather than economic, incentives.[30] This is a global phenomenon that manifests itself differently in diverse economic and political contexts. But many expert commentators are concluding that independent journalism and media platforms will only survive in the future through some form of subsidy. Indeed, strong arguments exist that such media have depended on some form of subsidy throughout history. "Good journalism has always been subsidized [and] markets have never supplied as much news as democracy demands", argued a landmark 2013 report from the Tow Center for Digital Journalism.[31] The report argued that in the digital age, where the "internet wrecks advertising subsidy", new models of subsidising independent journalism and media will need to be found.

It is worth noting that the Tow Center report, and others like it, focus on industrialised economies and there is scant data on the specific economics of the media in fragile states. The data that does exist suggests it is highly unlikely that independent media – regardless of whether it is generated online or through more traditional broadcast or print platforms – can sustain a public interest role by relying solely on advertising or other currently available income. If the media is to play this role, especially in fragile states, it will need support.

Part 4: Effective media support strategies in fragile states

Increasing international attention from both donors and transparency and accountability organisations is being focused on identifying more effective strategies to reduce corruption and improve accountability. This section examines some of the strategies being considered to improve support to independent media.

Investigative journalism

The exposure of the assets managed by Mossack Fonseca – also called the "Panama Papers" – by the German newspaper *Suddeutsche Zeitung* with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) is a dramatic testament to the media's crucial role in effective governance in the 21st century. The ICIJ – which partners with mainstream media organisations – is dependent on philanthropic funding and was founded specifically because the traditional media finds it increasingly difficult to carry out such journalism alone. "We are losing our eyes and ears around the world precisely when we need them most", the ICIJ website claims.[32]

Such global initiatives have mushroomed in recent years. The Global Investigative Journalism Network boasts 128 member organisations in 57 countries.[33] Several international organisations, such as the International Center for Journalism (ICFJ), are investing in important partnerships and mentoring programmes for investigative and data-driven journalism.

The extraordinary courage shown by investigative journalists is increasingly evidenced at national and regional levels. The Ghanaian investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas has an astonishing record of exposing corruption and wrongdoing, perhaps most famously exposing bribe-taking by 12 high court judges, 22 lower court justices and 140 other court officials in his country.[34] Many of those he has exposed have been suspended, fired or jailed, and Ghana's 2012 Mental Health Act was largely a response to his investigation into living conditions in a mental asylum.[35]

Collectives of investigative journalists are also prominent actors in exposing corruption. The Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting project brings together numerous regional "investigative" centres and independent media, from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. It claims that its reports have led to more than $2.5 billion of assets being seized by law enforcement agencies and helped tax authorities find $600 million in hidden assets.[36]

When these forms of journalism take place in countries (including resource-poor countries) with reasonable access to the rule of law, they are demonstrably effective at exposing and deterring corruption. But they can only survive in the 21st century with public and financial support. They deserve more of it.

However, these forms of journalism do not provide a panacea for deterring corruption in fragile or other states where the rule of law is weak. Such investigations are immensely risky, even in countries with relatively free media and some form of rule of law. In Ghana, for example, Anas has received multiple threats and employs heavy security to protect his offices. More than 20 years of data from the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that almost as many journalists are killed covering crime and corruption – a common focus for investigative reporters – as are killed covering wars.[37] The internet has provided fresh opportunities for bloggers and citizen journalists to call out those who are abusing public office for private gain but they can be especially vulnerable to attack or intimidation and rarely have the same resources – whether legal advice, proper security, safety training and public profile – that a broadcast institution or newspaper might.

The degree of training and skills required to carry out such journalism well is substantial and may not be available in countries with weak journalistic cultures. Training programmes for journalists designed to increase such skills, which have often formed a mainstay of media support programmes, may have limited impact unless implemented as part of a broader capacity-building strategy. A World Bank "how to" guide for developing independent media argued that "A program that plunks down a sum of money for 'training journalists' then measures success by the number of journalists trained is unlikely to have a substantive impact."[38] It concluded that piecing together a series of programmatic activities shaped by strategic insight into the country's media sector could be more beneficial.

Shifting social and political norms and creating a culture of accountability

Investigative and other forms of journalism provide just one societal asset capable of exposing corruption. The role of the media extends beyond journalism, however. The media – or at least media that has some public purpose – has immense influence and reach. Even in highly fragile settings, it may be possible to support the media in creating an improved culture of accountability by shifting social and political norms.

 "One of the biggest impediments to anti-corruption efforts is the fact that corrupt practices have become so institutionalized in everyday society that citizens view them as fixed and incontestable", argued Sabina Panth in a World Bank report on norms and corruption. Panth examined a series of case studies where efforts had been made, many including a major focus on media and communication, to shift such norms. She concluded: "To break down such an entrenched mind-set… citizens generally must believe that they can actually do something about corruption in order to summon the courage to act upon that belief".[39]

The role of the media as a shaper of social and political norms was clearly summarised in a paper prepared for the Partnership for Transparency Fund.[40] "The fight against corruption needs to be fought on several fronts. Institutional reform – legislation and oversight – is one, but it will not be successful if it is not embedded in a broad change of culture", argued Ann-Katrin Arnold and Sumir Lal. They asserted that "Corrupt practices are often embedded in

institutional practices and every-day lives and are perceived as fixed and uncontestable…. The media – traditional mass media as well as new technologies – can play a vital role in unveiling corruption, framing corruption as a public problem, suggesting solutions, and generally empowering citizens to fight corruption." While the role of the media in providing an institutional check on power is widely recognised, its role in influencing public attitudes may be just as important. It may also be more feasible to play this role in settings where media freedoms are particularly constrained.

The potential of media and communication to shift social norms is well evidenced in other sectors, most notably in health.[41] This role extends beyond journalism to the role of drama, public debate and discussion-based media programmes that enable people to question both their leaders and their customs. A review of a five-year BBC Media Action project focused on improving accountability in Angola, Sierra Leone and Tanzania – found that "working with the media to create trustworthy spaces that brought disparate groups together to discuss, mediate and collectively solve problems – especially at the local level – often proved the most constructive mechanism for engaging governments and citizens alike".[42] See Box 3 for more information on BBC Media Action's work to improve a culture of accountability.

Box 3: Creating a culture of accountability: the work of BBC Media Action

Corruption takes many forms and almost always involves some relationship of power. Corruption can also, however, become a social norm, something that becomes largely accepted by most people in society as how things get done. A range of approaches can, when appropriate, be used to shift such norms and create a culture of accountability. This might be usefully described as both an expectation that those in authority should be held to account and a declining acceptance that bribe-taking (for example) is an acceptable practice.

BBC Media Action's work across 28 countries, principally in fragile settings, includes journalism training and partnering with independent media, but also focuses significantly

on creating a culture and expectation of accountability. This work is designed to empower people by providing trusted, accurate and balanced information, stimulating discussion and challenging restrictive norms. While not focused explicitly on exposing corruption, it creates space for discussion capable of engaging all in society. It influences power, exposing those in power to views from across society and supporting platforms where those in authority have to explain and answer for their actions.

Programmes aimed at improving accountability that are supported by BBC Media Action reach more than 100 million people annually. Nationally representative surveys show that 29% of the people reached through this programming in nine countries[43] strongly agreed that these programmes had helped to hold government to account. Eighty-nine per cent either agreed or strongly agreed that they did so.

Increasing efficacy – the belief that people can effect change through their own and their community's actions – is vital to shifting norms. BBC Media Action's research has consistently found that those exposed to its programmes are more likely to report higher efficacy. In Kenya, BBC Media Action's analysis of *Sema Kenya* (Kenya Speaks)[44] (a nationally broadcast programme that enabled people to challenge and question leaders) found that audience members were 10% more likely to report high internal efficacy compared to non-audiences after controlling for the effect of income, education and other confounders.

In countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Sierra Leone, BBC Media Action works with partner broadcast stations to produce public debate programmes where people can question and challenge their political leaders. Debate audiences say that the shows provide a platform for everyone – including those from traditionally marginalised communities – to question their leaders in a way that is not otherwise available. In many countries there is also a heightened expectation that authorities should take action in response to citizens' concerns, including corruption.

"To me, discussing governance issue[s] is very much necessary because some government officials think they can do anything and go free during this Ebola crisis."

Audience member, Sierra Leone[45]

The organisation works with FM radio stations and other partners at a local level. For example, local discussion programmes in Nepal provide a platform from which local officials can be questioned and directly asked to follow up on issues of concern to local communities, compelling authorities to commit to action. They also ensure the voices of all groups have the opportunity to be heard, motivating individuals and groups to take action to address problems.

"This type of format [local debate show] is effective. In this format, we get more participation where audiences can ask more questions…. This format is effective in putting the pressure on the relevant authority."

Male panellist, Chitwan, Nepal

"Rather than pressure, I think the programme has enforced different parties to identify and to realise their accountabilities."

Male panellist, Achham, Nepal[46]

BBC Media Action also works through drama, generating discussion and debate at scale in society. In Nigeria, radio drama Story Story, based around a market and motorpark, reaches more than 23 million people, exploring the lives and challenges of ordinary Nigerians. Audiences say that BBC Media Action's dramas demonstrate how people can secure their rights and that they help change norms, such as those around the role of women in society.

The role of partnerships

The media is just one set of institutions capable of holding government to account. Increasingly, media organisations depend on others to help them report and do their work, and these others, such as civil society, increasingly depend on the media. Similarly, the capacity of the media to investigate and report effectively benefits from civil society[47] and governmental efforts[48] to make government more transparent and accountable.

Partnerships between civil society and media organisations are not always simple. Civil society organisations are sometimes concerned by media's tendency to sensationalise or distort. They also tend to see media outlets as a conduit to transmit their messages rather than a set of institutions to be supported in their own right. Meanwhile, many media organisations consider their role to hold all actors in society to account, including civil society, and often feel uncomfortable about allying themselves to a particular advocacy agenda.

Despite this, there are many examples where civil society and journalism have a common interest in holding power to account, in defending democratic space and, sometimes, in forging formal or informal partnerships. Most reviews of the effectiveness of transparency and accountability initiatives – some of them long standing[49] – reaffirm this point. Initiatives that take partnerships with the media seriously tend to have greater impact.

Getting the digital/analogue mix right

The transformation in media landscapes has sparked a wave of innovation as publics, media organisations – and those who support them – search for more effective ways to improve accountability. This has encompassed everything from historically transformative social movements enabled by increasingly ubiquitous access to mobile telephony (such as those which led to the Arab uprisings) to a panoply of specific digital engagement initiatives.[50] The closing democratic space for traditional media described in this report has been at least partially compensated for by individuals and collectives using online platforms to investigate issues and share their findings. The

field is vast, dynamic and diverse, and there is not room here to do justice to it. Just one such network, globalvoices.org, provides an insight into the energy and capacity of what a largely voluntary, self-organising group of writers, analysts and journalists are capable of generating online and how much this work can help to shine a light on abuses of power.

Overall, however, the impact of solely digital initiatives on improving accountability is limited. "The internet was expected to usher in a new era of accountability and political empowerment, with citizens participating in policy-making and forming self-organised virtual communities to hold government to account", argued the World Bank's 2016 World Development Report, Digital Dividends. "These hopes have been largely unmet", it concluded. The report acknowledged the impact of the internet on improving the efficiency of government functions, but concluded that it has had "limited impact on the most protracted problems – how to improve service provider accountability (principal-agent problems) and how to broaden public involvement and give greater voice to the poor (collective action problems)." It based this assessment on a review of 17 digital engagement projects concluding that "overall, digital technologies have helped curtail blatant abuses of political office, conditional on supportive institutions of accountability… and free media".

A review by a major multi-donor initiative focused on improving transparency and accountability, Making All Voices Count,[51] reached a similar conclusion, noting: "Our review found no analysis so far of government responsiveness to citizen voices expressed via technologies, as distinct from the older channels such as the media, non-tech social accountability projects or social mobilisation".

Fragile states are witnessing some of the most rapid increases in access to new technologies, but internet penetration remains low for the most part, and these states are also experiencing an explosion in the number of traditional, especially broadcast media.[52] Any media support strategy focused on curbing corruption and fostering accountability will need to get the digital/analogue mix right and tailor its approach to the context in which it is designed to operate. BBC Media Action's accountability-

focused programming, working to support the media in fragile states, currently engages more than 100 million people per year through multiple platforms (see Box 3). This includes a substantial emphasis on social and digital media but finds that the best and most impactful way to engage large numbers of people often remains through television and radio.

Adapting strategies to the media and political context

There are few universal answers to working with the media, including online media, to tackle corruption in fragile states. Where power, including corrupt power, is strong and media power is weak, a clear analysis of the political economy of the media, and of the impact and dynamics of corruption, are essential to understanding and supporting the role of the media. A range of responses is required to respond to this challenge.

Part 5: Conclusion

Independent media need increased support if they are to play the role they are so clearly capable of in curbing corruption and increasing state accountability to citizens. This paper has argued there is compelling evidence that an independent media is among the most effective checks on corrupt power, but that enabling and sustaining independent media will require substantially more- and often different kinds of - support than it currently receives. Given the paucity of other income available to an independent media, and given the economic and political pressures being invested in co-opting independent media, more financial support will be necessary from the development sector. Equally important, however, will be a degree of strategic investment in media support strategies that are effective and capable of adjusting to rapidly shifting media and development environments.

Successful strategies will need to be context-specific, evidence-based and underpinned by clear theories of change. They need to be rooted in an acknowledgement that corruption has both political aspects (it involves fundamentally a relationship of power)

as well as social aspects (it is often commonly accepted as the way things work). Many support strategies that might be expected to be effective in other settings are unlikely to be effective in fragile states if, for example, the rule of law is absent. Clear, coherent, prioritised strategies will look different in different settings and there is no simple policy blueprint for addressing the shortfall in support that currently exists.

Specific policy conclusions around effective ways of supporting the media to tackle corruption and increase accountability in fragile states are outlined in the rest of this section.

Prioritise media support in national development strategies

- Support to independent media is currently poorly prioritised in national development support strategies. Any support to the media needs to be in a framework that is separate from normal development arrangements to ensure that government influence (either donor or recipient) does not undermine independence of the media. Media support can also be better integrated into governance and other development assessments, such as political economy analysis, governance reviews (including peer review mechanisms), and the electoral cycle approach. An important step forward would be to have a clear, senior level focal point from within the donor community at country level capable of understanding the threats to the media and their support needs, and influencing development priorities. While acknowledging the intense pressures on staff resourcing at headquarter levels, it is difficult to see how these issues will be better prioritised if there are not at least some dedicated personnel focused on the issue at this level in the bilateral and multilateral system.

Defend media freedom

- As this paper makes clear, the freedom and independence of the media is increasingly imperilled. The risks that corruption will increase are consequently substantial. The need for networks and organisations capable of defending media freedom and supporting public interest media around the

world, including fragile states, has rarely been greater. Given the costs
inflicted by corruption on development and democracy, there is an
increasingly compelling rationale for development actors, including those who
have not traditionally prioritised support to free and independent media, to do
so as a matter or urgency.

Give teeth to transparency efforts

- Important and substantial efforts have been made in recent years to make
governance systems more transparent and to open up data. Some of the
assumptions underpinning such strategies – that journalists and civil society groups
will use this data to demand increased accountability – rest on there being a critical
mass of such groups with both the independence and capacity to do so. That
assumption is questionable in many fragile states. Much more needs to be done to
increase such capacity, such as through training for journalists, including on data
journalism. This training will only succeed if it is nested within a broader strategy
that guarantees both independence and the existence of a media that is trusted and
accessible to society at large.

Strengthen evidence and learning around effective media support

- Very few learning systems have enabled the development community to establish
which media support strategies work, which do not, and which can usefully inform
policy and research agendas. Those systems need to be strengthened where they do
exist, and established where they do not. Nor is there sufficient policy relevant
research on the linkages between the 21st century media and corruption, especially
in fragile states. This requires a strengthened think tank capacity as well as better
incentives for academic research that can effectively inform policy around these
complex issues.

Take the media seriously

- Many development actors find issues around supporting the media to be complex, difficult and highly political. The media can be sensational, inaccurate and distorting in its coverage of important topics. In fragile states where media organisations can be manipulated and co-opted, this can stoke factionalism and sometimes drive violence – making some development actors perceive the media as a problem rather than a solution. These are precisely the reasons why independent media needs more support and why, despite the complexity of the task, support to an independent media in the 21st century is likely to be one of the most important challenges the development community needs to confront.

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Acknowledgements