French Media Assistance

Developing tailor-made regional cooperation strategies

By Florence Minery

Florence Minery has worked for the Media Programme of the Research and Technology Exchange Group (GRET), a Paris-based development organisation, since 2004. She designed and supervised media development projects in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, financed by Britain's Department for International Development (DFID), the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the European Commission. In 2008 and 2009, Florence evaluated the media support activities of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie over the past ten years. She worked as media project manager in Chad in 2002-2003. She holds a PhD in Information Science on 'Geopolitical examination of French-language newspapers of Sub-Saharan West Africa' (Paris 2, 2006). Among others, she has published on the state of the media in Chad (GRET, 2001) and in Côte d'Ivoire (GRET, 2000).

In countries in democratic transition the media are of strategic importance. Citizens are better placed to participate in democratic decisions when they are informed by a responsible press. Thanks to a legitimate and transparent press, the media contributes to the emergence of public opinion, which in turn supports the establishment of a more critical and better structured civil society. An independent and responsible media sector is necessary to facilitate democratic processes, enabling an easier dialogue between civil society and the state.

In French-speaking Africa, the media participate in public debate but they lack editorial and economic independence, professionalism and legal protection, so the rules of the profession as established in developed countries apply only in limited fashion. Freedom of the press and access to information sources are not fully guaranteed, thus limiting the capacity of the media to play their role in a process of democratisation. The print media attempts to be a platform for national and democratic debates, but does so in a still overly partisan

way: it remains more an opinion press rather than a source for hard news. Radio successfully fills the local niche. Television fascinates and entertains, often with images from elsewhere.

Objectives of French media assistance

For more than 15 years, strengthening the media in developing countries has been a specific goal of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and French NGOs like GRET (Professionels du développement solidaire). They support the media as a sector in itself. Since the end of the cold war at the beginning of the 90s, the objective has been to support democratisation processes by fostering a pluralistic media sector. To do so, it was necessary to professionalise, regulate and organise it.

Activities to this end include:
• **Supporting capacity building,** especially with the training of journalists and

representatives of media outlets and professional associations;
• **Structuring the media sector** by helping regulatory and self-regulatory bodies and professional organisations, as well as supporting legislation towards freedom of the press;
• **Raising awareness and increasing accountability** of media professionals in matters of ethics and of freedom of the press;
• **Supporting local journalism,** principally community radio;
• Promoting **African broadcasting and films**, with funds to stimulate local production and exchange of programmes.

Already more than 10 years ago – a few years after the democratisation process in francophone Africa – French donors stopped their support for academic training programmes for journalists, as African universities suffered from a poor level of professionalism and were also not able to cover the training needs linked to the new media environments.
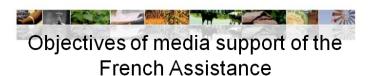
The target group of training has been foremost journalists and the programmes focused on journalistic research techniques, writing for the press, and ethics. Less attention has been paid to the training of management – the editors and directors of the media business. However, management training is now also being gradually included in France's media development portfolio, in particular for radio[1].

French Ministry of Foreign Affairs

For the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the goals of media assistance and public diplomacy form part of a single strategy. Both perspectives belong to the *audiovisuel extérieur* cluster of the *Direction de la Politique Culturelle et du Français.* Two media specialists work for this cluster.

The specific objectives of media assistance are:
• Strengthening the professionalism of the media and journalists;
• Consolidating the regulation of the media across the network of African regulatory bodies;
• Fostering the production of local broadcasters and producers.

Objectives of media support of the French Assistance

Support to media in development countries is a specific objective for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and French NGOs; supporting **media as a sector in itself**.
Challenges: **professionalise, regulate and structure**.
Areas of action concern the written press, radio and television:
- **Capacity building** (training essentially).
- **Structuring** the media sector.
- **Awareness-raising** and **accountability** of the media professionals.
- Local information.

- Promotion of **African broadcasting and film.**

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The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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- Consolidating **regulation** of the media across the network of African Regulatory bodies;
- Fostering **production** of local broadcasters and producers.

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Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)

Spreading the French language is NOT the goal of media support of OIF.

OIF's media programme: «consolidating democratic processes »
   -> two policy areas:
    1. Promoting Press Freedom
    2. Reinforcing media pluralism

GRET

Gret in media development

- Active in media developments since 1995.
- Mainly in the fields of network coordination, research and field projects.
- Activities: ongoing training, strengthening of self and state regulation mechanisms, development of freedom of the press and promotion of a business culture within the media.
- Target groups: media outlets and professionals; professional organisations; regulatory bodies and ministries.

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Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)

The Organisation Internationale de la Franco-phonie (OIF) is an international organisation of politics and governments with French as the mother or customary language, and where there is a notable affiliation with the French language or culture. However, regar-ding media support, spreading the French language is NOT the priority of the OIF.

Being active in media support since the early 1990s, OIF has its own media develop-ment department (which also collaborates with the Foreign Ministry). The OIF's media support programme aims at "consolidating democratic processes" and works in two main policy areas:

Promoting Press Freedom

• Developing legislation to guarantee free-dom of information and communication;
• Strengthening regulatory bodies;
• Supporting self-regulation activities.

Reinforcing Media Pluralism

• Modernising public television and suppor-ting press agencies;
• Transforming broadcasting structures;
• Supporting the funding of the written press;
• Providing professional training and suppor-ting capacity building;
• Improving the content of local radio;
• Helping the digital development of radio stations and newspapers.

Outcomes

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OIF have introduced innovative approaches, above all with respect to training methods, reforms in broadcasting systems and the development of media regulation. Ongoing training has led to significant changes in pro-fessional practices. The ministry's support has also contributed to setting up a private audi-ovisual production sector in several countries. French assistance has helped improve the skills of media professionals and members of the regulatory bodies. Specific training on the reporting of electoral issues had a posi-tive impact, even more so when this training involved the regulatory authority.

The results of French media assistance inter-ventions on self-regulation and the social responsibility of journalists are weaker. This is also the case with respect to strengthening the economic sustainability of the media, a more recent focus area. In addition the inter-vention strategies of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OIF are not always very clear.
In the case of the ministry, the two issues of, on the one hand, developing an independent media sector and, on the other, the public diplomacy importance of strengthening French audiovisual presence are mixed. The OIF's policy lacks coherence in that it has too many objectives and is therefore not a really strong strategy.

GRET in Media Development

The Paris-based NGO GRET has been active in media development since 1995, mainly in the fields of network coordination, research and field projects. GRET works closely with local professional organisations and is orga-nised around issues in a variety of areas: ongoing training; strengthening of self- and state-regulation mechanisms; development of freedom of the press; and promotion of a business culture within the media. Its interventions focus on three different target groups: media outlets and professionals; professional organisations; and regulatory bodies and ministries – the latter encourages the involvement of the state to promote the emergence of a public policy on information and communication.

Over the past five years, GRET has been operating media projects in the transition and post-crisis countries Burundi, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Ivory Coast and Rwanda. The projects included capacity building of professional media organisations (by providing training methodologies and technical support); accompanying local partners; encouraging skills transfers; and exchanging know-how and experience. These projects have been conducted in cooperation with local and international partners, and included the relevant governmental authorities (supervisory ministry, regulatory body). GRET has been facilitator and animator as well as the counterpart of the technical and financial stakeholders of these projects.

Since 1998, GRET has published practical handbooks for media professionals in French and English. These include: *Radio Production*; *The Art of Publishing a Newspaper* and *Media Law, Ethics and Standards of Professional Conduct*.

Sectoral approach

Over the last years, media support has experienced change: the sectoral approach has become more prominent. The sectoral approach aims at consolidating the media sector within its institutional and political environment. As such it not only focuses on the enhancement of individual journalistic quality, but also on improving the economic context and the regulatory environment in which the media operate.

Media governance

Governance and accountability have become prominent themes in international development assistance. It is really the most important that is being worked on at the moment, because involving all stakeholders is crucial for democratisation and development.

Strengthening governance and accountability requires integrated programmes with mixed target groups, i.e. including representatives of the political arena, law enforcement and the media. Activities like workshops to share experiences and best practices may be appropriate for such a mixed public, as the expectations and constraints of each participant are naturally different. Workshops may end with the adoption of a final agreement or declaration of resolutions.

A governance-centred approach should also help African states set up a public policy for the media sector. In order to give media support a governance objective, certain aspects are important:

• Training journalists in using **reliable information sources** is crucial: relying on verifiable sources of information enables journalists to prove what they wrote, avoids rumours and guarantees high quality. Unfettered access to government information is also important, both for reducing the risks faced by journalists and sensitising government officials to public accountability.

Media support and governance

- **Integrated programmes** with mixed target groups
- Helping African states to set up a **public policy** for the media sector.

- Important aspects:
- - Training in the use of reliable **information sources.**
- - Achieving **legal status** for community radio.
- - Transparent **media regulation**.
- - **Self-regulation mechanisms** must involve the civil society.
- - Support for **economic sustainability** must be integrated into each media project.

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• **Community radio stations** must be legally recognised so that they can work as local watchdogs and public forums, notably on political questions that they are often forbidden or discouraged from covering.

• **Transparent media regulation** has to be fostered, notably by way of a cooperation instrument, namely the Network of African Regulatory Authorities. With respect to regulatory bodies, their mediation role must be reinforced.

Ideas and perspectives
for regional media programmes

- **First step**: analyse which problems should be dealt with at national level, and which at regional level.
- Decentralised **coordination** and flexibility in the implementation
- **National level**: the legal framework, support to regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, structuring of the professional organisations.
- **Regional level**: professional training actions - in order to work to common standards - and production of programmes on regional topics and interests.

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• The mechanisms of **self-regulation** should be more operational and better implemented in civil society. Thus, the critical spirit of the citizens towards the press should be stimulated.

• Support for **economic sustainability** must be integrated into each media project. An economically well-managed and independent organisation contributes towards the struggle against corruption. It reduces the fragility of working conditions for media professionals, facilitates good ethical standards, and therefore leads to a better quality press.

• Community radio stations can generate revenues by offering ICT services like **internet cafés.** However, the capacity of these radios in ICT matters must be improved. This notably means getting them to master different aspects, in particular interactivity with listeners and economic management.

Regional support strategies

Normally, media support aims at responding to the needs of the media sector in a specific country. However, especially — but not only — in Africa, needs and challenges might be quite similar in a broader regional context, and regional media programmes (e.g. for French-speaking West Africa or the Great Lakes region) may have significant advantages over narrower national approaches.

Of course, a coherent media support strategy requires first a detailed analysis of the problems that could be dealt with at the national level, and of those best addressed at a regional level. Issues such as an appropriate legal framework, support for regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, the structuring of professional organisations, etc. may be primarily addressed at the national level.

Professional training — in order to work on common standards — and production of programmes on regional topics and interests may be best treated at the regional level.

Regional media programmes may offer long-term support to journalism schools, including for equipment (documentation, specialised software, etc.). Regional programmes may also imply cooperation between professional organisations and institutions across borders, e.g. regarding defending freedom of the press and security of journalists. Of course, the success of regional programmes depends on decentralised coordination and flexibility in implementation.

Some advantages of a regional programme:
• Cost-effectiveness: conducting the same activities for several countries reduces costs and staff;
• Greater capacity of lobbying and advocacy;
• Sharing of experiences and practices; Establishing professional ties.

Some difficulties in implementing a regional programme:

• Defining objectives and results which correspond both to the regional and national needs;
• Guaranteeing well-balanced activities among the participating countries, so that the programme does not become four or five independent national projects.
• Ensuring the visibility of regional programmes at the different national levels**.**

Lessons learned

Summarising the last 15 years or so of French media assistance, I would like to highlight the following strategic and methodological lessons learned:

• Support must be based on an in-depth-analysis of the whole media sector and of the direct political context of the media.
• Long-term projects – over three or four years – should be encouraged in order to accompany the professionalisation of the sector and to ensure sustainability, including, for instance, through the training of trainers.
• Local partners should not only be informed but also directly involved in the implementation of media programmes, for example in the steering committee, as it contributes to strengthening the ownership and the visibility of the project.
• State institutions should also be involved in order to spur them to carefully work out a public policy in the field of information and communication.

Enhancing training effectiveness

- **Training** has been the most popular intervention method supported by donors.
- In order to improve the **management** of press enterprises, in-house training should especially target managers, editors and directors of commercial services.
- International organisations should better use the expertise of **African trainers**.
- Clear distinction should be made between professional training and workshops aimed at the sharing of experiences.
- Training sessions must be part of a **structured training plan**.
- Eradicate the practice of "per diem", or at least harmonise the practices.
- Selection of trainees should rely on transparent criteria and should directly result from the specific objectives of the training.

Further steps

There are many ways to improve the media sector in Africa. They include:
• In-depth diagnosis of organisational and management capacity of professional associations and organisations: self-regulatory bodies and other institutions representing collective interests can hardly be auto-financed. They undoubtedly need short-term external support, as they fulfil a general interest function.

Lessons learned

- Support must be based on an **in-depth-analysis** of the whole media sector and of the direct political context of the media.
- **Long-term projects,** over 3 or 4 years, should be encouraged.
- **Local partners** should be directly involved in the implementation.
- State institutions should be involved, in order to establish a public policy in the field of information and communication.

• Broadening the concept of self-regulation from merely internal control mechanisms to a matter of broader political dialogue, including the state and civil society.
• Ensuring that regulatory authorities are financed more from the general state budget.
• Working with all relevant levels and stakeholders for the media sector, not only journalists (by enhancing their professional capacities), but also media managers, media owners, advertisers, legislators and politicians (regarding the legal framework).
• Strengthening the economic viability of media outlets by encouraging managers to organise their media organisations as businesses.

Enhancing training effectiveness

Training has been the most popular intervention method supported by donor organisations. It consists mainly of seminars for professionals, while support of basic skills training has been abandoned. Special attention must be dedicated to the professionalism of journalism schools, in particular to ensure a better balance between theory and practice. Cooperation between schools and media professionals should be encouraged.

In order to improve the management of press enterprises – financial management, working rules, tax etc. – in-house training should especially target managers, editors and directors of commercial services. The heads of marketing and those responsible for advertising need real marketing tools, while heads of editorial staff require management skills to improve the efficacy of their team. A well-managed media outlet contributes to the fight against corruption, as it helps reduce the uncertain and precarious situation many journalists work under.

Today we can rely on a good number of well-qualified African trainers. However, international organisations involved in media support could know and use these local trainers and their specific competences better.

It is necessary to make a clear distinction between professional training and awareness-raising workshops aimed at sharing experiences. Professional training requires a homogenous public that participates actively in the training session. To this end, hands-on exercises and individual evaluations by the trainers are paramount. The training sessions must be part of a structured training plan and should propose a concrete learning path to the trainees. E-learning has proven useful in particular for supervising ongoing training, as this may be difficult to do in-house. Training plans could combine residential workshops and on-line sessions.

Each training plan should include a train-the-trainer module. Training local trainers is one of the concrete results of a programme and may substantially enhance the sustainability and ownership of media programmes.

The selection of trainees should rely on transparent criteria and should directly result from the specific objectives of the training. Gender considerations should be an integral part of the selection process to ensure an appropriate place for women in the media. A thorough application process to evaluate if the candidates have the appropriate skills and abilities for the training – including motivation, professional background, current position within a media organisation – leads to better quality and higher efficiency of the training courses. It is also necessary to get rid of the practice of "per diem" stipends, or at least harmonise the different practices. This may be addressed by better coordination among the donors.

[1] See for example http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/actions-france_830/medias_19551/plan-radio-afrique_17969/index.html