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### INTRODUCTION

Since 1970, WACC has published a quarterly journal as a forum for people of goodwill to express their views about the role of communications in the development of more just societies worldwide. The WACC Journal was a space for encounter, debate, and visionary thinking. In 1980, the journal was renamed Media Development and, in the light of UNESCO’s MacBride Report Many Voices, One World published that year, it revised its editorial policy to focus on communication injustices both North and South, and to be a bridge between communication scholars and practitioners.

Under its then editor-in-chief, Michael Traber and guided by a board of internationally recognised experts, Media Development gained a reputation for lifting up stones that others might wish left unturned. It published the views and opinions of those intent on challenging the status quo and on advocating the MacBride Report’s fabled “new, more just and efficient world information and communication order”. That struggle was the backdrop to the evolving field of communication rights, which remains the journal’s focus today.

After nearly fifty years, the world has changed dramatically and all kinds of communications revolutions have taken place – some for good and others for ill. People and communities still need access to the information and knowledge that will help improve their lives. To that end, everyone must also be able to engage in transparent, informed, and democratic debate. And yet accessibility and affordability remain key issues; media monopolies and misrepresentation obstruct a diversity of opinions and perspectives; and digital technologies, a life-saver for some, are subject to abuse by others.

Media Development today continues to set the scene, to explore and to probe, and to raise the voices of those who might otherwise remain unheard. It advocates communication as a way of creating openness and building trust in place of division and discord, and as a path to a more just and more peaceful world. This collection of recent editorials reflects that policy.

Philip Lee  
General Secretary, WACC  
Editor, Media Development
Digital communication technologies have become ubiquitous and policymakers are still struggling to respond with appropriate infrastructure and governance models.

It is critical, therefore, to move beyond celebrating greater accessibility and affordability in order to tackle the fundamental questions about ownership and control, regulation, privacy, security and surveillance that are central to conversations about the ethics of digital technologies.

As The Global Risks Report 2017 published by the World Economic Forum notes:

“A new era of restricted freedoms and increased governmental control could undermine social, political and economic stability and increase the risk of geopolitical and social conflict. Empowered by sophisticated new technological tools in areas such as surveillance, governments and decision-makers around the world are tightening control over civil society organizations, individuals and other actors.”

On the positive side, for the first time in the history of communications, people have the chance to seize a form of democratic expression that could improve their lives and livelihoods. And, clearly, when it comes to such lofty ideals as Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, it is clear that this can only be achieved through the simultaneous implementation of communication rights that enable people to express their needs and concerns and to advocate solutions that are locally relevant and appropriate.

Seen from this perspective, Agenda 2030 ought to include taking steps to advance the availability, transparency and accountability of the 21st century’s digital infrastructures. Failure to do so will have political and ethical consequences ranging from the outright subversion of democracy to the spread of misinformation and extremist views to intrusion into and control over peoples’ lives. This may ultimately undermine the legitimacy of digital platforms, as the scandal around privacy practices at Facebook in 2018 has demonstrated.
The Global Risks Report 2017 goes on to warn:

"Technological tools are also being used to increase surveillance and control over citizens, whether for legitimate security concerns or in an attempt to eradicate criticism and opposition. Restricting new opportunities for democratic expression and mobilization, and by consequence the digitally enabled array of civil, political and economic rights (such as the right to work and education, freedom of expression) just as citizens have become more connected and engaged – creates a potentially explosive situation."

A role for digital communication ethics
Communication ethics is a well-worn academic discipline. Journalism ethics a vital professional discipline. Yet, digital technologies have opened up the proverbial “can of worms” with regard to social ethics – with which today’s youth in particular are struggling. As Allan Luke and Julian Sefton-Green ask in their article in this issue of Media Development:

“How do today’s young people and children deal with right and wrong, truth and falsehood, representation and misrepresentation in their everyday lives online? How do they anticipate and live with and around the real consequences of their online actions and interactions with others? How do they navigate the complexities of their public exchanges and their private lives, and how do they engage with parental and institutional surveillance? Finally, how can they engage and participate as citizens, consumers and workers in the public and political, cultural and economic spheres of the internet?"

It is not just a question of digital media literacy, but of using digital platforms and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to bring about greater equity and inclusion. This can only occur within a framework of rights that generate genuine opportunities for free and informed participation in order to create more robust societies and meet the sustainable development goals.

Digital communication platforms are vital tools for people to influence political and social policies in favour of their interests, to help communities to organize for positive change, and to foster active citizenship. In this respect, WACC and its partners are urging governments and international institutions to:

- Build the capacity of civil society organizations to participate in policy-making processes related to communication infrastructure, policy, and digital rights.
- Support community-initiated efforts to develop and/or manage telecommunications infrastructure in order to increase access to mobile telephony and internet services.
- Promote initiatives that link established community media platforms to ICTs, especially in ways that promote interactivity and participation.
- Promote digital solutions that help enable community participation in decision-making.
- Advance research about the relationship between access to ICTs, community participation, and development.
- Promote inter-sectoral partnerships to address violations to human rights online, such as online violence and illegal surveillance.
- Help strengthen networks of citizen communicators and journalists belonging to marginalized communities and social movements so that they can use digital communication platforms in their advocacy work.
- Provide digital media production training for marginalized and excluded communities, including women and girls.
- Advance digital media literacy among marginalized and excluded communities, and especially among young people.
- Build the capacity of marginalized and excluded communities, including women and girls, to develop and use open-source software.

As WACC’s own principles make clear:

“Only if communication is participatory can it empower individuals and communities, challenge authoritarian political, economic and cultural structures and help to build a more just and peaceful world.”

Note
“What the churches say about communication is not half as important as what they do,” wrote Michael Traber in the editorial of the 1/1984 issue of WACC’s journal Media Development. Its theme was “Church Statements on Communication” and it included “Communicating Credibly” – the declaration of the 1983 Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

As Traber concluded, “Looking at the World Council of Churches’ statement and other documents on communication, one gets the impression that the churches have at long last made a start on an adventurous journey through the varied and fast changing landscape of the world of communication.”

In some ways, much the same could have been said of the secular world of communications. In 1980, UNESCO published the MacBride Report, its international study of communication problems optimistically subtitled “Towards a new more just and more efficient world information and communication order”.

Seán MacBride, who chaired the commission that produced the report, noted in its preface, “As communication is so central to all social, economic and political activity at community, national and international levels, I would paraphrase H. G. Wells and say human history becomes more and more a race between communication and catastrophe.” Nearly 40 years later, that insight has lost none of its relevance.

So what has WACC – an international non-governmental organization founded by faith-based entities in 1968 – to say about today’s world of communications? In essence, its problems and solutions stem from questions of human dignity and human rights. Questions of inclusion or exclusion, accessibility and affordability. More than that (as is excruciatingly relevant today), it is all about credibility and responsibility.

As the WCC’s Vancouver declaration underlined, “Many of us have become cynical about sources of information and there is a special urgency in our search for credibility.” Does the communication affirm or exploit...
people? Does it make peace, build justice and promote wholeness? Does it respect the reality of pluralism and provide for the voicing of different views? Does it avoid quick judgements?  

Most communication researchers and practitioners today are familiar with the concept of communicative action put forward by the sociologist Jürgen Habermas and the capability approach elaborated by the economist Amartya Sen. Both stand on principles of a common human dignity: a view of ordinary people being able to exercise practical choices in order “to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value.”

But for people to be able to change and improve their lives, to claim rights and entitlements, their communication rights must be recognized and guaranteed. Communication rights are described by Pradip N. Thomas as “a scaffolding for an engagement with key communication deficits and a framework for the exploration of solutions in different contexts around the world.”

Is there moral equivalence between these worldviews and WACC’s credo of “Communication for All”? Paulo Freire, who argued that “If the structure does not permit dialogue, the structure must be changed”, would say yes:

“The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a ‘circle of certainty’ within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.”

In recent years, public dialogue has turned towards the moral and spiritual imperative of ending poverty, towards dignity for migrants and refugees, towards a shared pilgrimage of justice and peace, and towards an international partnership on religion and sustainable development. Whatever future direction such dialogue takes, WACC’s own “adventurous journey through the varied and fast changing landscape of the world of communication” is set to continue.

Notes
At the heart of this issue of *Media Development* lies an opinion piece written by the editor-in-chief of *The Guardian* newspaper and first published on 16 November 2017. The word lies is ironically appropriate – for its singular ambiguity in a world where balance and truth in news coverage often appear to be at a premium and where social media daily peddle fake news and misinformation.

Katharine Viner’s long article reiterates standards set by those who established *The Guardian* in the early part of the 19th century, standards that need reinvigorating in a world destabilised by “crises that are global, national, local and personal”. As Viner affirms, “In these disorientating times, championing the public interest – which has always been at the heart of the Guardian’s mission – has become an urgent necessity.”

*Media Development* was unable to secure permission to republish “A mission for journalism in a time of crisis”. However, the following quote from the article gives a sense of the direction this leading newspaper will be taking over the next few years:

“[The Guardian] will give people the facts, because they want and need information they can trust, and we will stick to the facts. We will find things out, reveal new information and challenge the powerful. This is the foundation of what we do. As trust in the media declines in a combustible political moment, people around the world come to the Guardian in greater numbers than ever before, because they know us to be rigorous and fair. If we once emphasised the revolutionary idea that ‘comment is free’, today our priority is to ensure that ‘facts are sacred’. Our ownership structure means we are entirely independent and free from political and commercial influence. Only our values will determine the stories we choose to cover – relentlessly and courageously.”
The article continues:

“We will ask the questions that people are asking, and the questions that no one is asking. Honest reporters approach every situation with humility: they find the people who don’t get listened to and really listen to them. They get to know a place. We will get out of the big cities and the big institutions, and stay with stories for the long-term. Our commentary must also be based in facts, but we will keep a clear distinction between news and opinion.”

The concept of public service endorsed here has a distinguished pedigree. Public service broadcasting was long championed by professional entities in Europe and North America that sought to provide balanced news coverage which was politically and financially independent. In the words of the BBC’s international development charity, BBC Media Action:

“Public service broadcasting can play an important role in shaping identity and a sense of inclusive ‘nationhood’. Where political and media environments are becoming more polarised, the role of public service broadcasting as a provider of trusted information and platforms for public debate for all sections of society is becoming increasingly important.”

The same can be said of public service media generally – if by “public service” independence, reliability, balance, diversity, and plurality are meant. Therefore, it comes as something of a shock when digital media – lauded as a global commons providing unmediated access to a shared social good that all can enjoy – fail those very same tests.

Of course, because they are market-driven, digital technologies play by different rules. Google’s claim “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” and Facebook’s “to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together” come at considerable cost – socially, culturally, economically, and politically.

As Jack Schenker noted in “Democratising the digital” (Aeon, 29 November 2017):

“The billions of lines of code that increasingly colonise our private worlds and public spaces are wrapped in a veneer of neutrality, but they are neutral only in the sense that they lead us doubly down whichever roads will generate income for their owners. That drive for income places digital technologies within an ideological framework which is itself deeply biased.”

Public service media are well placed to tackle the twin scourges of contemporary journalism: fake news and misinformation. Yet they are not the same and need different remedies. As the European Commission’s Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation “A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation” (March 2018), makes clear, the term fake news is inadequate to capture the complex problem of disinformation, and it is also misleading:

“Because it has been appropriated by some politicians and their supporters, who use the term to dismiss coverage that they find disagreeable, and has thus become a weapon with which powerful actors can interfere in circulation of information and attack and undermine independent news media.”

So where should people turn to for reliable and balanced news, and opinion? In whatever form they take, it has to be to public service media that are editorially independent and free from political and commercial constraints. However, in a world of global corporate ownerships, supranational telecommunications entities, and unregulated social media – not to mention government interference and Twittering politicians – public service media are looking increasingly fragile.
The 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, 12-23 March 2018.

The CSW’s priority theme will be “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.” In addition, there will be a review theme titled “Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.”

The Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) underlined the urgency of advancing gender equality in the two strategic objectives of Platform J: to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; and to promote a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

The 47th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2003) stressed the need for media and telecommunications companies to address gender-based discrimination. In 2005, the Outcome Documents of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) noted the need to “promote balanced and diverse portrayals of women and men by the media” and stated:

“...We recognize that a gender divide exists as part of the digital divide in society and we reaffirm our commitment to women’s empowerment and to a gender equality perspective, so that we can overcome this divide... We encourage all stakeholders to support women’s participation in decision-making processes and to contribute to shaping all spheres of the Information Society at international, regional and national levels.”
Even so, in its paper “Rights Should Be Central To Post-2015 Development Agenda”, Human Rights Watch (HRW) identified “Strengthening the rights of women and girls” as one of five specific areas requiring more robust commitments by governments. Specifically, HRW proposed that:

“The post-2015 agenda should promote gender equality and women’s rights, including a requirement on governments to work to end gender discrimination and promote equality in their laws, policies, and practices.”

Recently, the centrality of this agenda was reaffirmed in debates and initiatives at the international level. These included the Global Alliance for Media and Gender (GAMAG); the United Nations Women Global Compact “Step it up for gender equality in the media”, UNESCO’s Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media, the UNESCO University Network on Gender Media and ICT, and a number of advocacy and scholarly contributions to the debate.

WACC’s own Strategic Plan 2017-2021 includes the goal “To support civil society in the Global South to combat sexism in the media.” In part, WACC does so through its acclaimed Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) and other initiatives that generate evidence on the gender dimensions of news reporting. Monitoring findings are applied to awareness creation, critical media literacy training, advocacy, and engagement with media professionals on media policy and practice.

The articles in this issue of Media Development are shortened versions of some of the position papers prepared by the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) to be presented to the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2018). However, while gender equality and equitable participation in - and access of women to - the media and to information and communications technologies can undoubtedly be achieved by women alone, it will happen much more quickly and effectively if gender equality were recognized by men as a task for them as well.

As the American feminist and political activist Gloria Steinem has affirmed, “A gender-equal society would be one where the word ‘gender’ does not exist: where everyone can be themselves.”
Memory is power and power is politics.

Traditional newspapers are often considered “journals of record”, because they try to maintain rigorous ethical standards in terms of veracity, balance, and accountability. Their editorial independence is a mark of their integrity. Consequently, newspapers have been seen as repositories of factual narratives on which national and cultural histories and identities can, in part, be built.

At the same time, there are newspapers of the tabloid variety, whose ethical principles (if any) are subservient to profit and, therefore, to the need to attract readers and advertisers. They have become “shows” similar to those popular news channels on television that mix news titbits with dollops of “entertainment”. Tabloid newspapers, of course, are useful as indicators of the directions popular culture is taking at a given time, but that may be their sole worth.

In the heyday of public service broadcasting, media corporations such as the UK’s BBC, Germany’s ARD, the Dutch NPO, and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, were neither commercial nor state-owned. Free from political interference and commercial pressure, they embodied the words of UNESCO, that with “pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.”

In this sense, public broadcasters also became repositories of historical facts: what was on record was assumed to be true and reliable — even though thorny issues of inclusion and exclusion were often ignored. From the 1960s onwards, the rise of alternative media gave public representation and voice to some of those omissions.

Today, traditional media and other social institutions are giving ground to digital technologies and social media with a consequent revaluation of how public memory is represented and conserved. As Joanne Garde-Hansen has noted:
"A shift in power relations is occurring, such that the powerful archiving force of the institution (museum, government, church, law or mass media) and corporations that may seek to preserve knowledge and history on their own terms seems to be challenged by the present archiving power of increasingly popular and easy-to-use digital media."

It is important, therefore, to test some of the assumptions made about digital media and, in particular, to tease out potential implications for the way society sees itself, records itself, and remembers itself. That is the theme of this issue of Media Development.

It is well known that when oral communities made the long transition to writing, it impacted how they were organised, how they recollected the past, and how they viewed the future. They were able to keep tallies and records and lineages, which cemented social bonds and commercial relationships, establishing what directions they might take next. Writing marked a settled community with a sense of its own place in history and a sense of its own importance. In terms of political and social control, therefore, the need arose to monopolise and/or control public “statements” relating to political and social entities. And, as Michel Foucault points out in The Archeology of Knowledge:

“Instead of being something said once and for all – and lost in the past like the results of a battle, a geological catastrophe, or the death of a king – the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced.”

Today, public statements that lay claim to a particular status or existence, and the public forms of communication that maintain them, have been appropriated by digital technologies that seem to be shifting the nexus of power from the monopoly of authority (political or social) to that of the social collective or, indeed, of the ordinary person, either of which can effectively challenge, make counter-claims, and organise in opposition.

Yet, as the draft report of the International Panel on Social Progress “Rethinking Society for the 21st Century” warns in its Chapter on “Media and Communications”:

"As media infrastructures become more pervasive in everyday life, they increasingly mediate the human experience of the self, the other, and the world. As they connect individuals and communities, they also structure the universe of information and personalise informational exposure. Since individual autonomy is a necessary element of any form of social progress, it is essential to consider the implications of such large-scale media-based developments for the ongoing goal of social progress."

In relation to the politics of memory, mediations of both individual and collective memory are likely to be heavily influenced and profoundly changed by the way digital infrastructures and protocols are designed and implemented over the next decade. It is already clear, as Anna Reading has pointed out, that digital media technologies, in combination with other political, economic, social and cultural shifts “are changing human memory practices both individually and collectively.”

What is less clear, and will require considerable interdisciplinary study to elucidate, is how digital media technologies are transforming human relationships, human behaviour, and human beings themselves.

Notes
2. https://www.ipsp.org/
Great expectations have been placed on social media platforms as a panacea for the challenges facing societies worldwide. In particular, social media platforms are expected to strengthen open dialogue and public debate and to be sources of information and knowledge.

Social media are also expected to play a key role in holding decision-makers accountable in regard to equitable access to public resources and social services. Civil society organisations see them as a way to expand public spaces for citizens to participate in the way societies are run and to promote better governance.

Social media have a coordinating function, relaying often vital information in both normal and exceptional times. They may never be revolutionary in the sense that, without long-term ferment and sustained political and social organisation, they will not overthrow a repressive regime or free an oppressed people. But, as Ricky Storm Braskov notes:

“Social media are revolutionary in the sense that they facilitate, even fortify, a culture of networking. From the perspective of developing countries where communication and media are sparse and often non-existent, social and mobile media do have a massive potential in connecting people both within and to the outside world. It is a qualitative change and... in a complex modern society, where things that matter can happen anywhere and at any time, the capacities of people armed with the means of recording, rendering, and communicating their observations change people’s relationship to the events that surround them.”

In many ways, this observation makes it all the more remarkable that the role of communications, mass media, and social media found scant place in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite much work having been done over several decades in the fields of communication for development (C4D), communication rights, and in relation to information
and communication poverty and to "voice" (inclusion and participation in social, political, and economic processes), this is an astonishing oversight.

Much more emphasis on this vital domain might have been expected in the SDGs, since communication and the interplay of information and knowledge at all levels arguably underpin sustainable development. Among 17 goals, three make passing references:

SDG 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls rather weakly says: "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women".

SDG 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation is stronger: "Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020."

And SDG 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development escapes with: "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology".

Communication is curiously absent from SDG 1 End Poverty in all its forms everywhere, although it could have been front and centre. As a multi-dimensional and multi-layered process, communication for development and social change aims to empower individuals and communities to take actions to improve their lives. In this respect, C4D involves engaging with communities and listening to real people as they identify problems, propose solutions, and act upon them.

Communication is also difficult to pinpoint in SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In a sense, SDG 16 lies at the heart of Agenda 2030 and yet only one of the target indicators relates to communication rights: "Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information".

Returning to the kind of political, social, and behavioural change that communication for development is expected to bring about, traditional mass media and social media can play distinct and sometimes overlapping roles. However, it would be wrong to suppose that either of them comprise neutral spaces. Both are constructed with a purpose, and that purpose is ideological. And behind the ideology of the social platform is the ideology of the content-provider, whether blogger, advertiser, or citizen-journalist.

Media systems contribute to and, to some extent, determine local, national, and global discourses. Ownership or control of the sector is essential for political leaders and corporations aiming to further their own interests. This is why the media are often the first targets of authoritarian leaders (as well as some leaders in democratic countries) when taking or consolidating power.

Independent media and journalists (who often put themselves at risk) serve to counter some of the excesses of governments by exposing misinformation, corruption, and misuse of national resources; by providing a platform for political debate and building consensus; by offering a source of factual information and balanced analysis. In doing so, they strengthen democratic processes and equitable economic development and give a powerful voice to people seeking to advance good governance and good citizenship.

The same could be said of social media if they were made subject to ethical safeguards around honesty and accountability. In this way, social and mobile media platforms could have a revolutionary impact in the field of communication for development — provided that they demonstrate reliability, transparency, and legitimacy.

Note
1. Ricky Storm Braskov (2012). In Social Media in Development Cooperation published by ORECOMM Centre for Communication and Glocal Change.
On 4 April 1967, the Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr gave his impassioned “Vietnam” speech at Riverside Church, New York. Most of that speech is as pertinent now as it was then. Take out the references to war and there are compelling arguments for truth-telling and a revolution of values. In a certain sense, that is the theme of this issue of Media Development.

Writing in The New Yorker (3 April 2017), the American author Benjamin Hedin noted:

“Half a century later, the Riverside speech also seems to carry the greater weight of prophecy. King portrayed the war in Vietnam as an imperial one, prosecuted at the expense of the poor. Vietnam, he said, was ‘the symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit’, and, if left untreated, if the malady continued to fester, ‘we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight’.”

Some might argue that this is precisely where the USA finds itself today – in a morass characterised by lack of respect for fundamental rules and the institutions on which good governance is based, lack of regard for truth, and a mix of conspiracy theories, racist rhetoric, and crackpot ideas.

What follows are passages from Martin Luther King Jr’s speech that could have been written yesterday, and probably would have been had King not been assassinated.

On the need to act

“Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government’s policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one’s own bosom and in the
surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexing as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty. But we must move on.”

On the need to speak out
“Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak... For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.”

On the need for transformation
“A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see than an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

On the need for redistribution of wealth
“A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, ‘This is not just’. It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of South America and say, ‘This is not just.’ The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.”

On the need for equality and justice
“A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.”

Communicators today — especially those much maligned public intellectuals, opinion journalists, and voices of conscience who open people’s eyes and ears to inequality and injustice — have a moral duty to tell it like it is, to disturb the world, and — like Martin Luther King Jr — to dream of a better future for all.

Reference
A recent report from the World Economic Forum (WEF)\(^1\) says that the main characteristics of digital media consumption today are:

- Mobile: People now spend an average of two hours daily on the mobile web, one-third of their total online time, with Millennials and digital media users in emerging countries leading the mobile revolution.
- Social and interactive: Social networking is by far the most popular online activity, clocking in at an average of 1.8 hours or 30% of daily online time.
- Flexible and personalized: Users can play a more active role and have more control over the digital media offerings they use and engage with compared with traditional media.
- Fast, instant and convenient: Fast internet and new technologies (hardware and software) allow for easier access and use, and enriched content.
- More content: As content creation and distribution become simpler, a greater amount of content and services are becoming available. Content is more diverse, but consumption is potentially focused more on breadth than depth, as capacity is limited. The importance of content filtering, curation and recommendation has grown.
- Collective: The possibility to connect, share, recommend and communicate creates a collective experience that shapes not only behaviours and preferences, but also a collective consciousness of shared beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes.
- Fragmented and multi-channel: The huge number of channels and creators makes content ever more fragmented. Users access multiple platforms from multiple devices. Adapting content to these multiple platforms becomes imperative.
- The higher the usage of digital media, the higher the willingness to pay: Increased connectivity and use of digital media should tip the revenue scale in industry’s favour, but innovation in creating better
user experiences is crucial, as it is clearly evident that traditional
digital advertising is losing its appeal and efficacy.

The WEF report also identifies key challenges brought about by new patterns
of consumption and the presence of more players and creators in the market
leading to consumer trust failing because of concerns about:

- Truthfulness of content, given its volume, the large number of creators
  and sources, and need for more clarity around filtering mechanisms.
- Integrity of the company/consumer value exchange.
- Security of personal data and digital identities from cybercrime, given
  the significance of this information to a consumer’s professional,
  financial and social well-being.

In short, while digital communication technologies are transforming the
world and the way people communicate, people themselves are also being
reshaped by those technologies. At the same time, there is a perception that
content is less trustworthy and that the communications infrastructure more
susceptible to abuse.

This is partly because of a lack of oversight and partly because the ethical
standards followed by traditional media (at least in principle) have not been
translated into equivalent norms for so-called social networking.

Here is where much of the concern lies. Social media are changing how
people govern and are governed; they are impacting healthcare and public
health; they are part and parcel of corporate business and the international
banking system. But they are also helping to tackle some of the world’s
biggest challenges, from human rights violations to climate change, and
they are becoming ever more effective in situations of natural or human
made disaster.

It is too early to tell how these profound changes in a multitude of
contexts will play out in the long-term. Increasing dependence on digital
communications may ultimately lead to irreconcilable problems, but what is
already clear is that people of the late 21st century will bear only a passing
resemblance to those of the 20th century and their ways of communicating
will be entirely different.

Hyperconnectivity is defined as being connected to myriad means

Notes
1. From the Executive Summary in “Digital Media and Society Implications
The voice of the people is all very well as long as it can be ignored. While official archives and libraries are subject to authoritarian control, while newspapers can be relied upon to reflect the views and opinions of those in power, and while radio and television can be manipulated, people’s voices and images can be edited and censored. But with the arrival of the Internet and digital communication platforms, all that has changed.

The traditional guardians of collective memories were state institutions, official historians, and newspapers of record. Collective memories and their social construction were vital to how nations saw and represented themselves, a process that demanded inclusion and omission. And, as Benedict Anderson noted in *Imagined Communities*, “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.”

Who imagines, writes, or fashions these narratives? And in that process, who is forgotten or omitted? Paul Connerton has articulated seven kinds of ideological forgetting: “repressive erasure” (obliteration, destruction, editing out); “prescriptive forgetting” (erasure believed to be in the best interests of all parties); “forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity” (forgetting is not a loss but a gain that facilitates new beginnings); “structural amnesia” (the tendency to forget links that are socially undesirable); “forgetting as annulment” (flowing from a surfeit of information, discarding or storing vast quantities of data); “forgetting as planned obsolescence” (discarding as a vital ingredient of consumerism); and “forgetting as humiliated silence” (collusive silence brought on by collective shame).

Thinking about these kinds of forgetting in the context of traditional mass media and social structures operated by the state, it quickly becomes apparent that collective identity is firmly and often irrevocably founded on edited versions of national history, on ideologies that are biased or detrimental. In contrast, the potential of today’s digital media lies in their ability to challenge dominant narratives. As the editors of *On Media*...
“Phenomena such as the increasing use of YouTube as an accessible archive of popular and elite/establishment memory, the unprecedented availability of online databases offering media-based documentation of the past, the ease with which conflicting representations of the past can now be evaluated and compared, alongside the ease with which distorted or even fabricated versions of the past can now be created and disseminated – all require a comprehensive inquiry into the ever-changing relations between mass media and the recollection of the past.”

The explosion of digital media has created a global scenario in which there are now thousands of competing narratives or “memories” of any happening. They can take the form of personal memories (audio and video recordings, blogs, photos, Instagrams, recollections and histories, and anything that can be uploaded and given permanence in the digital sphere.) Then there are radio, television, and newspaper corporations – national and global, private, commercial and government – all creating their own versions of day to day events. These historians of the mundane bring their own ideological and editorial take to every aspect of political and social life. So that when it comes to sorting out fact from fiction, reasoned opinion from pure speculation, there is more information than ever, much of it more accessible than ever. The field of collective memories can easily turn into a quagmire of discord and dispute.

Consequently, as the editors of On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age also point out:

“The fundamental role of collective memories in the formation of modern national identities, the rise of mass culture and mass politics, and the development of new communication technologies have all led to the current state, in which the right to narrate the past is no longer reserved for academic and political elites. Nowadays, major historical events gain their public meaning not only through academic and state-sponsored interpretations but also through television, films, and the press.”

The right to memory

Logically, the right to memory is a basic human right, as is the right to forget. At the level of the individual, remembering or forgetting are often coloured by questions of privacy and human dignity. At the level of a collectivity, such issues are not so clear cut. Collective memories are often bitterly contested, with claims and counterclaims by imagined political communities (Anderson’s definition of a nation but by extension communities within a nation).

Today, these include imagined digital communities (imagined because their members mostly will never know, meet or hear their fellow members, yet they still picture themselves as part of a coherent entity.) Such digital communities have a communicative power unknown before the invention of the Internet, although their potential for organization and bringing about political and social change is still being tested.

In this context, the choice of what is recorded in the public memory and the way it is represented is not neutral, but takes place in accordance with predetermined policies and mind-sets. This politics of remembering (or consigning to oblivion) constitutes a power struggle in which justice is almost inevitably compromised.

Aided and abetted by digital technologies, it falls to civil society to be the defender and spokesperson of history and public memory. In this way, the right to memory becomes synonymous with the right to justice.

References
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Director of Research at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, writes:

“For more than a century, most people in the Western world have taken local journalism for granted. From small rural communities covered by weeklies to larger towns covered by their own daily, newspapers have been an integral part of local life, and their journalists have chronicled events from the mundane to the monumental, publicised local debates, and kept a more or less watchful eye on those in positions of power. Local media have represented their area and helped people imagine themselves as part of a community, connected in part through their shared local news medium, bound together by more than geographic proximity or politically defined administrative boundaries.”

Today, profound changes in the newspaper and journalism industries together with technological convergence risk “seeing much weaker local news media that do less in terms of holding power to account and keeping people informed, less to encourage civic and political engagement, and less to foster community integration than they have in the past.”

With the availability of news 24/7 and limitless sources of information via the Internet, local media have more or less lost the battle for audience attention as well as the market sway they once had in terms of local advertising. This reversal of fortune is in marked contrast to media at the national level where so-called “legacy media” (those traditional means of communication and expression that have existed since before the digital era) have lost audiences for their analogue outlets but increased them for their digital platforms.

In 1980, when UNESCO published the report of the MacBride Commission — Many Voices, One World, subtitled “Towards a new, more just and more efficient world information and communication order” — it stressed the importance of local communication:
“More emphasis should be placed on these media and local activities for four main reasons: one, because they may be overshadowed and pushed into the background by the big media; two, because mass media have been expected to accomplish tasks and goals for which they are not fitted; three, because in many countries the neglect of a certain balance between big and small led to unnecessary wastage of scarce resources, by using inappropriate means for diverse audiences; four, because by establishing links between them broader horizontal communication could be developed” (pp. 55-56).

The MacBride Report also drew attention to the alarming concentration of media ownership in fewer and fewer hands in the form of horizontal and vertical integration of enterprises connected with the information and entertainment industries; the infiltration into media of enterprises operating in totally different spheres; and the merger of various information outlets into multi-media conglomerates.

However, what the MacBride Report could not have anticipated was the exponential growth of digital technologies; their global accessibility via the Internet and, consequently, their enormous networking potential; and their relatively low cost. In theory, the revolution offered by digital platforms and social media was the ideal answer to the communication problems identified by the MacBride Commission. In practice, governments and mass media oligopolies have not been willing to give up ownership and control without a prolonged struggle.

The importance of digital communications in the contemporary landscape was recognized by the European Court of Human Rights in 2012. It noted:

"The Internet has become one of the principal means for individuals to exercise their right to freedom of expression today: it offers essential tools for participation in activities and debates relating to questions of politics or public interest." 1

In this respect, the concept of open journalism or user generated content (typically created and circulated in an online environment by a range of different actors) or networked journalism seems to have great potential when it comes to addressing the needs of local communities. As Linda Steiner remarks in her article in this issue of Media Development:

“Digital tools enable all kinds of people to participate in information production and distribution. And many people who never went to journalism school and have no interest in being paid reporters are not only technically and technologically savvy but also have experiences and knowledge that are highly relevant to investigating newsworthy community problems.”

True, but that is not the whole picture. Editorial responsibility and liability for published content come into play as well as a range of contested values touching directly on news-making: objectivity, impartiality, truthfulness, transparency, reliability, and ethics. While the genie is out of the bottle, there are still tensions between journalism professionals and those seeking to exercise their communication rights by using digital technologies.

Yet, barring a global technical catastrophe, digital is here to stay and the local will continue to reinvent itself in whatever digital spaces open up. However, as Rasmus Kleis Nielsen concludes, these developments portend a future in which:

“We risk seeing much weaker local news media that do less in terms of holding power to account and keeping people informed, less to encourage civic and political engagement, and less to foster community integration than they have in the past (even as digital media offer both individual citizens and local communities many other benefits in other areas beyond news and journalism).”

Notes
International principles of journalism ethics stress the duty of professional communicators to seek truth and to provide fair and balanced accounts of events and issues. With this in mind, conscientious journalists try to serve the public with honesty and integrity the cornerstones of their credibility.

The independence of news outlets rests on high standards of accuracy, fact checking, and impartiality. Their obligation is not only to inform the public, but also to engage people in the practice of good governance and to serve as a voice for those who have been denied a voice.

Not everyone will agree with every editorial decision taken, but ethical standards help guide journalists and enable them to be held accountable.

In short, the basic functions of the media in a democratic society are:

- To encourage democratic choice by clarifying complex issues, particularly in an age when information is the driving force of economic advancement and global events impact people’s daily lives as never before;
- To provoke public debate leading to greater participation in important decisions;
- To uncover abuses and campaign to rectify them;
- To alert and mobilize public opinion to humanitarian causes/injustices;
- To promote political pluralism by publicising different views/ideological approaches to certain issues;
- To keep politicians and decision-makers attuned to public opinion.

Consequently, while totally impartial media are neither possible nor desirable, it is essential:

- To maintain a distinction between facts and opinion, reporting and analysis;
• To use only trained, professional reporters who are knowledgeable and who check sources;
• To explain issues without trivializing or sensationalizing;
• To publish corrections;
• To avoid using information likely to be harmful to national security or to endanger individuals.

So much for the theory. In reality, media practitioners are subject to the economic constraints facing the industry in which they work, to the demands of the market, and often to the dictates of government or corporate interests. Editorial policies need to cater to a broad range of tastes so that “giving the public what they want” often becomes an argument for dubious, salacious or inflammatory content. In such cases, freedom of expression is used as a camouflage for “anything goes” and satire can be confused with incitement.

In recent years, and for a range of reasons, Islamophobia has “hit the headlines”. At times like these independent media have to be especially sensitive and vigilant and to take steps to present balanced coverage, to counter discrimination and stereotyping, and to defuse tension.

Islamophobia has many causes. It can be deep-rooted historically, culturally, and socially. It can take the form of an understandable reaction to an act of terrorism or an irrational prejudice towards migrants. It can reflect ignorance or a fear of the unknown. Often it is seized on by malcontents for political or economic advantage. In such situations, the role played by mass media, but also by community and social media, becomes crucial and, on occasion, a matter of life or death.

In “Islamophobia plays right into the hands of Isis” (The Guardian 25 November 2015), Owen Jones pointed out that:

“Some of the media’s attacks are beyond sinister. A Daily Mail cartoon provoked understandable comparisons with 1930s Nazi propaganda after portraying gun-toting Muslim refugees entering Europe amid rats.
It is generally more subtle than that, of course.

But it helps create an atmosphere where anything goes; where bigotry seems officially sanctioned and legitimised. Muslims become seen as the enemy within, a near-homogenous group defined by their hostility to western values – or indeed the west full stop. ‘Muslim’ becomes synonymous with ‘extremist’ and ‘potential terrorist’.”

Many reputable (and responsible) media outlets make a point of offering balanced views of Islam, Muslims, and the difficult situations in which they are caught up – for example the war in Syria, the Israel/Palestine conflict, Hindutva in India, and the struggle in Mindanao, Philippines. Others are deliberately inflammatory and provocative.

The current crisis of Syrian refugees is a case in point, in which some media outlets have stoked public anxiety and intolerance by reporting the words and deeds of certain politicians without offering more moderate or sympathetic views. And then there is political intervention. In “The Elephant in the Room: Islam and the Crisis of Liberal Values in Europe” (Foreign Affairs, 2 February 2016) Alexander Betts makes the point that:

“They simple fact is that European member states don’t really want to welcome Muslim migrants. This has been explicit in the case of countries with vocal far-right parties and in central European countries with Christian nationalist governments. But the liberal political elites of Western Europe have steered clear of admitting that the biggest single barrier to coherent asylum and immigration policies is public anxiety about Islam. Far-right parties have pandered to these fears, stoking xenophobia.”

Predominantly negative and racist reporting in the media strengthens an increasingly dangerous anti-Muslim mind-set, which reinforces stereotypes and leads to an escalation of violent attacks on Muslims. False or inaccurate stories about Muslims are routinely used by far right groups to legitimise their “case” and to gain followers. The Internet is full of forums using mainstream newspaper reports as “proof” that their intolerant views about Muslims are true.

Silence, of course, is deadly. But some journalists are trying to persuade others to act more responsibly. In “5 Ways Journalists Can Avoid Islamophobia In Their Coverage” (Huffington Post, 14 December 2015), Senior Media Editor Gabriel Arana noted that, “It is the duty of journalists to inform and educate.
But when it comes to Islam and the Muslim community – in the U.S. and across the world – news outlets have far too often served to spread misinformation and perpetuate prejudice."

Arana proposed the following remedies:

1. Visit a Mosque: The heart of the problem with the media’s coverage of Muslims is that most of us simply do not know enough about Islam.
2. Be careful whose views you promote: Far too often, “balance” in news coverage has meant providing a platform for ideologues to spew racist garbage. Don’t give bigotry a platform.
3. Challenge prejudice and debunk outright lies: The reason it’s so important for journalists to arm themselves with information is not only so they themselves make sure not to perpetuate prejudice, it’s also so they can challenge it.
4. Choose your words carefully: When journalists use phrases like “Islamic terrorism,” they are implicitly conflating two concepts. While this term is in common use, it is the duty of those of us in the media to be more precise in our use of language than the general public.
5. Provide context: In the age of the Internet – with conduits for information like Twitter, Facebook and >YouTube giving the public direct access to raw information – the role of the media has changed. It’s no longer just to “report the facts”, which the public is bombarded with on a daily basis. We must contextualize what’s out there.

The articles in this issue of Media Development address these questions from a variety of perspectives in an attempt to open up dialogue and to pave the way for greater understanding.
A quarter of a century ago, in an essay published in the journal Religion and Society, Michael Traber wrote:

“Communication, both public and private, is a fundamental human right and, as such, the precondition for other human rights, because communication is intimately bound up with what it means to be human. The freedom to speak and to publicize, and to create works of communication (cultural goods), is not only an essential component of human dignity and cultural identity, but it is also necessary for any progress in other rights.”

That statement followed a long-running debate in the 1970s and 1980s about a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which in turn laid the groundwork for the MacBride Report (published by UNESCO), the Cultural Environment Movement (inspired by George Gerbner), the People’s Communication Charter (guided by Cees J. Hamelink), the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) Campaign (launched by the Platform for Communication Rights, an umbrella group of international NGOs active in media and communication) and culminating in the ITU-led World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005).

What became known as the “right to communicate” or “communication rights” is now the subject of a considerable body of scholarly literature. Much of its history and evolution is explored in the book The Right to Communicate and can be found on the WACC portal called Centre for Communication Rights.

Taking a rights-based approach to communication means that it becomes a legal entitlement, rather than a commodity or service provided on a commercial or charitable basis. For example, to date freedom of information laws have been implemented in over 95 countries in relation to the public sector, although most exclude the private sector from their jurisdiction. The right to information falls within the framework of communication rights.
A rights-based approach also means that achieving basic and improved levels of access to communication should be a priority; that the “least served” should be better targeted and therefore inequalities reduced; that communities and vulnerable groups will be empowered to take part in decision-making processes; and that the means and mechanisms available in the UN human rights system will be used to monitor progress in realizing communication rights and in holding governments accountable.

Ten years after the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, the General Assembly High-level Meeting to review the implementation of its outcomes took place 15-16 December 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. It was an opportunity for in-depth discussions around progress, gaps, and challenges, as well as areas for future action.

The UN General Assembly’s Overall Review of the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes, prepared in time for the meeting, recognized that “human rights have been central to the WSIS vision, and that ICTs have shown their potential to strengthen the exercise of human rights, enabling access to information, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association” (47).

Without mentioning communication rights by name, the document also emphasized that “communication is a fundamental social process, a basic human need, and is central to the Information Society. Everyone, everywhere should have the opportunity to participate, and no one should be excluded from the benefits the Information Society offers” (50).

The WSIS+10 Review stressed the link between communication and building “a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life” (6).

Despite that long awaited recognition, the communication rights movement itself has been criticized for a failure to demonstrate how sustainable development and the eradication of poverty can be enhanced, facilitated, or advanced through the implementation of communication rights. In Negotiating Communication Rights: Case Studies from India (Sage, 2011), Pradip Thomas, a stalwart of the right to communicate, notes:

“There is a need for the CR movement to ground itself in the local and begin from where people are. Vital to the survival of already enfeebled communities is their ability to have faith in their own meanings, and the ability to articulate the key deficits including communication they face. … A philosophy of communication rights offers a conceptual framework to understand the practice of communication rights. It offers a framework for us to understand the ‘why’ and ‘what’ of communication rights” (p. 47).

This issue of Media Development is an attempt to demonstrate how communication rights in practice have advanced the cause of social justice in particular circumstances and at particular times. As Seán Ó Siochrú, one of the leading lights of the CRIS Campaign, notes in his article, the right to communicate:

“…goes beyond ensuring that those currently excluded from the public domain can have their voices amplified – welcome and all as this would be. The right to communicate is, in the end, not just about being heard: it must also mean securing access to the information you need; and being listened to by those in power with due consideration for your views.”

You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink. There are those who do not wish to listen to or give consideration to other people’s views. While communication rights propose an environment in which people’s voices can be heard, it is up to civil society in alliances and partnerships to call for, campaign for, and bring about real social change.

In turn, civil society needs the determined support and encouragement of enlightened governmental and non-governmental organizations, corporate entities that have the interests of others at heart, and faith-based organizations that want sustainable development goals to become reality.

Notes
“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” is the first line of a famous poem by Robert Frost published in 1914. In “Mending Wall”, the narrator, a New England farmer, contacts his neighbour to rebuild the stone wall between their two farms. As the men work, the narrator questions the purpose of a wall “where it is we do not need the wall”. Twice he points out that walls are generally disliked, despite his companion’s assertion that, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

The Great Wall of China, Hadrian’s Wall in England, the Berlin Wall, the concrete barrier between Israel and the West Bank, the wall on the US-Mexico border, and most recently the barbed wire fence between Hungary and Serbia are instances of physical barriers intended to contain, to keep in or out, and to prevent migration. Then there are the uncompromising barriers erected by the global economy in a world where, in developed and developing countries alike, the rich control 90% of the wealth.

There are more sinister and lethal “walls”. The longest continuous minefield on the planet is a militarized zone in Western Sahara running for 2,700 kilometres and dividing the Sahrawi people. In 1975, Spain ended more than 90 years of colonial rule of Western Sahara after decades of a violent Sahrawi independence movement. When the Spanish left, Morocco sent 350,000 settlers and 20,000 troops into the territory, starting a war that lasted 16 years.

Sahrawis fought under the flag of the Polisario Front, supported by Algeria and Libya. Morocco was backed by France and the United States. Tens of thousands of people died and more than 100,000 were displaced. As Morocco settled the Atlantic side, it built a wall down the middle of the territory to keep Sahrawis and the Polisario Front in the eastern desert. The wall consists of a series of sand berms (ridges) fortified with Moroccan soldiers and landmines. It is still there.

Less immediately obvious are the social, cultural, and psychological barriers to better understanding between peoples and communities. Many of these impediments are directly related to communication – from linguistic

+ Indigenous community media
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Indigenous community media aid reconciliation in Canada

El paradójico desarrollo de la tecnología
barriers to media misrepresentations – demanding what the Latin American scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero calls the reconstruction of local meanings: listening “to everything that speaks, screams, curses, makes noise, blasphemes, at the same time as it inaugurates, invents, energizes, liberates, emancipates, creates”.

A simple definition of communication is precisely the creation and exchange of meaning in common. A more complex definition includes traditional media, social media, digital media and their associated industries. Communication is multi-layered and, in societies fashioned by media (where all is not as it seems), there are numerous obstacles and challenges.

The theme of this issue of *Media Development* is “Invisible Walls and Barriers” and its aim is to explore some of the political, social, cultural and technological impediments to freedom of expression in today’s world. Some barriers are more obvious than others. Indigenous people and their communities have been denied access to communications and excluded from discussion tables at international and national levels. The voices of refugees and migrant workers are not often heard by policy-makers. And in the world’s news media, women are often rendered invisible – which has been the focus of a 20-year-long study carried out by WACC’s Global Media Monitoring Project.

As with many countries in the global South, Afghanistan has suffered political trials and tribulations for a number of decades. But also embedded in Afghan society and culture are religious ideological barriers – as Mina Saboor reveals in her article in this issue of the journal. “Cases of media censorship and regulation become particularly complicated when religious scholars intervene in determining whether media content is Islamic or un-Islamic. … Conservative groups advancing these notions tend to use religion as an ultimatum,” she writes.

**Challenge to young people**

And then there are young people who, in today’s world, often face apparently insurmountable barriers and yet display astonishing resilience and creativity. Addressing an audience of young people in the Town Hall, Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 17 June 2013, President Barack Obama told the story of a wall that divided the city’s Alexandra Park.

The barrier was erected in 1994 and is one of a number of so-called “peace walls” built within the city in attempt to prevent violence between Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist communities.

President Obama praised the initiative of a young woman named Sylvia, who campaigned among local communities to build a gate in the wall that would allow people free access. In September 2011, the campaign achieved its goal. Obama commented:

“A small bit of progress. But the fact that so far we’ve only got a gate open and the wall is still up means there’s more work to do. And that’s the work of your generation… We’ll need more of you, young people, who imagine the world as it should be; who knock down walls; who knock down barriers; who imagine something different and have the courage to make it happen. The courage to bring communities together, to make even the small impossibilities a shining example of what is possible.”

As the articles in this issue of *Media Development* underline, traditional mass media and today’s social media can play an important role in breaking down barriers and in creating better understanding between communities, societies, and nations.

**Note**

Communication for Social Change (CSC) is a field shaped by a variety of theories drawn from different intellectual disciplines and aimed at leveraging communication, media and information in the pursuit of social change. The role of CSC to prioritise change from a people-centred perspective is the basis of its popularity among governments, global development agencies, international and local NGOs and foundations.

However, in recent years, increasing challenges at the level of local communication and development, transformations in communication and media environments, the re-emergence of new forms of civil mobilisation, problems of freedom of speech in the world of religious pluralism, and the challenges of privacy and security have had profound effects on how CSC is theorised and practised.

In addition, there seems to be a lacuna between the noble aspirations of CSC and those of the domain of communication rights – the latter having stagnated somewhat since the heady days of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS):

“CSC today is primarily communication for development and while its language includes frequent homage to the power of empowerment and participation, for the most part these words have been adapted to contexts that are not supportive of people-based, meaningful long-term change... Communication rights, on the other hand, is clearly based on the belief that CSC practices should advance the right of people to have their Voices heard and to use communication in the pursuit of goals and objectives that they have been involved in articulating.”

This issue of Media Development seeks to provide new thinking on how the CSC discipline can be better shaped by – and aligned with – these challenges. Specifically, the issue encompasses critical questions about the
theories and practices of CSC beyond its traditional boundaries in order to bring to light new ways that communication, media and information can contribute to creating a better world.

Recently, one expert in the field stated that “communications and development theory consists in the main of principles that become the basis for pathways to practice.” He identified five distinct levels:

- A theory of knowledge – an epistemological understanding of why and how a communications intervention will result in the required change.
- A specific understanding of process that feeds into practice – based on an epistemology of process.
- A knowledge of structures – meaning the institutions and power flows that play a role in the structuring processes, interventions and access to resources.
- A specific understanding of context – meaning the environment and community that is the location for the intervention, especially the complexities inherent in any locality: traditions, hierarchies, culture, norms, divisions, power flows, and politics.
- A grappling with the flows of power, including the influence of a variety of different stake-holders.2

In this respect, communication for social change can be seen as standing on the bedrock of communication rights, which set out to challenge the political, economic, and cultural structures that obstruct greater equality – meaning (in Cees Hamelink’s plausible definition) “equal entitlement to the social conditions that are essential to emancipation and self-development.”3 Here, communication rights underlie any initiative aimed at creating an enabling environment in which people can improve their lives and livelihoods.

The trick, then, is to harness communication rights – defined as enabling people to express themselves individually and collectively by all means of communication – to achieving genuinely sustainable development. But, as with any theory of change, there tend to be gaps between the various building blocks intended to bring about a particular long-term goal: as with particle physics, the two fields lack a grand unified theory that adequately expresses the single force implicit in communication for social change.

The Global Information Society Watch 2013 Special Report posits a people-centred information and knowledge environment as crucial to policy gains, despite the fact that such gains do not necessarily translate into real-world results.4

Alarmingly, however, the report says that in the context of the fragmentation of the communications rights movement, “people-centred” change has become difficult, especially when the information and communications technology industries tend to be in cahoots with government.

One task for proponents of communication for social change is to theorise and provide evidence of how communication rights are inextricably linked to genuine development. Rather than leaving the debate to communication activists and practitioners, it is for development specialists to make the running and to bring communication rights in from the cold.

Notes
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fall due in 2015 and many people are asking what happens next? What is the plan and what are the priorities? This has become known as the “post-2015” debate. Yet, search the official documents and there is very little to be found relating to the role communication rights, mass and social media are to play in this brave new world.

In 2012 the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development, took place in Brazil. Known as Rio+20, it agreed to establish an “Open Working Group” of government representatives to make a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A key question was how the SDGs would relate to or advance the earlier MDGs.

In August 2014 the Open Working Group on SDGs reported to the UN General Assembly, setting out 17 goals for the period 2015 to 2030:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Once again communication received short shrift, with barely a mention under Goal 16, “Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms” – presumably including freedom of expression and opinion.

This happened despite many UN-related agencies and most civil society organisations agreeing that strengthening communications, independent and pluralistic media, and improving access to information and communication technologies play an essential role in the development of today’s information societies and communities.

The year 2015 also marks the 15th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325, a landmark legal and political framework acknowledging the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all aspects of peace-building. UNSCR 1325 recognizes that exclusion from peace processes infringes women’s rights.

Despite a broad commitment to gender-inclusive and women’s rights-based approaches to peace processes, the role of media in portraying peace process, particularly those involving or impacting women, is little understood.

On 4 December 2014 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon published his synthesis report “On the Post-2015 Agenda.” He wrote:

“We are at a historic crossroads, and the directions we take will determine whether we will succeed or fail in our promises. With our globalized economy and sophisticated technology, we can decide to end the age-old ills of extreme poverty and hunger. Or we can continue to degrade our planet and allow intolerable inequalities to sow bitterness and despair. Our ambition is to achieve sustainable development for all... Never before has the world had to face such a complex agenda in a single year. And this unique opportunity will not come again in our generation.”

None of these noble aspirations will come about unless people are able to communicate their dreams, concerns, and needs – locally, nationally, regionally, globally. The obstacles are many: social, cultural, political, ideological, yet communication can help overcome them all unless it is silenced, censored, and repressed.

Communication clearly underpins sustainable development and requires equitable access to information and knowledge, to information and communication technologies, as well as plurality and diversity in the media. Without it, the post-2015 agenda may take a wrong turn.
What’s in a name? In 1989, the ruling military junta changed the name of Burma to Myanmar, one year after thousands were killed in the suppression of a popular uprising. The change was recognised by the United Nations and by countries such as France and Japan, but not by the United States and the United Kingdom.

A statement at the time by the UK Foreign Office said, “Burma’s democracy movement prefers the form ‘Burma’ because they do not accept the legitimacy of the unelected military regime to change the official name of the country. Internationally, both names are recognised.” The European Union sat on the fence by adopting the compromise “Burma/Myanmar”.

The name “Burma” derives from the ethnic Burman (or Bamar) majority and, following local custom, was adopted by British colonialists in the 19th century. The more formal indigenous name “Myanmar” has been used for centuries in titles, literature, and official documents. The English language version of the 1947 Constitution, prepared the year before the country regained its independence, referred to the “Union of Burma”, while the Burmese language version used the name “Myanmar”.

Burma’s opposition movement clung to the old name as a protest against the military regime. The opposition said that it was a matter that could only be decided by the people. The name Myanmar is also controversial at another level. It can be traced back to the pre-colonial period when successive kings ruled the central lowlands of Burma and periodically clashed with the states and societies around them. It implies the continuing political dominance of the major ethnic group living within the geographical boundaries inherited from the British in 1948. This is a problem for many of the country’s ethnic nationalities.

To some, the use of either “Burma” or “Myanmar” represents a political
position. To call the country Myanmar is deemed by activists to denote sympathy for the military regime. To the government, continued use of the country’s former name is considered insulting. Yet, many who preferred to use “Burma” after 1989 did so without such connotations, arguing that “Burma” is more easily recognised than “Myanmar” and lends itself to the adjective “Burmese”. Myanmar does not have an equivalent adjective in English.

Such linguistic tensions are symptomatic of Burma’s inner turmoil, a country of over 51 million people with 135 distinct ethnic groups speaking 11 languages. The Bamar form an estimated 68% of the population; the Shan 10%; the Kayin 7%; the Rakhine people 4%; and overseas Chinese approximately 3%. They prefer the term “ethnic nationality” to “ethnic minority” as the term “minority” deepens their sense of insecurity in the face of what is often described as “Burmanisation” – the proliferation and domination of the Bamar culture over other groups.

And then there are the Rohingya, a relatively small ethnic group who practice Islam and whose origin is disputed. Some say they are indigenous to the state of Rakhine and others contend they are migrants from East Bengal, today’s Bangladesh, who came to Burma during the period of British rule. In 2012 riots took place between Rohingya and Arakanese in northern Rakhine State. The government responded by imposing curfews, deploying troops in the region, and declaring a state of emergency allowing the military to oversee the administration of the region.

In July 2012, the Burmese government omitted the Rohingya – since 1982 classified as “stateless Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh” – on the government’s list of more than 130 ethnic races. The government said that the Rohingya have no claim to Burmese citizenship.

Stalled reform
At a press conference in November 2014, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was asked for her assessment of Myanmar’s reform process. “Stalled,” she replied, before challenging anyone in the room to name a significant change that had taken place in the previous two years. Commentators concur with the view that the pace of political change has slowed since the early reforms introduced when Thein Sein became President in 2011.

At that time, many political prisoners were released, censorship of newspapers and the Internet was lifted and a (flawed) law passed allowing public demonstrations. In a short period of time, control over one of the world’s most tightly controlled societies was relaxed. Private newspapers regularly carried stories of demonstrations – mostly connected to land rights – and criticism of government ministers.

But that thaw has not continued and many believe that the real objective is to leave the army in charge of a nation but with the appearance of it being more democratic yet subject to the same old constraints. One key frustration is that the country’s Constitution has not been rewritten.

Drafted in 2008, the current Constitution guarantees the military a quarter of the seats in the Hluttaw (the Burmese parliament). Opposition leaders have focused on two Articles they want removed: the clause barring anyone who has foreign family members from becoming president (which effectively prevents Suu Kyi from standing) and Article 436, which gives the army a veto on constitutional changes.

Altering the “Suu Kyi clause” has been dismissed outright as a “threat to national sovereignty”, while amending Article 436 will be discussed in parliament, although if the army remains opposed there is no way it can be changed. Nevertheless, senior leaders are said to be discussing possible compromises.

Then there is the issue of equal rights for minorities. Ever since independence (1948), Burma has never been truly at peace, with minority ethnic groups fighting guerrilla wars against the Burman-dominated state. The last three years have seen progress towards a nationwide ceasefire agreement to which all the major rebel groups were drawn by the promise of dialogue about a more inclusive future. But recently clashes have begun again.

Media scenario
Print and broadcast media in Burma have faced strict censorship and regulation since the March 1962 military coup d’état. The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, but in practice the military government prohibited the exercise of those rights. After the coup d’état, journalists responded by forming the Burma Press Council to protect press freedom. Within a month, however, several journalists had been arrested and publications shut down. By 1988, the number of newspapers had decreased
from 30 to eight and the media gradually became the mouthpiece of the military junta.

On 20 August 2012, Burma announced that it would stop censoring media before publication. Newspapers and other outlets no longer had to be approved by state censors, but journalists in the country could still face consequences for what they wrote or said. On 4 March 2014 Burma’s Parliament formally approved two laws to regulate the country’s media, which lawmakers said would extend press freedom despite leaving media licensing in the hands of the Ministry of Information. Easing restrictions is one example of reform undertaken by the quasi-civilian government of President Thein Sein, but media freedom advocates have warned that recent moves by the government threaten those gains, which they say must be enshrined in law.

ARTICLE 19, the human rights organisation dedicated to promoting freedom of expression and information, analysed the 2014 “Printing and Publishing Law of Myanmar” in the light of international standards on freedom of expression. The new Law represents a step forward compared to its draconian predecessor of 1962. It no longer facilitates prior censorship, and the penalties imposable under it are relatively modest. Oversight of the printing and publishing sector has been partly transferred from the government to the courts.

However, ARTICLE 19 questions if a specific law to regulate the printing and publishing sector is needed at all, since its primary impact is to create a series of bureaucratic formalities such as registering with the Ministry of Information and sending it information on the import and export of publications. While these procedures are less problematic than those under the 1962 law, it is not clear why they are necessary.

**Internet access**

In the early hours of 5 August 2013, Burma completely disappeared from the worldwide Internet. A total outage followed a series of problems with the power supply to the terrestrial cables, disrupting the connection to the country’s undersea link on and off for two weeks and causing the country’s normally slow Internet service to grind almost to a halt.

One of the main factors dragging down Burma’s Internet is that there is simply not enough capacity or bandwidth on the domestic network and international connections to support the amount of people going online. However, conspiracy theories abound, from suspicion over why problems seem to occur every year near the anniversary of the 1988 democracy protests to claims that the government deliberately slows the Internet down.

In 2011, Freedom House ranked Burma’s Internet policies as the world’s second most repressive – surpassed only by Iran, and in the same league as China and Vietnam. To keep citizens in the dark, Burma’s government routinely restricted Internet access and censored large amounts of online content, including most foreign media. Those who defied them faced severe penalties.

In 2012, the government unblocked most previously banned content, including the websites of outlets that frequently criticized the regime, and stopped requiring journalists to submit content to government censors before publication. Today, those that can afford access can see whatever they want online. Exiled news organisations have moved into Yangon, their online presence now accessible from within the country. Webmail and social media, once blocked, are increasingly popular despite low Internet penetration. Facebook is home to most of the country’s million or so Internet users – although just 2% of the population.

Burma’s transition to greater democracy is proving a test case for communication rights in practice. If the government is serious about unifying and reconciling its different peoples and allowing them a voice in policy-making, it will have to grant them open access to media platforms that enable them to express their opinions and to raise issues of public concern.

The Burmese people may find inspiration for their ongoing struggle in the Burmese journalist and politician Win Tin (photo left by Soe-Zeya-Tun), imprisoned by the military government in 1989 for his critical writings and for taking up a leadership position in the National League for Democracy. After his release in 2008, Win Tin continued to wear his blue prison shirt “because my friends were still in prison, and I feel that the Burmese people, as a whole, are still in prison.”

Win Tin died on 21 April 2014. While incarcerated, he had written on the wall of his cell, “As long as the black stripes on the yellow background are painted vividly enough, the tiger is still a tiger.” It’s a warning the Burmese people understand very well. But can the tiger change its stripes?
Graffiti and public speaking have an ancient pedigree. In classical Greece and Rome, public speaking was known as rhetoric – the composition and delivery of speeches. It was an important skill in public and private life. The Greek philosopher Aristotle and the Roman orator Quintilian practised oratory, and it was an essential part of a liberal arts education during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The first parliament in the modern sense, from the French parler meaning “to talk” or “to discuss”, dates to 12th century Sicily, where representatives of the nobility, the church, and autonomous towns had decision-making powers. In the 13th century the term “parliament” was used to designate an advisory body among the French-speaking nobility in England. And from the 18th century onwards, rhetoric or “the good person speaking well” – the art of persuasion – became the basis of democratic politics, although direct election by the people lagged behind.

We can imagine that speaking in community – in the form of talking circles and discussions with elders – was the basis for tribal decision-making since the beginning of history. Similarly, expressing discontent through informal public writing or drawing must have had its counterpart in every culture. In fact, graffiti has long existed, with examples dating back to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire.

Interestingly, the only known source of the Safaitic language, an Ancient North Arabian dialect, is from graffiti: inscriptions scratched on the surface of rocks and boulders in the basalt desert of southern Syria, eastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia. Safaitic dates from the first century BC to the fourth century AD.

A whole genre of artistic expression today is based upon spray paint graffiti styles conveying social and political messages. And within hip hop culture, graffiti has evolved alongside hip hop music and both were derided before finding an unassailable place in youth culture. Hip hop can be seen as a kind of oral graffiti that harks back to public speaking – a kind of rhetoric of the people.
It is as forms of non-elitist media that graffiti and hip hop have put pressure on the more formal boundaries of communication. Young people, who may feel themselves and their concerns ignored by decision-makers and by traditional mass media, find creative outlets of their own and especially in what appear to be the unbounded domains of social media. Itunu Bodunrin, writing in this issue of Media Development, makes this clear:

“Despite the difficulties encountered in utilizing hip-hop as a protest tool in many urban cities in South Africa today, many marginalized youths in the peripheries continue to engage in rap as a means to create spaces to penetrate a public domain that often excludes them in favour of adults; while some rural communities with no access to mainstream media (radio, TV, internet etc.) also utilise graffiti to protest perceived injustice.”

In *Fissures in the Media Landscape: An international study of citizens’ media* (2001), Clemencia Rodriguez makes the point that:

“Producing alternative media messages implies much more than simply challenging the mainstream media ... It implies having the opportunity to create one’s own images of self and environment; it implies being able to recodify one’s own identity with the signs and codes that one chooses, thereby disrupting the traditional acceptance of those imposed by outside sources.”

Hip hop and graffiti do just that. Identity is affirmed and alternative views and opinions given space. Soapbox oratory, early forms of social media like graffiti and hip hop, and later forms of mobile social media which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content embody true freedom of expression. But what is really at stake is who is listening? And more to the point – for good or ill – who is acting on what they hear?
Communication among the Pacific Islands

There are some 20,000 to 30,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. Most of these Pacific Islands are collectively referred to as Oceania and are traditionally grouped into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

**Melanesia** means black islands. These islands, south of the equator, include New Guinea (the largest Pacific island and second largest island in the world after Greenland), New Caledonia, Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait Islands), Vanuatu, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands.

**Micronesia** means small islands. These include the Northern Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palaú, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Most of these lie north of the equator.

**Polynesia** means many islands. Lying mostly south of the equator, this group includes New Zealand, the Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, the Midway Islands, the Samoan Islands (divided between the Independent State of Samoa and American Samoa), Tonga, Tuvalu, the Cook Islands, Wallis and Futuna, Tokelau, Niue, French Polynesia, and Easter Island.

Oceania’s islands are classified into two kinds: high islands and low islands. Volcanoes form high islands, which generally can support more people and have a more fertile soil. Low islands are reefs or atolls and are relatively small and infertile. Melanesia, the most populous of the three regions, contains mainly high islands, while most in Micronesia and Polynesia are low.

On 25 September 1513, Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa became the first European to see the Pacific Ocean from the west of America. He called it Mar del Sur (South Sea) since he crossed Panama from North to South to reach it. But it was the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan who named it the Pacific, having encountered its waters for the first time in 1521 on a particularly calm and peaceful day.

Covering 165 million sq km, the Pacific is larger than the entire land surface of the Earth and comprises half its water surface.

The only island kingdom in the Pacific is Tonga, made up of 176 islands under King Tupou VI.
Imperceptibly, and because of plate tectonics, the Pacific is shrinking about 0.5 sq km a year.

The Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench plunges 10,911 metres, the deepest place on earth. If Mount Everest were put in Challenger Deep, its summit would be 2,000 metres underwater.

The point on earth farthest from land is in the South Pacific halfway between Pitcairn Island and Antarctica, 1,660 miles from land.

Most of the Islands of the world are found in the Pacific Ocean and most of them are found south of the Equator.

So much for the geography! Today, Pacific Island peoples and communities are facing unprecedented challenges to their economies and environment – at least some of them caused by the impacts of climate change.

Rising sea levels, tropical cyclones, floods and drought, combined with pressure from unsustainable fishing practices and coastal development, and modern consumption and production trends, are rendering the livelihoods of some 10 million people increasingly precarious. They are being forced to become migrants and refugees.

Despite great diversity across the Pacific islands – in terms of culture and economic structures – all of them face difficulties. These include narrow production and export bases, limited economies of scale, lack of diversification, and high fixed costs of government given the small size of their population.

Most nations are also heavily dependent on aid and their remoteness poses an additional constraint. For example, transportation costs are far greater when hundreds of islands are scattered across vast stretches of ocean. In short, Pacific Islands and their communities are vulnerable.

The theme of the Human Development Report 2014 is “Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience”. It acknowledges that:

- Vulnerability threatens human development – and unless it is systematically addressed, by changing policies and social norms, progress will be neither equitable nor sustainable.

- Life cycle vulnerability, structural vulnerability and insecure lives are fundamental sources of persistent deprivation – and must be addressed for human development to be secured and for progress to be sustained.

- Policy responses to vulnerability should prevent threats, promote capabilities and protect people, especially the most vulnerable.

- Vulnerabilities are increasingly global in their origin and impact, requiring collective action and better international governance.

The Human Development Report 2014 goes on to point out that, “Development pathways that are not informed by voices of all stakeholders are neither desirable nor sustainable. But when societies create space for all voices to be heard, policymakers are more likely to be attentive to the concerns and needs of minorities and other vulnerable groups” (p. 83).

In the context of the Pacific, as articles in this issue of Media Development underline, journalists can play a key role in identifying and making public the global, national and local concerns and aspirations of vulnerable people and their communities. They can also tell success stories, and share knowledge and information that will contribute to greater resilience and long-term survival.

Of course, here as elsewhere, there are contentious questions of media ownership and control, and the accessibility and affordability of digital communications to address.

Just a few years ago, Internet access was limited in the Pacific, but it is now expanding quickly. As a result, use of social media is spreading – although unevenly – and many more people are gaining access to mobile telephone technology.

Together with web-based tools such as Facebook, Skype and Twitter, social media offer one solution to providing timely information to Pacific islanders, whether it be for awareness about natural disasters or something as simple as connecting rural farmers to their markets.

Democratizing all levels of communication – communication for all – can only help Pacific Island nations, their people and communities to resist, to survive, and to resume their rightful place in the region.
The aim of this issue of *Media Development* was to begin to explore how Indigenous / First Nations / Aboriginal people are building their own media and communication networks. It was conceived as a way of reviewing some of the communication rights aspects inherent in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Article 16 of UNDRIP speaks of Indigenous peoples having “the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.” The same Article calls on governments to “ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity” and “to encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.”

Writing in 2009 the Canadian media scholar William F. Birdsall was of the opinion that, “Considering the range of communication issues addressed in the [UN]DRIP, it could be argued that if its terms become entrenched in national law, Indigenous peoples would be, in practice, close to achieving a right to communicate. Their political struggle and its results so far serve as a model for others and demonstrate how a right to communicate may be achieved without an explicit definition of or reference to such a right.”

So, how is this working out in practice. How are new information and communication technologies being used to advance peoples’ rights of these peoples? What obstacles remain to be addressed?

Recently, the Indigenous New Media Symposium sponsored by the School of Media Studies hosted at the New School in New York City on 21 February 2014 brought together prominent Native American and First Nations media makers and creative activists to discuss how new media are being used in Indigenous communities to educate, organize, entertain, and advocate.

An invited panel addressed topics such as confronting the ongoing Native stereotypes in mainstream media, the resurgence of Indigenous ways through new media, and discussed how new generations are using their artistic talents for cultural, economic, and political change.
One powerful example of indigenous media under attack comes from Guatemala, where community radio has been a vital presence in Indigenous communities since the 1960s. Indigenous peoples in the country rely on community radio to keep their cultures, languages, and traditions alive as well as to inform their communities about issues and events relevant to their lives.

Bill 4479, recently proposed by one of Guatemala’s political parties, poses a threat to community radio stations. If passed, the legislation would criminalize community radio while compromising the fundamental right to free speech and censoring dissemination of information about human rights. In contrast, Bill 4087, provides for the legalization of community radio. It was proposed in 2010 but has not advanced. A similar law enacted in Argentina has proved beneficial to Indigenous peoples by promoting their political participation, community cohesion, and self-sufficiency. If Bill 4087 is passed into law, Guatemala will finally see the democratization of media and take a meaningful step towards ending Indigenous repression, while helping to promote peace and stability in Central America.

Once again, it would seem that digital technologies and new communication platforms offer the means of self-expression and self-assertion that many Indigenous peoples seek. However, as the following articles show, questions of accessibility and affordability, as well as ownership and control by corporate behemoths, cloud the issue. In practice, communication rights do not yet extend to all and there is still much work to be done.

Note
It was in 1948, with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that the United Nations proclaimed the family as “the natural and fundamental unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State.”

In the following decades, as the concept of the family became the subject of intense sociological scrutiny, the UN sought to draw attention to the debate by making 1994 the International Year of the Family (IYF).

2014 marks the twentieth anniversary of the IYF, providing an opportunity to focus on the role of families in society today, to review current challenges, and to recommend new directions. And in today’s information and knowledge societies, the impact of new technologies, social media, and interactive digital platforms needs to be taken into account.

In many affluent countries and in communities in many urban centres of countries in transition, communication technologies have become an essential part of everyday lives. Research into the impact of this relatively new media landscape suggests that:

More family members, beginning at ever younger ages, are using interactive technologies, including the Internet and mobile phones.

People within families are using these technologies in increasingly individualised contexts. Family television viewing, sharing a family computer and vying for time on a family phone are less common as TVs, mobile phones and laptops become individual devices. And busy families seem to be interacting in more fragmented ways, with fewer communal activities.

For many young people, multi-tasking has become the norm, as they juggle different communication devices and experiences: downloading music while talking on the phone, engaging in IMS chat, searching the Internet for school-related information and keeping one eye on the television screen.

There is also an ongoing controversial debate about cognitive effects. Some believe that the creative aspects of engagement with interactive technologies helps young people to develop the skills needed for
Others are concerned that this comes at the expense of focused concentration and critical thinking. In the context of the International Year of the Family it might also be important to recall those families affected by disappearance and loss. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people are separated from their loved ones as a result of oppression, conflict, migration, and natural disasters.

The International Day of the Disappeared (August 30) draws attention to the fate of individuals imprisoned at places and in conditions unknown to their relatives through secret imprisonment and forced disappearance, as well as those detained or stranded in foreign countries.

The role of media in helping human rights groups to bring such cases to public attention is crucial – as was demonstrated in Argentina, for example, during the decades-long search for those “disappeared” under the military dictatorship.

Even so, media practitioners often find themselves treading a fine line. In Syria the recent widespread seizure of journalists has gone largely unreported by news organisations in the hope that keeping the kidnappings out of public view may help to negotiate the release of those held captive. There is also confusion over what constitutes a journalist, since much reporting coming out of the country is not from traditional professional journalists but from “citizen journalists” affiliated with so-called local “media offices”.

The family bears the brunt of such political and social disturbances and it is children who suffer most. During International Year of the Family it is to the child that media practitioners may need to pay particular attention. Children’s rights include their communication rights – a theme often ignored by policy-makers.

In this respect, communication rights advocate Cees J. Hamelink notes:

“The mass media should disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child. This implies that the mass media should have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous; that the mass media should develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; and that the mass media should prepare the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous groups.”

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family is an opportunity to consider how new information and communication technologies are impacting the life of the family and its most vulnerable members: children.

It is also an opportunity to remind ourselves that while communication is what makes us human, it also offers us a means of preventing ourselves from being inhuman.

Note
It was in 1792 that the British writer, philosopher, and advocate of women’s rights, Mary Wollstonecraft, published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. Her book is a plea for gender equality at a time of political and social ferment the repercussions of which would last more than two centuries.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was written against the background of the American and French Revolutions, and that of intellectual debates pursued by Enlightenment philosophers such as Diderot and Rousseau.

Wollstonecraft had also read government minister Talleyrand’s report to the French National Assembly in 1791, which supported the notion of public education, but stated that women should only receive domestic training. She launched a broad riposte:

“Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good?”

Wollstonecraft was tackling a social injustice that is still prevalent today: gender stereotyping – preconceptions concerning the roles of women and men that for women result in discrimination and oppression. She took society to task for treating women in ways that were dismissive or belittling and which resulted in domination.

Stereotyping is an attempt to diminish human dignity, reinforcing prejudice and ignorance, and weakening those structures that offer protection in society. In a mass mediated society, stereotypes, especially
about women and men, can easily become ingrained, ultimately contributing to repression and leading to violence.

Consequently, it is vital for social communications – mass, community, and social media – to represent people, no matter who they are or where they come from, in a more balanced and gender-sensitive way.

Moreover, it is important for those responsible for media content – including what has become known as user-generated content – to counter gender bias wherever it occurs.

As Claudia Florentín, a contributor to this issue of Media Development, points out:

“It is for all women and men to construct how they want the media to reflect society in general and women in particular. That is to say, to take account of histories, practices, discourses that allow women to be seen, to take them out of invisibilization, to give them the possibility of constructing reality according to their way of speaking and viewing, and not to carry on reproducing the discourse of the dominant powers and patriarchies that pervades cultures, economies and religions.”

Gender stereotypes are one of the most persistent causes of inequality between women and men in all spheres, impacting both their professional and private lives. Media content influences the way people perceive reality and contributes to shaping gender roles.

Yet, women (and sometimes men) are often poorly represented in the media. The findings of WACC’s Global Media Monitoring Project (2010) confirm that:

• Only 24% of the people heard or read about in print, radio and television news are female. In contrast, 76% - more than 3 out of 4 – of the people in the news are male.
• News continues to portray a world in which men outnumber women in almost all occupational categories, the highest disparity being in the professions.
• As persons interviewed or heard in the news, women remain lodged in the “ordinary” people categories, in contrast to men who continue to predominate in the “expert” categories.
• 18% of female news subjects are portrayed as victims in comparison to 8% of male subjects. In contrast, women are now twice as likely to be portrayed as survivors than men.
• 46% of stories reinforce gender stereotypes, almost eight times higher than stories that challenge such stereotypes (6%).

Steps are being taken towards remedying this situation and some governments are even getting behind action plans.

On 10 July 2013, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a “Recommendation on gender equality and media”. It forcefully stated that:

“Democracy and gender equality are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The inclusion of women and men, with respect for equal rights and opportunities, is an essential condition for democratic governance and sound decision-making. Gender equality means equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both women and men in all spheres of public life, including the media... Gender equality is an integral part of human rights. Freedom of expression, as a fundamental right, goes hand-in-hand with gender equality.”

Mary Wollstonecraft would surely have applauded, but as articles in this issue demonstrate there is still a long way to go.
What gives democracy validity? Only if it offers a political system in which citizens – and others marginalized by inequalities – are not subordinated to but exert real influence over the forces that impact their lives.

The notion of citizenship is contested, so it is important to emphasize that only a rights-based approach can provide the normative framework for social transformation and participatory development.

ACT Alliance has underlined the point:

"Inequalities are the key cause of extreme poverty. In order to eradicate poverty we must work on the systematic and structural factors that deprive women and men of their dignity, rights and entitlements. By empowering vulnerable rights holders and holding duty bearers accountable, a rights-based approach aims at transforming the structures with the aim of granting entitlements and thus sustainable livelihoods for all."

In this respect communication for development, also known as communication for social change, has a respected history. Critical approaches to the field have focused on participation, empowerment, gender equality, the role of social movements, technological interventions, and dialogue-based approaches to strategic communication.

Faced with such broad-based – some might say vague – outcomes, aid agencies and funding partners demanded ways of demonstrating results so that development aid could be quantified and proof given that funds had been well spent. At the national and global levels this was often done by studying statistics and producing economic indicators of advances in meeting basic human needs.

In the mid-1970s economic indicators of development or improvement
gave way to social indicators that were felt to better reflect real progress: average life expectancy, maternal healthcare, child nutrition, schooling and literacy. Yet even here there is evidence that the politically powerless, the socially disregarded, the geographically isolated, and the ethnically or culturally discriminated against are often excluded.

As author and researcher Peter Adamson wisely suggests, “In the years to come, progress should be measured not by statistics that capture national averages but by data that capture what is happening to the poorest 20 per cent – in any country and for any indicator that is meant to measure human well-being.”

One of the key obstacles to eradicating poverty is to be found in the current global economic order. Discussions are currently taking place around what is being referred to as a New International Financial and Economic Architecture. When its foundations are laid, it will be of fundamental importance to incorporate the role that communication and media can play in restoring voice and visibility to vulnerable, disadvantaged and excluded people.

**UN backs freedoms but needs a broader vision of communication**

In 2006 the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, published “Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies”. It is an informative and highly motivated document that addresses the urgent need for actions that are underpinned by human rights.

It affirms that if people living in poverty are to participate meaningfully and effectively in the different stages of decision-making, “they must be free to organize without restriction (right of association), to meet without impediment (right of assembly), to say what they want to without intimidation (freedom of expression) and to know the relevant facts (right to information). Furthermore, they must be allowed to receive support from sympathetic civil society organizations (including the media) that might be able to champion their cause.”

The references to communication rights – freedom of expression, right to information, independent media – underline the expectation that people living in poverty must be heard. In this regard, considerable hope has been laid on citizens’ media as forms of more democratic communication that both bring diverse voices into play and challenge dominant power relationships.

At the end of May 2013 the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda published its report “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development”. The report highlights five big transformative shifts: Leave no one behind; Put sustainable development at the core; Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and Forge a new global partnership. Taken together, the Panel believes “that these five fundamental shifts can remove the barriers that hold people back, and end the inequality of opportunity that blights the lives of so many people on our planet.”

Tucked away on page 11 is the admission that:

> “Civil society organisations can play a vital role in giving a voice to people living in poverty... They have important parts to play in designing, realising, and monitoring this new agenda. They are also important providers of basic services, often able to reach the neediest and most vulnerable, for example in slums and remote areas.”

And then on page 12 the sole reference to the role of communication and the media:

> “People must be central to a new global partnership. To do this they need the freedom to voice their views and participate in the decisions that affect their lives without fear. They need access to information and to an independent media. And new forms of participation such as social media and crowd-sourcing can enable governments, businesses, CSOs and academia to interact with, understand and respond to citizens’ needs in new ways.”

So let’s underline the point: Communication rights have a unique role to play in creating enabling environments in which people can challenge the
status quo and bring about change. As ACT Alliance points out, and the contributors to this issue of Media Development affirm:

“Rights-based strategies hold great potential as a powerful tool for empowerment aimed at political, social and economic transformation. However, unless we adapt our current policies and practices to its principles and challenge the unequal power relationships that underlie poverty, we will fall short of addressing the issue of institutionalized poverty and social exclusion confronting the world.”

Notes
WHAT FUTURE for Community Radio

WACC has been publishing articles, reflections, and opinions about the world of communications for more than 60 years. In 1953 the first issue of The Christian Broadcaster appeared, running until 1969. From 1970 to 1979 WACC published the WACC Journal, renamed Media Development in 1980. It is still going.

In that same period the world has been utterly transformed by new technologies – from television to satellites to the Internet to digital platforms – in ways that were unimaginable. Communications today are fluid, dynamic, interactive and potentially liberating. Yet the old questions remain: accessibility, affordability, diversity, ownership and control.

With the capabilities offered by new information and communication technologies, how can we bridge longstanding information and knowledge divides? How can we empower people to articulate and shape processes of development and social change? How can we tackle questions of power, inequality and identity? Fundamentally, what kind of society do we want?

The 4/1990 issue of Media Development was titled “Radio – The Sound of the People”. In the editorial, its then editor, Dr Michael Traber, wrote:

“More than anything, people’s radio could provide a climate conducive to development. It could symbolically establish an atmosphere of freedom, a move towards greater social justice and an opportunity for people to participate in the taking of decisions that affect them.”

This is also the conclusion reached 20 years later by Birgitte Jallov in her book Community Radio for Development and Empowerment (2012), which is an in-depth survey of concepts and practical knowledge essential to creating sustainable, community-run and well-managed platforms for community voices. She writes:

“When well organised, community radio is the voice of everyone, including those living in poverty, which in many rural contexts means
everyone in the community. This is the core of the use of community radio in development for empowerment: that it is a community channel, and space for everyone’s voices, especially those who do not have access to speak elsewhere. So when development facilitators advocate that the voice of the poor be heard, they actually advocate part of the core conceptual framework of community radio.

A second invaluable book is *Radio in the Twenty-First Century* (2012), a collection of essays and case studies edited by Janey Gordon. Contributions focus on how community radio broadcasters and activists are using the medium to challenge corruption, aid the transition to political democracy and broadcast voices that might otherwise be unheard. They demonstrate the pivotal role of small radio stations in developing, sustaining and invigorating communities.

Community radio today cannot be divorced from technological convergence – as several of the contributors to this issue of *Media Development* point out. No longer does community radio simply benefit a local audience but also, via the Internet and social media, one or more diasporas or communities of interest. It is simultaneously narrowcast and broadcast with a certain element of Pirandello’s “Six Characters in Search of an Author” – whose tragic denouement calls reality into question.

Carlos Arnaldo says that, “Community radio is a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design programmes and produce and air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny, whether this be for something as common as mending fences in the neighbourhood, or a community-wide campaign on how to use clean water and keep it clean, or agitation for the election of new local leaders.”


Community media – of which community radio is one sector – enable people to voice common concerns, to unite around common causes, to challenge decision-makers on their own turf, to create communities that better respond to the needs of their members.

As such, technological convergence posits a future in which community media (radio, television, digital platforms) become the nexus of grassroots democracy, of a genuine forum for good citizenship and good governance.

In that sense, community radio could enable people to take on the “primary role of actors in their own destiny” instead of being bit-players in someone else’s drama.

The risk is that community radio loses its relevance by becoming just one more voice among many. The challenge is for community radio to represent the locality in ways that shape it for the better.
“It’s difficult to imagine two words that have raised more anxiety among news media professionals than ‘citizen journalism’... Simple words but a complex concept variously seen as either the end of the literate media world or the salvation of disconnected civilization,” wrote Clyde H. Bentley in 2008 in “Citizen Journalism: Back to the Future?”, a discussion paper prepared for the Carnegie Knight Conference on the Future of Journalism.

Surveying the relatively brief history of citizen journalism in contrast with more than 300 years of professional journalism, Bentley made the following crucial distinction:

“A professional journalist assigned to a story will research the issues, talk to the people involved, check the facts and craft the results into a story. Then move on. The job of a journalist is to taste the world, one news bite at a time. A citizen journalist or blogger, however, lives the story. It is neither a passing interest nor something he or she was assigned to investigate. Rather than taking that quick bite of the world, citizen journalists share a bit of their own lives.”

In 2009 The Open Newsroom produced “Citizen Journalism: A primer on the definition, risks and benefits and main debates in media communications research”. It argued that:

- “The risks and dangers of using copy from citizen journalists are real; the interconnectedness of the Internet means that unchecked false reports can be fed into the media, on a blog for instance, and be picked up by many more websites and within minutes circulated throughout the world.
- The overall benefit however is that citizen journalism can help keep news current by publishing news as it happens. This can enrich...
mainstream media. With time, most citizen journalism will be clued on the do’s and don’ts of journalism and this can reduce the potential risk of citizen journalism to both the citizen journalist and the publisher.

- Some of those who dismiss citizen journalism as irrelevant seem to ignore the fact that citizen journalism is a developing phenomenon that only started way after the Internet started commercially in the 1990s. Web 2.0, the interactive features that enable blogs and social networking has been in existence for less than 10 years. Mainstream journalism on the other hand has existed for more than 500 years.
- As such, it’s fair to say any conclusions dismissing citizen journalism or audience participation in the media are still too early. At the same time, glorifying citizen journalism as a replacement of traditional journalism is premature. Predicting the future of the media is impossible.”

Hanna Nikkanen, writing for the web site of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) towards the end of 2012, is also optimistic. She does, however, sound important notes of caution:

- “Seemingly pluralistic reports become, in fact, more monotonous, as journalists use online sources to cherrypick the views that correspond with their own (often subconscious) agenda. Filter bubbles – situations where a member of the audience only receives information that corresponds with their pre-existing views and values – become increasingly impermeable.
- Lack of financial resources for in-depth reporting increases the amount of citizen media quotations in news reports, but decreases the amount of time spent factchecking said quotations. Successful hoaxes and instances of astroturfing [posing as a citizen journalist, a social media user or an internet commenter to promote a view or a product] are common. Audiences lose faith in professional journalism and the crisis of the traditional media deepens.
- More and more citizen journalists and whistle-blowers are killed or imprisoned be cause of their work. Sometimes their security has been compromised because of their uncompensated collaboration with professional journalists. Censorship, both government-mandated and private, threatens citizen journalism. The erosion of the principle of net neutrality benefits large companies, but complicates things for everyone else.”

In less than a decade, and hardly surprisingly given the rapid proliferation of digital media platforms, citizen journalism has upset the applecart of traditional journalism. Yet, for all kinds of reasons, professional journalists are increasingly viewing citizen journalism as a means of supplementing sources, of getting closer to the ground, and of gaining crucial insights into complicated local situations.

Citizen journalism is here to stay. How credible and reliable can it be as a source of information and news? Is it appropriate to devise a code of practice for citizen journalism? And while new digital platforms have created exciting new opportunities for socializing and information sharing, how reliable can they be when it comes to professional journalism?

Notes
3. “They shoot citizen journalists, don’t they? Curating or outsourcing? Opportunities and threats in post-gatekeeper journalism.”