



DEPLOYMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT  
DÉPLOIEMENTS POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DÉMOCRATIQUE



# **MEDIA GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT**

**A CASE STUDY FROM GUYANA**

**Ian Alexander**

**August 23, 2009**

# MEDIA & DEMOCRACY

- “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter.” (Thomas Jefferson)
- “Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- “There is no more important pillar of democracy than a free and active press.” (Condoleezza Rice)
- “Democracy and journalistic excellence rise or fall together.” (Jeffrey Scheuer)
- “There has never been a famine in any country that has been a democracy with a relatively free press.” (Amartya Sen)



# NECESSARY CONDITIONS

- **Physical safety of journalists.**
- **Guarantees of media freedom.**
- **No state interference (direct or indirect).**
- **Capacity-building (training, facilities).**
- **Ethical standards, professional practices.**
  - **For working journalists and media owners.**
- **Media accountability mechanisms.**
- **Broad public access to media.**
  - **Reception; input / complaints; ownership.**
- **Open, competitive media environment.**
  - **But with economic stability for operators.**



# WHAT TOO OFTEN HAPPENS

- **State controls, interference, threats.**
  - Including use of economic or physical force.
- **Concentration of ownership / monopolies.**
  - State and/or commercial.
- **Media used as proxies in political battles.**
  - Advocacy or hate vs. balanced reportage.
  - Owners treat media as personal soap box.
- **Inadequate resources for good journalism.**
  - Not enough skilled journalists.
  - Too many outlets for market to support.
- **Sensationalism.**
  - Politically or economically motivated.



# MEDIA GOVERNANCE

- The institutions and systems by which media and communications are organized and managed.
- Three pillars or elements:
  - Government: policy, legislation, regulation.
  - Industry: self-regulation, capacity-building, accountability.
  - Public: engaged as audience members and as citizens.
- Twin poles or goals:
  - Media freedom and media accountability.
- Key provisions:
  - Independence of public institutions from government of the day (“arm’s length relationship”).
  - Transparency of public processes.
  - Pro-active accountability mechanisms.
  - “Co-regulation.”



# THE GUYANESE SITUATION

- Severe ethno-political divisions amplified by media.
- 4 daily papers: 2 pro-government, 2 anti-government.
- “Wild West” environment in private TV in Georgetown: too many stations, very low professional standards.
- Government monopoly over radio and regional TV – state, not public, broadcasting.
- Government Information Service produces regular programs carried by many outlets (state and private).
- No broadcast legislation or independent regulator.
- Very close control of media from Office of President.
- Licenses issued/suspended directly by government.
- Other forms of influence, e.g. government advertising, access to government press briefings, etc.
- International criticism from regional and global bodies for lack of media freedom in Guyana.



# SOME ENCOURAGING SIGNS

- **2006 National Elections: Media Code of Conduct and Media Monitoring Unit contributed to improve coverage of most peaceful elections to date.**
- **MMU has continued to function since elections with international support.**
- **Recent High Court decision has found denial of regional licenses to be unconstitutional.**
- **Government has pledged to bring in broadcasting bill, end radio monopoly, issue new licenses.**
- **Guyana Press Association of working journalists already exists; media proprietors interested in organizing themselves collectively.**
- **UNDP and USAID working with U of Guyana and others on capacity-building and community development initiatives in media sector.**



# DDD PROJECT: A WORK IN PROGRESS

## Building on stakeholder consultations to date:

- Facilitate discussions to form an association of print and broadcast industry owners and operators.
- Work with proprietors, journalists and regulators to expand Media Code of Conduct beyond elections to a comprehensive set of standards and practices.
  - Improves journalism, demonstrates industry's capacity to act responsibly, forms potential basis for self-regulation.
- Develop industry recommendations regarding the draft broadcasting bill and regulatory framework.
- Consult the public on their expectations from media, test proposed accountability mechanisms with them.
- Work with government to bring a comprehensive media governance package into being.



# REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Several other Caribbean countries are in situations not unlike Guyana's.**
- **In other places, real progress has been made.**
- **Goal: leverage successes; syndicate solutions.**
- **Regional models can be preferable to imports from further afield.**
- **Regional organizations can help; e.g.:**
  - **CARICOM, UWI's Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication, Caribbean Broadcasting Union, Association of Caribbean Media Workers, etc.**
- **So can international agencies; e.g.:**
  - **UNDP, UNESCO, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, Internews, etc.**
- **Potential fit with goals of CIDA's Caribbean Regional Program.**
  - **Strengthening capacity in democratic governance – accountable public institutions and rule of law.**



# LESSONS LEARNED

- **Assess (and reassess) readiness of government and other key stakeholders.**
- **Systems thinking: look at the big picture – not just technical issues.**
- **Best practices – but adapted to local conditions.**
- **Bottom-up + top-down approaches.**
- **Inclusive process of trust-building, driven by in-country stakeholders.**
- **Seek and/or create effective, sustainable local partnerships.**
- **Work with other international donors.**
- **Importance of commitment from Head of Mission.**
- **An iterative process in a shifting environment – stay plugged in and flexible.**



# OUR GOAL

- **A media governance framework that:**
  - **Promotes media freedom and accountability.**
  - **Provides optimum media access to all.**
  - **Uses open, transparent processes.**
  - **Is efficient, effective and sustainable.**
  - **Operates at arm's length from government.**
  - **Encourages industry self-regulation.**
  - **Engages the public in media issues.**
  - **Facilitates informed citizenship.**
  - **Nurtures a strong domestic media industry.**
  - **Is made in Guyana, for Guyana, by Guyanese.**

