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A New Purpose for International Broadcasting: Subsidizing Deliberative Technologies in Non- transitioning States

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Abstract

In failed or failing states, deliberation as it is operationalized in much of the political communication literature is inapplicable. These states lack advanced communication infrastructures, press systems and public spheres, which require high literacy rates, education, the rule of law and other elements of an enabling regulatory environment. Rather than imagining deliberation as a series of exchanges over focused issues, a scaled down standard of deliberation is appropriate. Such a model could simply involve enhanced communication and information sharing among the citizenry, spreading political norms that aid some level of quasi-governance or simply improving the quality of life in challenging circumstances. Even in both starkly repressive countries and states where governments barely exist, some new communication technologies are increasingly available and they facilitate deliberative exchange. At the same time, foreign international broadcasters are complementing their traditional broadcasting with the development and promotion of deliberation technologies. This paper suggests international broadcasting agencies can find new purpose by utilizing emerging ICTs for the purpose of deliberative development in failed and failing states where public deliberation is under-developed.

Keywords

International broadcasting, ICT, Al Jazeera, VOA, Liberation Technologies, failed state, deliberative development

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A New Purpose for International Broadcasting:
Subsidizing Deliberative Technologies in Non-transitioning States

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Introduction

Larry Diamond's (2010) essay "Liberation Technologies" was published amidst growing interest in how the spread of information communication technologies (ICTs) were reshaping societies around the world. Diamond explains, "Liberation technology is any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social and economic freedom" (p. 70). Modern ICTs are distinct from previous examples of revolutionary technologies, such as the printing press and television, due to the fact that they are highly mobile, connected to the World Wide Web, decentralized and affordable. In particular, modern ICTs facilitate the kind of many-to-many communication often theorized as necessary for sustaining democracy through, among other networked media, social media portals like Twitter, Facebook, Orkut, Renren and others.

Importantly, for Diamond, the liberatory potential of technology is not limited to political mobilization. It also suggests civil society-building potential, including: (1) enhancing the quality and scope of "the public sphere"; (2) "creating a more pluralistic and autonomous arena of news, commentary, and information"; (3) improving the ways by which citizens can hold corporations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to account; and (4) increasing access to information about micro-loans, public health, and education (2010, p. 71). Although Diamond admits that "It is not technology, but people, organizations and governments that will determine who prevails," these functions seem to presume a pre-existing public sphere, an "arena" where citizens can process news and information, and basic governance institutions (p. 82). But what about so-called "failed states," or states with highly repressive regimes, both of which tend to lack the necessary actors, organizations and governments to make political use of technological development? States such as Somalia, Chad, Haiti, Syria and Afghanistan may have potential to experience the positive impact of ICTs on economic development, but seem less likely to be able to take advantage of the governance benefits of ICTs because of weak or nonexistent civil societies and political instability.

This lacuna in theorizing the role of technology is implicit in the literature on the global digital divide. The places that are best positioned to see gains in freedom from technology are not those excluded from digital communication networks. Systematic research by Philip Howard found that small, educated countries with vibrant civil societies derive the most political gains through technological diffusion (Howard, 2010).

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Most frequently, such states expanded telecommunication services to further economic development rather than introduce political opportunities for citizenry and Diaspora. The ways in which the internet and related technologies could empower citizen activism were largely unforeseen. Building a national information infrastructure relies on a capable, enabling government and capital, or at least a business-friendly regulatory environment that is oriented towards economic growth. Without these, can deliberative technologies offer any tangible benefit to users or hope for ending entrenched stasis?

This question is particularly important in the context of failed states. The term “failed state” refers to countries with insufficient “state performance in meeting essential obligations toward their inhabitants” and “the larger community of nations” (Estes, 2012, p. 561). This can have multiple dimensions, allowing for variation between failing and failed states.³ In a context of state crisis, deliberation as it is operationalized in much of the political communication literature is not necessarily applicable. Rather than imagining deliberation as a series of exchanges over focused issues, in a setting where the public sphere is scant, institutions are weak and other larger hurdles to basic livelihood unavoidable, we may have to apply a scaled down version of deliberation. It could simply involve enhanced communication and information sharing among the citizenry, spreading political norms that aid some level of quasi-governance or simply improving the quality of life in challenging circumstances. Lisa Wedeen’s ethnographic study of Yemen (2008) shows how overly formalistic definitions of deliberation do not capture the vibrancy of public sphere practices in informal, everyday life settings. She examined *Qat* chews, in which circles of men share narcotic leaves while discussing public issues and exchanging information. This is a form of Yemeni citizenship and identity even in lieu of a fully functioning state or formal civil society.

Failed states are often left out of most advanced, capital intensive technological developments, which then also require high literacy rates and education, rule of law and other elements of an enabling regulatory environment to translate into civil society. Thus, there are severe challenges in thinking about technological solutions to their deep-seated problems. That said, even in both starkly repressive countries and places where governments barely exist, new communication technologies are increasingly available. Technology-centered development then must begin with an inventory of ICTs as well as a calculus of the domestic regime’s or factional power and capabilities, requiring a country-by-country approach.

This paper proposes one way the introduction of ICTs can be used towards deliberative development. There is a possible way forward in practical terms: *external international broadcasters*⁴ should complement their traditional broadcasting roles with

³ *Foreign Policy* and the Fund for Peace use 12 indicators³ to gauge the extent to which a state is failing: demographic pressures on services, resources and the state; the presence of uprooted refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); group grievances that motivate vengeance-seeking; human flight or voluntary out-migration; uneven development or group-based inequality; economic decline over time; delegitimization of the state through corruption, crises in confidence, and failure to enforce law; poor or non-existent public services; poor human rights conditions; over-reliance on leader-aligned security apparatus; factionalized elites in conflict; and, finally, external military, economic or humanitarian intervention by foreign powers.

⁴ International broadcasting, or “the use of electronic media by one society to shape the opinion of the people and leaders of another,” includes the use of radio, television and increasingly web-based

the development and promotion of deliberation technologies. We readily acknowledge that this idea is fraught with potential problems. For starters, foreign information interventions are often justifiably equated with furthering neo-colonialism and imperialism. Moreover, the motivations behind supporting deliberative media interventions are not likely benign, and state interests necessarily place constraints on the range of deliberation allowed for. There are, of course, other concerns too. Broadcasters offer promise because they, unlike development agencies, can more easily reach large groups of people, can operate outside of domestic, repressive governance structures, and are in need of a new mission. An analysis of two case studies suggests ways in which concerns can be mitigated by careful, multilateral and self-reflexive planning, and flexible implementation and assessment.

A Renewed Purpose for International Broadcasters?

Any plan for ICT-driven development requires local participation, expert research and training, and technology, each of which depends on financing of some form. While resources don't guarantee a success, without them, deliberative technologies for development are unlikely to function *en masse* in failed and failing states. The question is who would foot the bill? While international development NGOs and government agencies offer funding, they are limited and do not have access to the mass communication infrastructure that international broadcasters do. The deployment of deliberative technologies in such places also fits well with something international broadcasters require in a post-Cold War world: renewed purpose.

International broadcasters are state-sponsored news media that rely on journalism and information to both inform foreign audiences and promote goodwill to the sponsoring countries. Historical examples include the Voice of America (VOA), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and China Radio International (CRI). Recently, governments in the Middle East have invested in new broadcasting initiatives, including Qatar's Al Jazeera Network and Iran's Press TV. These entities are generally stuck in a difficult position, as they are presumed to be sophisticated propaganda operations. All state broadcasters are sensitive to being perceived as propaganda while being statutorily and/or financially compelled to pursue programming content that is in line with the broader foreign policy objectives of the financing government. The formative years for modern international broadcasting were during the Cold War, when the low availability of information made their material especially valuable and useful. In the past decade, with the onset of an era of information abundance created by digitally networked media, many of the incumbent broadcasters faced lower budgets along with the rise of new competition from non-traditional broadcasting states (i.e. Iran's Press TV and Qatar's Al Jazeera Network). At the same time, private global news media have risen to challenge the state sources. With the expansion of the internet and a dizzying array of news sources, many traditional externally-oriented state broadcasters have been left with an identity crisis. What is their *raison d'être*?

broadcasting targeting a foreign, as opposed to a domestic, population (Price, Haas & Margolin, 2008, pp. 152-153).

In thinking about deliberation and technology, the focus is often on private technology firms. In the United States, for example, Google, Facebook, and Twitter compete to provide netizens the ideal online portal for socializing and collaborating at no financial cost to the users. Each company understands the value in having social, professional and political deliberations take place within their own electronic purview, so that citizen expressions and opinions can be archived and monetized. In many cases consumers have come not just to accept, but also to expect such profiling in exchange for an enhanced ability to connect with desired commercial products and/or services (Schiller, 2006). But none of these for-profit portals for social communication are guaranteed to promote deliberation. They are strategically constituted through rules, access, and control—all enforced by user agreements—in order to further a particular financial, ideological or political interest (Deibert et al., 2010). Importantly, trends in social media and tech firms’ policies, such as limiting anonymity, prohibitions on pseudonyms, bans on offensive content and regime use of social media can impair activist uses (Youmans and York, 2012).

International broadcasters operate without commercial ambitions and have long, storied, pre-internet histories. However, due to political constraints, fostering unfettered deliberation was not often part of their missions. This is a new informational era, however, and embracing a role in fostering deliberation may be the best path to maintaining relevance. Rather than engaging in the largely duplicative work of reporting news that is widely reported and in ways that are often predictable reflections of state interests, increasingly taking on a new role of subsidizing deliberation where it is badly needed can offer greater public service and returns on investment in the form of goodwill for sponsor countries. In as much as broadcasting can help constitute and shape public forums in foreign contexts, efforts to foster “deliberative development” (Evans, 2004, p. 37) go hand in hand with the broader strategic mandate of broadcasters while simultaneously providing a feasible path forward.

In countries where internet access is insufficient, can international broadcasters provide a special forum for many-to-many deliberation? International broadcasters have access via television and radio to many places where internet access is non-existent or where state controls limit dissent. Can they re-define new missions using non-traditional Internet technologies, such as mobile phones, in combination with the powers of broadcast to facilitate deliberation and information flows where they are currently poor? Two brief case studies – the Voice of America’s Middle East Voices and the Al Jazeera Network’s Somalia Speaks initiative – offer some insights into yet unexplored possibilities.

The Voice of America’s ‘Middle East Voices’

The Voice of America (VOA) was established in 1942 by the United States and embodied the informational front of 20th century Cold war geopolitics. Funded annually by the U.S. Congress, the VOA was a critical means by which American policies and culture were explained and framed for foreign audiences. While necessarily strategic in nature—VOA’s statutory mission is to “present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively”—its broadcasts are not simple government propaganda, but by law are

required to be “consistently reliable and authoritative source of news...accurate, objective, and comprehensive,” including “responsible discussions and opinion on American policies.”⁵ VOA, along with other government financed broadcasters like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), was an important tool of statecraft during the Cold War, broadcasting anti-communist programming and news of local political dissent in the closed societies behind the iron curtain. U.S. government supported broadcasters have always emphasized interactive programming formats, in part to demonstrate their relevance to policymakers, but also to effectively engage audiences suspicious of American government financed news. According to Geoff Cowan (2009), former Director of Voice of America, “we’ve always used the most advanced technologies to connect and listen to our audiences.”

In particular, RFE/RL was well received among audiences, as it did not focus exclusively on American policies, but instead on local stories that were suppressed by the various ministries of information in communist countries. Broadcast from West Germany, with exiled political dissidents presenting the news, RFE/RL is held up as a powerful example of how state-financed media interventions can effectively re-shape domestic public opinion in foreign countries (Puddington, 2003; Cull, 2008; Price, 2002). According to East German spymaster Marcus Wolf, “of all the various means used to influence people against the East during the Cold War, I would count Radio Free Europe as the most effective” (Mitrovich, 2004).

In November 2011, months after popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and amidst ongoing political ferment in Bahrain and Syria, VOA launched the Middle East Voices (MEV) portal (middleeastvoices.com). Distinct from the U.S. government financed Middle East Broadcasting Network (MBN), the portal is exclusively online and its goals explicitly deliberative. According to managing director Davin Hutchins (2012), “We wanted to find a place where people could start conversations as opposed to hearing about the news. There are plenty of sites and organizations that cover the Middle East. What we wanted was a site that enhanced the level of dialogue.” The website’s “About Middle East Voices” section adds some additional context to this purpose, explaining: “We seek to spark dialogue that would enable people to build bridges within, without and across man-made borders,” adding, “Our site is designed to...stimulate dialogue and understanding between people in the Middle East and the West by providing a platform to speak out.”⁶ Mashable, a popular technology weblog, recently praised the portal, describing it as “a digital forum for footage from Arab Spring protests...and the result looks a lot like hot startup Pinterest” (Fox, 2012).

The initiative uses citizen journalism as the primary spark for dialogue. The ‘mission’ webpage explains that Middle East Voices is “a collaborative journalism platform. It seeks to combine investigative journalism, crowdsourcing, participatory writing and social media technology to redefine how stories in and about the Middle East should be told.”⁷ Importantly, while the portal acknowledges that it was created and is operated by the Voice of America, its goals appear to be adapted to meet the networked media ecology: “We will measure our success by the quality of the discourse, the level of engagement, and the growth of our community that we might achieve through this

⁵ <http://www.insidevoa.com/about/voa-charter-code/>; <http://www.voanews.com/english/about-us/>

⁶ <http://middleeastvoices.com/site-rules/>

⁷ middleeastvoices.com/our-mission/

endeavor.” In order to amplify citizen voices and create “a unique new form of journalism – one that listens,” the site solicits user-generated content, by making it easy to submit breaking news, photos, and videos and maintaining author anonymity. Hutchins (2012) sees MEV as functioning as a “free speech engine” in the region, translating reports between English and Arabic and allowing for “enhanced dialogue between interested parties.”

In its first three months, MEV focused on engaging audiences and content producers in Syria and Bahrain, two countries where political protest is consistently confronted with government repression and efforts to control free expression. Given the dramatically different socio-economic and political contexts of the two countries, MEV has had to engage each of the audiences in very different ways. According to Hutchins, “a poll about the Bahraini political opposition received 50,000 unique visitors and 15,000 votes. The reason why there was such resonance is that the level of mobile proficiency and media literacy is robust in Bahrain. Everyone knows each other on Twitter!... Two-thirds of traffic from Bahrain comes from iPhones.” This is compared to Syria, where “there are few smart phones. A handful of reliable Twitter accounts. Internet access is often slow or blocked. Most communications come to us via SMS rather than the computer” (Hutchins 2012). Incorporating SMS was vital for producing shared content, a lesson for deliberative technology promotion in authoritarian settings.

Security of deliberation is another crucial consideration. In Syria, at first, “People wouldn’t write essays about their experience. It just didn’t work” (Hutchins 2012). Instead of waiting for Syrians to come to the portal to contribute their own content, VOA’s Middle East desk reached out to Syrians via social media, Facebook and Twitter in particular, and engaged in conversations that evolved over time. Interviews often took place using Google Chat, using http-level encryption, as opposed to email or telephone communications that are less safe. Reflecting on the challenge of eliciting input, Hutchins (2012) notes, “It has been much more pull than push. We’ve had to work to pull information out of Syrians who are interested in dialogue but afraid.”

As a result of the diversity of media habits and opportunities between countries, constructing metrics for measuring successful engagement or deliberation is especially difficult. “We’ve never had huge traffic from Syria, but our user-generated content from Syrians has provided substantial citizen accounts” of the ongoing civil unrest (Hutchins 2012). This challenge is magnified as the initiative expands, reaching out to audiences throughout the region. “Our focus has been in Egypt and Saudi Arabia too. You’ll find each country requires a different, flexible strategy for engaging potential contributors” (Hutchins 2012).

Middle East Voices is just one of several VOA projects that embraces new and emerging technologies to seize on the possibility of greater information sharing in transitioning and repressive states. Similar projects are underway in the Congo, Haiti, Tanzania, and Pakistan, each tailored to connect with the particular informational needs and technological capacities in each country. Speaking to the unique need for state-supported projects in transitioning and repressive states, Hutchins (2012) argued:

Our goal is our public diplomacy, which is different than the goal of *The New York Times*. We want to make sure that the exchange of ideas and ideals is taking place, despite challenging circumstances, where freedom of expression is lacking. We also want to make sure the ideas and ideals that are germinating in the public sphere are made public and accessible to English speaking

audiences. These are not the goals of privately run news organizations, but our site and the VOA takes them seriously.

VOA's efforts to pilot deliberation technologies in non-transitioning states has been valuable, both in the sense that they facilitated more informed dialogue on divisive issues, but also in that they've exemplified many of the practical challenges broadcasters face in trying to reach out to audiences to solicit content. While measuring impact is difficult and this project has not reached nor involved significant audiences, it offers a new model for international broadcasters' flow of information and expression. Middle East Voices is laying the deliberative infrastructure for national and transnational dialogue in countries where forums are limited.

Western governments are not the only ones investing in deliberation-centered media interventions. Non-traditional actors are also operating and innovating in this area. For a perspective as to how these tools work from a non-Western international broadcaster, we turn to Al Jazeera and its use of emerging mobile media platforms in Somalia.

The Al Jazeera Network's 'Somalia Speaks'

Based in Doha, Qatar, the Al Jazeera Network is an international media network that broadcasts news in Arabic, English, Turkish, and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. It manages a series of sports and movie networks and is the largest producer of Arabic-language Children's programming in the world. The network emerged in 2006 as a means to expand on the success of Al Jazeera (Arabic), the ambitious launch of Al Jazeera English (AJE) and consolidate redundancies across the network's expanding initiatives. Al Jazeera was launched in 1996 with a grant from the Qatari Emir and continues to operate with substantial financial support from the Qatari government. In 2011, Qatari Royal Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani was named Director-General of the network and oversees all of the channels. It is an international broadcaster in the sense that it is a government financed media network whose primary target audience resides outside of Qatar. The Al Jazeera Network, and AJE in particular have been at the forefront of adopting new media technologies in the news production and dissemination process (Powers, 2012).

In mid-2011, a severe famine struck Somalia following East Africa's worst drought in 60 years ("Somali famine," 2012). The famine continued into 2012. Tens of thousands died and 250,000 were deeply impacted, severely malnourished and displaced in refugee camps. To remedy the perceived absence of direct Somali testimonies in media coverage, AJE undertook a collaborative project that combines several communication technologies to solicit short message service (SMS) texts about Somalia and share them on its website. Soud Hyder, an AJE staff member, said the project's aim is to share "the perspective of normal Somali citizens" and let them "tell us how the crisis has affected them."

Called "Somalia Speaks,"⁸ the project gathered responses to the famine and violence via 5,000 mobile phone subscribers throughout the country. Respondents gave

⁸ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/somaliaconflict/somaliaspeaks.html>

their location and thoughts about how the famine and decades of conflict impacted them. Souktel, a cell phone-based service working towards development, provided the local response number and subscriber lists. Moeed Ahmad, also with Al Jazeera, called it the “first large-scale survey of Somali sentiment” (“Aljazeera Somali”, 2011). It received 4,000 responses.

To translate the text messages to English, they used a crowd-sourcing platform, Crowdfunder, which allowed 80 volunteers to translate 1,000 messages into English by members of the Somali Diaspora. Bloggers and others in Somalia and the Diaspora also added their views through a separate online form and an international cell number, generating a forum for transnational exchange. The translated SMS messages appeared on AJE’s website in both map and catalog forms, via Ushahidi’s mapping application.

The SMS messages chronicled the violence and the famine’s effects. For example, one SMS posted on January 1, 2012 read:

I lost both my parents and the elder brother in the bloodshed that has been going for the last 20 years. In addition, my students and their children all perished in this conflict and there is a lot which I can't count all here.

For Patrick Meier (2011) of Ushahidi, this not only pushed “the world to bear witness” but allowed engagement in “a global conversation with people of Somalia, a conversation in which Somalis and the Diaspora are themselves at the centerfold.” The “Somalia Speaks” project shows the promise of cross-platform and multi-stakeholder collaboration, particularly for places under-served by mass media and internet services, but where mobile penetration is increasing.

This multi-media collaboration not only met standards of social responsibility since it protected the identities of respondents, but paid dividends professionally as well. As a result of user-generated information gathering, AJE was able to break news, such as a deadly market fire in Bosaso that would have normally never made the news (Ulbricht, 2012). It strengthened the flow of information about under-reported areas, and gave media access to people throughout a country that sees few foreign journalists.

The power of mobile phones could certainly be harnessed more as a deliberative technology. Hyder observed that SMS is social media “for communities without access to Twitter or Facebook.” Somalia has seen recent rapid growth in mobile penetration, which could be a result of almost no telecommunication regulations due to a lack of central governance (Heeks and Konkol, 2009). As of 2009, there were an estimated 640,000 mobile users – more than six times the number of Internet users and six-and-a-half times the number of main phone lines, according to the World Bank’s indicators.

Table 1. Somalia Speaks participation numbers

Task	#	Division of Labor
SMS’s Sent	5000	Souktel
SMS’s Received	4000	Souktel
Translated	1000	Crowdfunder
Translators	80	Crowdfunder
Curation	--	AJE
Web page views	25,000	Ushahidi/AJE

As of January 26, 2012.
 Figures provided by Soud Hyder, Al Jazeera English.

Developing deliberative tools may require a coming together of diverse stakeholders. Souktel's Jacob Korenblum commented that productive partnerships “in the social mobile landscape can come together to really help give a voice to communities” (Ulbricht, 2012). This innovative effort offers lessons for how coordination between telecom providers, global news outlets, internet-based platforms and humanitarian and development agencies can foster new projects to advance national deliberation where online access and national media are under-developed. As a newsgathering effort, most of the in-country communication was one-way, however, and not expressly aimed at creating a forum for deliberation between citizens—though that happened with those in the diaspora who accessed it online. It was proto-deliberative, focusing primarily on information circulation and not directly concerning dialogical negotiations of difference. Also, crowd-sourced, amateur translation seemed to be a bottleneck on the circulation of the messages. This could be an issue for projects in multi-lingual societies.

For “Somalia Speaks” to work as a deliberative device, some modifications would be required. A Somali, international or United Nations broadcaster, for example, could expand the call-in format and develop a program around SMS messages, including real-time surveys, thereby creating better multi-directional interpersonal exchange that better resembles a mediated deliberative process. BBC Somali, for example, would be a promising partner. Such use of “reliable and innovative communication institutions are indispensable paths to greater security, democratic stability, and development” (Livingston, 2011, pg. 44). While Somalia’s challenges may be greater than what deliberation alone can deliver, this project offers a vision ripe with potential for helping the highly unstable country develop its nascent civil society.

Potential Problems & Lessons

Moving international broadcasters toward deliberation technology is not without risks. Technological faces of foreign policy carry the same “baggage” as does foreign policy at-large (Morozov, 2011; Price, 2002). This means that international broadcasters must consider how public perceptions of their state sponsors could impact public receptivity and willingness to participate. Moreover, promoting venues of deliberation in unstable countries risks allowing the broadcast and circulation of potentially destructive messages, as was the case in Rwanda in the lead up to Tutsi genocide in 1996 (Metzl, 1997). Therefore, some kind of moderation of participant contributions is likely to be necessary, though it may well exacerbate the perception of deliberation “controlled” by the sponsor state. To address this perception, moderation should be carried out credibly, according to well-defined rules, and done with the utmost transparency.

Other problems could block the efficacy of deliberation technology sponsored by international broadcasters. Repressive governments can block such initiatives, thereby limiting their efficacy. Trying to develop circumvention tools requires care and planning (e.g. the anonymizing Tor), and can place people at risk (e.g. the unsecure Haystack software). International broadcasters must necessarily consider partnerships with security-minded organizations and consider the safety of different at-risk publics. AJE did this by anonymizing texts to prevent backlash from militias. VOA’s Middle East Voices partners interested citizen contributors with experienced journalists who provide

security training. Of course, different mediums and different countries require different levels of security.

The digital divide problem is also stark within many countries. With mobile and internet penetration still fairly low, any ICT-focused project that does not involve distribution of hardware and training to new populations will be constrained by pre-existing disparities in technological diffusion, and possibly exacerbate systematic differences that account for those disparities. Cognizant of this challenge, the VOA Congo service trained 100 interested citizens in mobile reporting prior to the November 2011 election, providing multimedia smart phones and covering related telecommunication costs (Ferri, 2012).

Finally, effective projects should not stay institutionalized as foreign-operated, thereby facilitating dependencies. As soon as feasible, they should be handed over and domesticated if it furthers sustainability. UN Peacekeeping Radio operations in Cambodia and Liberia, for example, provide possible models for broadcasting efforts that were launched with foreign financing in periods of crisis and slowly transitioned into locally financed operations (Orme, 2010). This requires more altruism than states may possess, but is important for moving past dynamics of aid dependency while helping broadcasters effectively combat accusations of functioning purely as propaganda.

Conclusion

International broadcasters can find new meaning by developing and promoting deliberation technologies. Their budget dollars can go a lot further in under-served societies that face a dearth of public information and formal avenues of exchange. Such work, rather than being seen as propaganda or advancing biased content, offers a better chance of accruing global goodwill to the sponsoring country. By providing a safe, trusted space for ideational exchange and deliberation, over time broadcasters can move beyond the perception that they are merely extensions of their sponsoring government while simultaneously providing a valuable service that furthers national interests (e.g. the development of civil society in non-democratic states) and provides a window into foreign public opinions.

To promote deliberative technologies most effectively, international broadcasters must develop projects in partnership with NGOs, firms, and country specialists. Collaboration allows them to overcome their own institutional blindspots and harness technologies more effectively. Projects must necessarily be multi-media and draw on the assortment of technologies actually available within target countries. Reflexivity, creativity and openness to new ideas are required, not just by their staff but by their funders and government overseers. Most importantly, however, projects should be designed and carried out with the participation of the people such projects are intended to benefit. A unilateral intervention based on external assumptions and uninformed by local input risks recreating patterns of neo-colonialism.

As risky and difficult as such endeavors could be, they are important both for putting to better use international broadcasters and for advancing the public flow of information and expression in countries wracked by deep governance problems. While such weak and failed states have not developed reliable mechanisms of governance,

micro-projects could be the seeds for better institutions in the future: “If it were possible to implant this sort of deliberative process in political units large enough to impact developmental trajectories—say, the provincial or municipal level—we would have something that could be called ‘deliberative development’” (Evans, 2004, 37). That said, technology alone is unlikely to be a panacea, but it could help in the building of a communications infrastructure for deliberation.

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