

Challenges to U.S. Government Support for Media Development

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Andrew Green

September 11, 2009



**National Endowment
for Democracy**
Supporting freedom around the world

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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Table of Contents

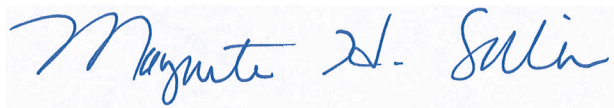
Preface	3
Methodology	4
Abbreviations	5
Executive Summary	6
U.S. Government Activities in Media Development	8
Issues, Trends	13
What Should Be Done to Improve Support for Media Development?	19
Endnotes	22

Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) commissioned this study of U.S. government funding of media development. The purpose of this report is to examine the ways in which government entities such as the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development fund media development projects.

CIMA is grateful to Andrew Green, an expert on funding issues with firsthand experience in government development efforts, for his research and insights on this topic. Any opinions or views expressed within this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent CIMA or NED.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts. We welcome your comments on the ideas presented here either by emailing CIMA@ned.org or by visiting our Web site at <http://cima.ned.org/reports>.



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Methodology

This report is based on the author's own experiences as a senior democracy fellow in USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance; his expertise in democratic development; available funding data; and interviews with more than three dozen media experts from the U.S. government and the media assistance implementation community. Anonymity was promised to each interviewed expert in order to encourage frank and open discussions. No statement of fact or opinion should be attributed to any specific person; any errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of the author. The paper is intended to stimulate a lively and sustained discussion among those interested in international media assistance. It represents the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of CIMA or its parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy. We welcome comments on this report on CIMA's Web site: <http://cima.ned.org>.

Abbreviations

ACE	Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
C-Change	Communication for Change cooperative agreement
DG	USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance
DRL	U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
ECA	State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
EGAT	USAID's Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau
EUR	State Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
IIP	State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs
IREX	International Research & Exchanges Board
MEPI	State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative
NEA	State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
OTI	USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives
S/CRS	State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VOA	Voice of America

Executive Summary

Media play a pivotal role in U.S. foreign policy, but the two U.S. government bodies most directly involved in media development assistance—the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—face significant resource shortfalls in this area. This weakness has a direct impact on the U.S. government’s ability to support media development around the world. Several units within the State Department are engaged with media efforts. Those that work in media development usually do so in cooperation with or through USAID and its media experts.

USAID works on direct development of media as well as media *for* development projects; that is, the use of media and communications to achieve other development goals, such as promoting better health practices or informing citizens about an election. A handful of USAID personnel work full time on media development and are spread throughout different organizational units, with the locus of activity centered in its Democracy and Governance (DG) Office. To the extent that these media specialists work closely with other USAID development practitioners and various units of the State Department, they form a technical assistance hub within the agency for media work of all kinds. In general, USAID budgets for media work have been relatively small and traditionally have been concentrated in its Europe and Eurasia Bureau. In recent years, however, as priorities have changed, media efforts have shifted to countries in other regional bureaus, which do not have media experts.

This means that media development often can take a backseat to other development programs in those regions.

Several issues and trends are important for the future of media assistance:

- ***New media technologies*** are rapidly changing the media environment around the world and present challenges for standard approaches to media development programs. Strategies that embrace new media must grapple with technical assistance problems related to different business models and government regulations applicable to news content delivered via new media platforms, such as text messaging on cell phones.
- ***Technical capacity issues*** raise questions about the U.S. government’s ability to adapt and respond to new opportunities in media assistance. USAID and the State Department experience a technical capacity shortfall. Media assistance implementers, such as those who carry out their projects on USAID grants, often have a higher technical capacity than their U.S. government counterparts, which is not unusual in development assistance generally. However, the rapid pace of technological change in media has opened a much wider gulf than in other development areas. This can pose a serious problem for programming strategy and budget planning as well as limit the ability of USAID to respond quickly to new

opportunities. USAID’s DG Office and the Europe and Eurasia Bureau are the key sources of technical assistance to various U.S. government entities, but technical capacity at USAID and the State Department is severely limited and also is vulnerable to loss of those few personnel with technical expertise.

- **Budget and procurement** trends pose problems for the U.S. government’s ability to fund media assistance programming and to encourage innovative programs. A number of troubling trends related to budgets and procurement exist. One source of budget changes is the natural and necessary shifting of funding to and from regions based on foreign policy and development priorities. Changes in procurement, on the other hand, are the result of multiple causes. Multi-year, global, and wide-scope funding mechanisms have become the norm for DG Office procurement. For example, efforts to reduce staff and workload through the use of large omnibus procurements that combine programming from different DG topic subsectors into a single contract or grant tend to reduce funding for media development and cut out implementers, such as those with niche media expertise.

Issues and possible avenues for addressing them include:

- The picture of U.S. government support for media development is complex, and each government funder has different goals, which may occasionally be at odds with each

other. For media development projects to succeed, **responsibilities should be clarified and budgets should be increased.**

- Development is a long-term process. This is no less true for media than for other areas, so **programming should involve a long-term view by specialists with deep expertise. USAID should continue to play an important role in media development.**
- Given the positive effect of media assistance on democratic development, the scarcity of media experts in government, the increasing demands for technical expertise on new media technologies, and the increased use of large procurement mechanisms in the DG Office, **more media development experts are needed to provide expert advice on media projects.**
- These increases should be at the global level, not only at the country level, because of the general lack of expertise at the country level and differing development priorities at the regional level. **Media assistance within USAID’s DG Office should be elevated to the division level.**
- A new procurement mechanism should be created to focus on media assistance, allow for greater implementer independence, and provide space for innovative programming. **Procurement should be in the form of grants, not contracts, in order to maximize independence, as contracts can be too restrictive to permit innovation.**

U.S. Government Activities in Media Development

There is considerable evidence that development of media can help foster democracy.¹ Media undergird strong economies and civil societies and are key components of U.S. foreign and democracy assistance policy. In development, “media” refers to the direct development of independent media outlets as an end unto itself as well as to media as a means to some other end, such as educating voters before an election or promoting better health practices.

Media’s dual nature in foreign assistance as a means of communication and a democratic end drives U.S. government units to focus on media directly.

Even within a government body such as USAID, the general label of “development” obscures the important differences between media as an end (media development) and media as a means (media for development). The sections below describe the activities and goals of various units of the State Department.

Budgets and Personnel

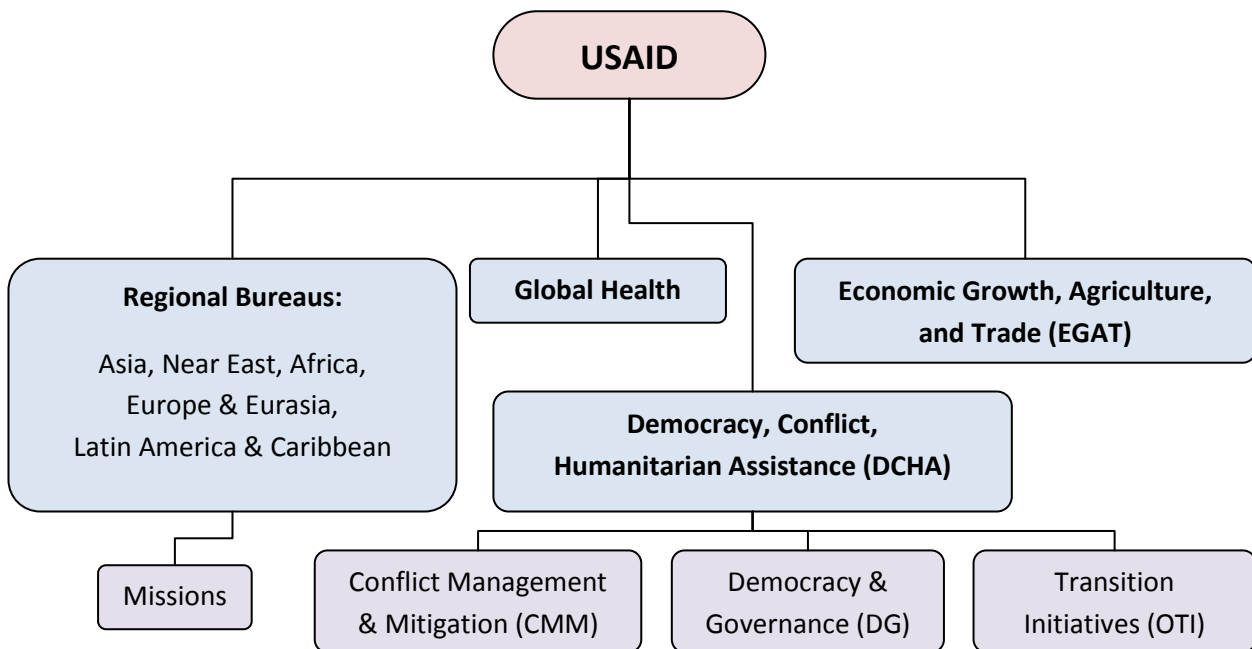
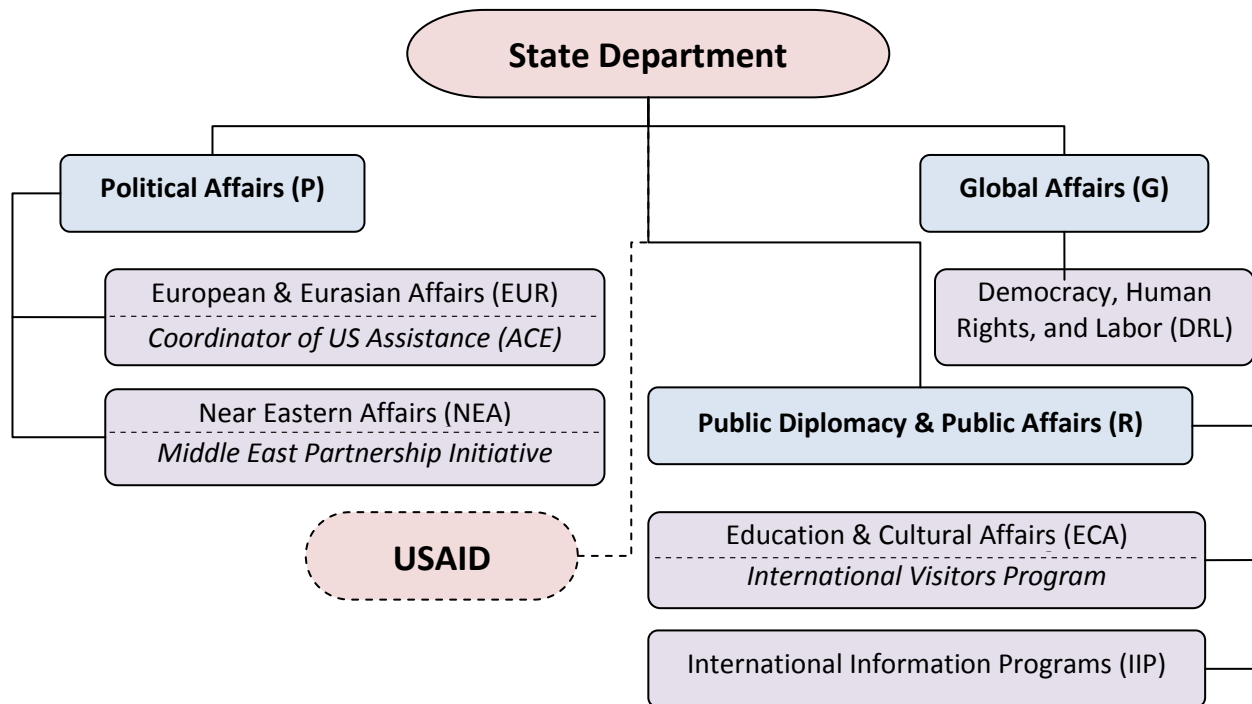
It is commonly accepted within USAID that media cut across policy sectors, but this is also true of other democracy and governance areas such as civil society, local government, transparency, rule of law, and public administration. It was the salience of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the post-communist states that resulted in media development as a specific field of expertise under what was labeled democracy assistance. Although the immediate

catalyst for the creation of a democracy and governance unit in the mid-1990s was the experience of USAID’s Europe and New Independent States Bureau (as the Europe and Eurasia Bureau was called at that time), there were a host of factors in other development sectors dating to the late 1960s that contributed to the unit’s creation.²

USAID works on both development of media and media for development. To the extent that personnel with media expertise are cooperating with other USAID development practitioners and various other units of the State Department, they form a technical assistance hub within the agency for media work of all kinds. Budgets for media work are small overall and have traditionally been concentrated in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau. In recent years, however, they have shifted to high priority countries in regional bureaus without media experts. The few media experts in the DG Office are called on to advise other bureaus and missions in devising projects, but they cannot set programming priorities because they have small independent budgets.

As part of its work on civil society issues, USAID’s DG Office, the lead technical assistance unit for democracy and governance, provides assistance for media development encompassing everything from professional standards of journalists to financial sustainability of the media to reform of the legal environment for media. The DG Office has long provided leadership on media development, as can be seen in policy and technical publications dating at least as far back as 1999.³

Partial Organization Chart of U.S. State Department and USAID



Much of the spending on media programming, however, occurs at USAID's missions (overseas country offices). Media experts in the DG Office have often worked closely with their counterparts in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau, for example, to give advice on media projects and provide technical assistance to USAID field offices. Among the many media programs supported in this way were the so-called ProMedia projects in former Yugoslav and Soviet republics from 1995-2008, which covered investigative journalism, organizational capacity, production facilities, and legal and regulatory frameworks. Media programs in other countries have been developed to incorporate most, if not all, of these aspects. For example, the International Research and Exchanges Board's (IREX) Media Sustainability Index, which analyzes the condition of independent media in a number of countries, was originally a project of the Europe and Eurasia Bureau. The effort has been expanded to include countries in the Middle East and Africa. Other projects help provide Internet access in Central Asia, production training for journalists in Azerbaijan, investigative journalism in Cambodia, and development of independent radio in Indonesia, to name only a few.

The DG Office is the only USAID unit with dedicated media development experts, and the Europe and Eurasia Bureau is the only USAID regional bureau with a media expert, although part time. Consequently, the DG Office media experts are USAID's main source of technical assistance or media expertise. The DG Office has dedicated two staff members to full-time media

The DG Office is the only USAID unit with dedicated media development experts.

development work. Two additional personnel actively incorporate media into other civil society programs that USAID funds; however, they are not dedicated to media issues full time.

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), which is described as providing "fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs" in crisis countries, also does media development work.⁴ Among its first programs was the development of nongovernmental media outlets in Bosnia in 1996, following the Dayton Accords. Recently, OTI has worked in even more

challenging environments, such as Afghanistan, where it supported the establishment of a network of 31 community radio stations. It also has worked in Liberia, Sudan, Nepal, and other crisis states. OTI generally has one or two in-house media experts. Organizations

or implementers doing media development are part of consortia bidding for work.

Other parts of USAID integrate media into projects as a tool to achieve their development ends. The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation uses media largely in the service of peace building. For example, in Mali it supported the establishment of a network of community radio stations, which provided vital socio-economic information and reduced marginalization of nomadic tribes.

USAID's Global Health Bureau initiated a partnership with its DG Office and the Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau (EGAT) to create a cooperative

agreement called “Communication for Change” (C-Change) to support the development of media as well as the use of media for other development goals. Activities include promoting sustainable media outlets, journalism training, investigative reporting, and messaging; with content specific to health, education, environment, and economic growth.⁵ More typical programs in these two development sectors may include programs to train journalists on environmental or maternal health reporting, both limited forms of professional capacity building. Global Health has two people with expertise in media for development, while EGAT has one.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) is the lead State Department unit for coordinating efforts to promote freedom, democracy, and human rights globally. DRL funds programs mainly via the Human Rights Democracy Fund, primarily in the form of grants. One example of the kinds of media projects DRL supports was the creation of youth-run radio stations and training young journalists in Jordan. DRL coordinates with USAID to avoid duplicating efforts.

The State Department’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) oversees all bilateral assistance to post-communist states through the Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia (ACE). Funding comes from Congressional appropriations dedicated exclusively to the region and is coordinated with USAID and other U.S. government organizations.

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Individual U.S. embassies also support media development programs through discretionary grants by local panels called Democracy Commissions, but the funding amounts are small—about \$25,000 or less.

Under the heading of “Governing Justly and Democratically,” the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has allocated more than \$10 million for civil society programs, including media development. Among the more innovative efforts is the Tanmia portal in Morocco, which uses new media technologies to mobilize youth for development. It has also supported the expansion of IREX’s Media Sustainability Index in the Middle East and North Africa.

The under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs oversees a number of media development-related activities, such as those run by the Bureau of Educational and

Cultural Affairs (ECA) and the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). ECA has long run programs that bring foreign citizens, including journalists, to the United States and send Americans abroad for educational or cultural exchanges, such as the Fulbright Program. Its Office of International Visitors runs the International Visitor Leadership Program for individuals nominated by embassies to travel to the United States. ECA’s Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists, a public-private partnership with the Aspen Institute, 10 U.S. journalism schools, and corporate sponsors brings journalists from around the world

Department of Defense

The Department of Defense has long been involved in messaging as a form of public engagement, ranging from warnings for overseas civilian populations about military operations to vital information about social services in secured areas. As a result of its experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Defense Department has been increasingly interested in post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization.

There has been concern within and without the U.S. government over the encroachment of the Defense Department on established areas of foreign assistance. One source of these concerns appears to be the “1207/1210” funds, named after the sections of the National Defense Authorization Acts for 2006 and 2008 that provide for up to \$100 million per year to be transferred to the State Department for reconstruction, security, or stabilization activities.

The State Department’s use of the funds is heavily proscribed by legislation or regulations, the interagency approval process is cumbersome, and programs have been limited to the creation of a Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework, Provincial Reconstruction Team training, and personnel exchanges. Another source of concern appears to be AFRICOM, established in 2007; indications at this time are that its non-defense activities are in such well-established roles as facilitating humanitarian assistance. A third source of concerns may be proposals in the last and current Congress to create a Strategic Communication Center (H.R. 5658, H.R. 489), a State-Defense interagency organization tasked with strategic use of media, research, and intelligence. Neither proposal has progressed far at the time of writing.

to the U.S. to examine American journalistic practices. The Office of Citizen Exchanges has a Professional Exchange division that has given grants to Bowling Green State University in Ohio and Southern Illinois University to train journalists on environmental and HIV/AIDS reporting.

In the arena of media for diplomacy, IIP actively engages foreign populations with the goal of informing and influencing. In addition to running the America.gov Web site, which incorporates blogs, videos, podcasts, Web chats, and social networking tools, IIP provides traditional print materials, such as how-to books on good journalism, and sends speakers, such as American journalists, overseas to train and talk about their professional experiences.

The U.S. government’s main means of communicating with the world is the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio and TV Martí, Radio Free Asia, Radio Sawa, and Alhurra (TV), all efforts of the Broadcasting Board of Governors. VOA’s mission is to provide objective news, information, educational, and cultural programming, following an explicit code of journalistic standards. Besides traditional broadcasting in dozens of languages, VOA has a sophisticated Web site that provides streaming radio programs, videos, podcasts, Web chats, and information for mobile devices.

The three main State Department units that engage in media development—DRL, EUR/ACE, and MEPI—usually do so in cooperation with or through USAID and its media experts.

Issues, Trends

Interviews with experts and analysis of data raise a number of issues key to the future of media assistance. New media technologies represent a rapidly changing environment with challenges for traditional approaches to media development programs. Technical capacity issues also raise questions about the U.S. government's ability to adapt and respond to new opportunities in media assistance. And finally, budget and procurement trends pose problems for the U.S. government's ability to fund media assistance programming and to encourage the creation of expert, innovative approaches.

New Media Technologies

Mobile phones, the Internet, and social networking are booming, while traditional media such as newspapers are on the decline or have never taken off in some parts of the world.⁶ "This is a new era for media [development] programming," stated one U.S. government media expert, echoing the sentiments of many interviewed for this report.

New media technologies present opportunities and obstacles for diplomacy and development. These new tools offer those practicing media for diplomacy unprecedented ways to reach audiences and to interact with them. The Voice of America, for example, and various State Department public diplomacy outreach efforts are taking

advantage of multimedia functionality on Web sites that allow for embedded videos and podcasts, freeing their content from the limits of broadcast technology and print distribution.

However, maintaining centralized control over content is more difficult than before, which raises important concerns for the nature and potential of media for

diplomacy. New media technologies not only increase the free flow of information through the Internet, texting, and podcasts, but also reduce barriers to entry in media because of lower costs for production and investment. The legal and regulatory environment for new technologies is quite different than it is for traditional media, and many of the

new media technologies are in the area of telecommunications, not broadcast media. The result is a completely different environment for dealing with state-controlled enterprises or even state monopolies than existing programming has dealt with previously. This means, for example, that a ministry of telecommunications could more easily control information transmitted via cellphones by shutting down the service than a ministry of information could control live radio or television broadcasts.

Additionally, media development programs must come up with new ways of dealing with the old problem of investigative reporting

New media technologies are "more about getting around restrictions" on promoting development in other DG areas.

and fact-checking in the new media context. Whereas “traditional media programs were about resolving distortions in media markets” that inhibited freedom of the press and free flow of information, one expert explained, new media technologies are “more about getting around restrictions” on promoting development in other DG areas.

Media development implementers and their funders will need to understand the new media landscape if their programs are to be effective.

Technical Capacity Issues

The rapidly changing nature of new media technologies highlights the potential for technical capacity issues at USAID and the State Department. The State Department’s human resources and technical capabilities for media development present a challenge. Foreign Service personnel typically serve short tenures in their assignments. The rotation of Foreign Service officers is intended to produce well-rounded foreign policy generalists, not development specialists with deep technical knowledge.

USAID’s limitations in media center around personnel—there are too few. In its Civil Society Division, the DG Office has two staffers who focus on media development: one a U.S. government employee with particular expertise in traditional broadcast media, the other a democracy fellow with particular expertise in new media technologies. Two other staff members have some media experience and use media strategies in the setting of other

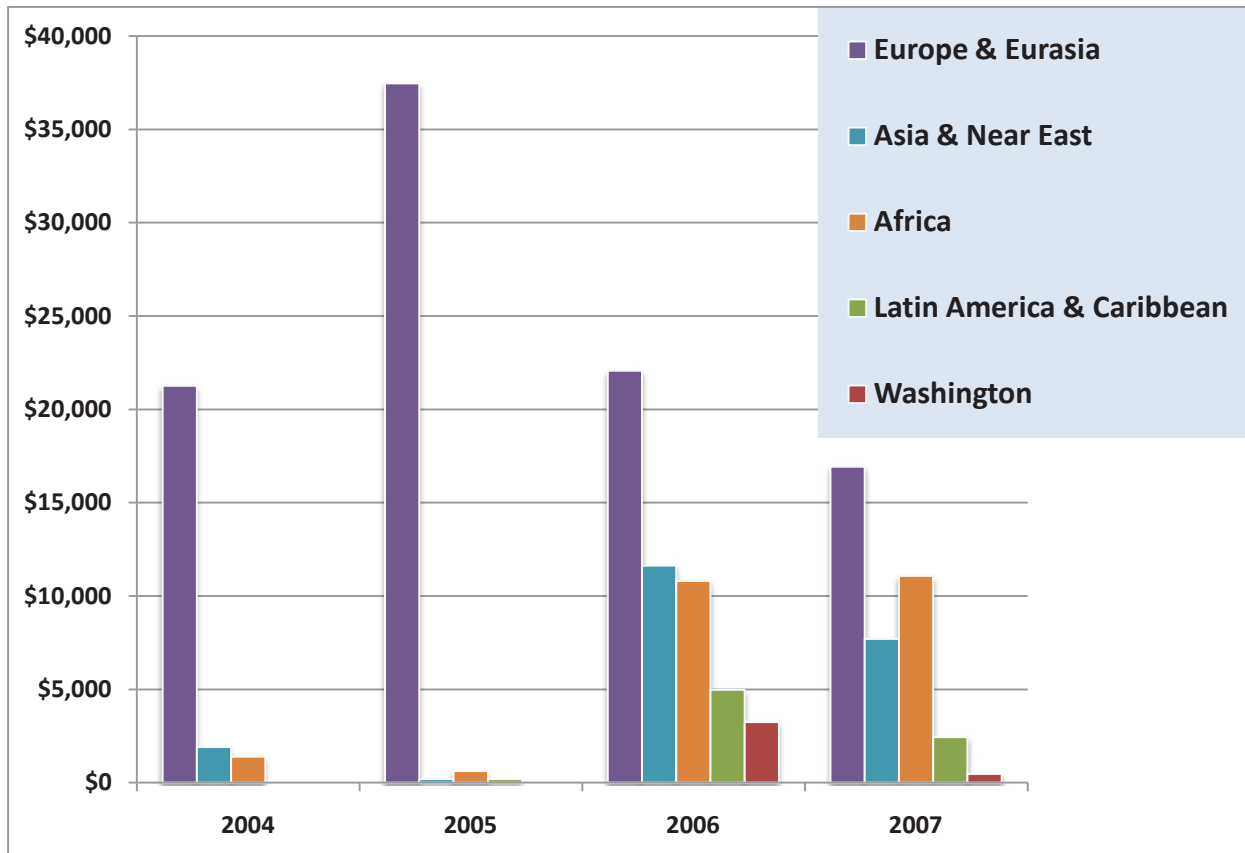
USAID’s limitations in media center around personnel—there are too few.

civil society programs, but they are not media development specialists. In the last five years, there have been two successive democracy fellows with expertise in media. Democracy fellows, who serve one-year terms renewable for up to four years, provide technical assistance and policy analysis. Since 1997 they have been the core of media expertise in the DG Office. The current fellow has been at USAID for two years as of this writing, and he is in such high demand for his new media expertise that he travels almost constantly to give technical advice on media projects to USAID missions. It should also be noted that because fellows are not hired outright, they are prohibited from exercising any responsibilities in procurement matters.

The DG Office could be reduced to a lone dedicated media expert and two media-related program experts when the media democracy fellow’s contract runs out. Given that media assistance is but one aspect of civil society programming, which is itself but one subset of the DG Office’s activities, it is important to at least maintain the current level of technical capacity, if not increase the number of media experts on staff.

USAID’s OTI typically has two in-house media development experts. The Europe and Eurasia Bureau has one media expert, a contractor, who splits her time between media and other social transition programming activities. The Global Health Bureau has two staff members with significant experience in media for development, and the Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau has one.

USAID Funding of Media Development by Region



Other than the C-Change cooperative agreement among EGAT, the DG Office, and the Global Health Bureau, there has been “no collaboration, learning, or integration across sectors,” according to one expert with long experience in media for development.

Major media development implementers, such as Internews, IREX, and the International Center for Journalists, have on-the-ground media development experience and can design and implement innovative new media programs. It is not unusual in development assistance to find that implementers have a larger repository of expertise than their government counterparts. Yet the rapid pace of

technological change in media has opened a much wider gulf between those doing media development work and those funding it than in other areas of development. This can pose a serious problem for programming strategy and budget planning at USAID and the State Department and limit their ability to respond quickly to opportunities, such as how text messaging might be used to mobilize citizens in a disputed election. USAID’s DG Office and Europe and Eurasia Bureau have long exercised leadership in media development and been sought by others throughout the government for their technical expertise, but the scarcity of technical capacity and personnel present challenges for USAID and the State Department.

Budgets and Procurement

There are a host of troubling trends related to budgets and procurement. One source of budget changes has been the necessary shifting of funding to and from regions based on foreign policy and development priorities. Changes in procurement, on the other hand, are the result of multiple, more artificial causes.

During the 1990s and early 2000s most U.S. government support of media development—in fact much of the democracy and governance work—focused on the post-communist countries of Europe and Eurasia. As USAID missions have reduced their activities in the region and closed many offices, USAID and the State Department have given higher priority to critical countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Development priorities in these regions center on issues such as health and education as distinct from those in Europe and Eurasia, where democracy and governance has been a higher priority.

Among those carrying out development projects, procurement is always a sensitive topic, whether it is the perennial battle of contracts versus grants, the relationship between prime contractor and subordinate contractor, or the increasing use of multi-year funding mechanisms with wide program scopes. In the context of the development of media, these issues can create a deleterious effect. Expertise in media development is largely, but not exclusively, the domain of a small number of nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits favor grants or at least cooperative agreements, over contracts. Grants tend to be flexible, while contracts are more directive. Cooperative agreements occupy a blurry middle ground, in that

they are lumped together with grants in the “assistance” category but can be tailored to be either more grant-like or contract-like in nature. Many nonprofit executives contend that contracts are inherently directive and controlling, and make the important case that media project implementers must be as removed from U.S. government direction as possible in order to maintain the credibility of nascent independent media.

A related concern is that multi-year, global, and wide-scope funding mechanisms have become the norm for procurement by the DG Office. Given that media development falls under the civil society designation, which in turn is a part of the DG sector, the share of funding that goes to media development is relatively small to begin with. In addition, such funding mechanisms inevitably lead to a smaller, subordinate role for media programs. Not only are media programs a small piece of the pie, but the financial incentives for the prime contractor can cut implementers with niche expertise out of programs. This can lead to the assignment of media development projects to contractors inexperienced in media development rather than to the nonprofit organizations that focus more directly on media.

There is evidence that the push to reduce the staff workload associated with managing programs could lead to a shift to “omnibus” DG Office procurements that combine programming from different DG subsectors into a single funding element. For example, an anti-corruption program might be combined with a local government program to introduce transparent budgetary processes, a civil society program to support watchdog organizations, and a media program to support independent media in regional cities.

Procurement: A Glossary

Contract: Obtaining goods and services for the direct use or benefit of a U.S. government agency. The requirements of the contract are usually written by the agency to be quite detailed and specific. Nonprofit organizations tend to avoid contracts because they can be extremely directive and are subject to complete control by the agency. Also known as *acquisition*.

Grant: Funding the creation of goods and services for a public purpose. The requirements of grants are usually written by the U.S. government agency to be broad. As opposed to contracts, nonprofit organizations prefer grants because they allow greater independence from the funding agency. This is also one form of what is known as *assistance*.

Cooperative Agreement: Like a grant, this is funding for the acquisition of goods and services for a public purpose. Although this is a second form of *assistance*, a cooperative agreement is something of a hybrid of contracts and grants—it explicitly incorporates “substantial involvement” by the funding agency and can be as directive or broad as the agency chooses it to be when writing the activity requirements.

Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC): A multi-year procurement tool that essentially pre-qualifies a small set of awardees for an unspecified number and dollar amount of contracts in the future. Competition for specific activities (called *task orders*) is then limited to the awardees and does not require the funding agency to engage in a labor-intensive full and open competition. Due to the wide range of activities usually covered under an IQC and the complexity of this procurement tool, awardees tend to be consortia of *prime* and *subordinate* organizations. A similar version exists for *assistance* with the term *Leader With Associate*.

Prime and Subordinate Organizations: An IQC awardee is often a consortium consisting of a prime organization, which assumes managerial and administrative responsibility for any activities under an IQC, and subordinate organizations, which are generally chosen for specific expertise and experience needed to fulfill activities under the IQC. Subordinate organizations often complain that prime organizations keep opportunities for themselves, without sharing work or letting others compete for business.

Leader With Associate (LWA): Similar to an IQC, this multi-year procurement tool pre-qualifies a small set of awardees for an unspecified number and dollar amount of cooperative agreements in the future. There are two important differences, however. One, the term “leader” refers to the agreement between the awardees and the agency division responsible for the activity, while the term “associate” refers to agreements between missions or other divisions and an awardee. Two, agreements do not have to be awarded through competition and can be signed directly with an awardee. As with IQCs, an LWA awardee is often a consortium of organizations, with one organization assuming responsibility for management and administration, sometimes limiting the access of other consortium members to opportunities.

One benefit of omnibus procurement is that one USAID staffer can manage a single contract or grant, rather than having multiple personnel manage separate ones to achieve the same end. But with diminishing budgets and higher priorities in other development sectors, this evolution could have a negative effect on the frequency and quality of media assistance. An omnibus procurement may serve to protect DG Office priorities at a time of budget and policy uncertainty, but it also tends to make media a means for the development of other democracy and governance ends. This is not in and of itself bad; it just needs to be recognized that use of media as a means may come at the expense of media as an end, even within the democracy and governance arena.

One implementer likened DRL grants to “venture capital,” reflecting the uncertainty that follow-on funding will materialize.

A final procurement issue relates to questions of program continuity. As much as most implementers with media expertise like the flexibility of grants, which is how DRL tends to fund programs, these activities tend to be one-time projects because the programs’ themes change every fiscal year, based on input from embassies and USAID experts, as well as congressional earmarks. Traditionally, DRL’s grants were mostly for one-year programs, but in recent years the bureau has funded more multi-year projects. IREX, for example, is running

three-year media programs under DRL grants in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Iraq. One implementer likened DRL grants to “venture capital,” reflecting the uncertainty that follow-on funding will materialize. Two fundamental aspects of media assistance deserve recognition. The organization funding the activity matters: A program with State Department funding may be viewed differently by implementers and local partners than a program funded with USAID support. The mission of the former is U.S. foreign policy and that of the latter is development. Additionally, the form of funding matters: Contracts are restrictive, with partner organizations often viewed as mere instruments of the U.S. government, while grants allow implementers to put more of their own expertise into the design of a program. For projects in support of independent media, the latter provide greater credibility.

The confluence of budget and procurement trends could lead to a problematic environment for media assistance. Amid reduced budgets, different development priorities, increased use of global procurement mechanisms, and increased use of contracts rather than grants, media assistance could become harder to fund and less likely to benefit from appropriate expertise when it is funded.

What Should Be Done to Improve Support for Media Development?

The picture of U.S. government support for media development is complex, but the above discussion and analysis point to issues that should be addressed. The following analysis echoes many of the recommendations made in recent studies of foreign aid reform, including the 2009 Congressional Research Service Report *Foreign Aid Reform: Studies and Recommendations*.⁷

What is Needed:

- An examination of the roles and responsibilities of the main U.S. government entities engaged in media development.
 - Better cooperation between the USAID's DG Office and OTI. Once a crisis has passed, OTI typically "graduates" a country to mainstream development programming. Today, however, there is no common process for easing that transition.
 - Clarification of responsibilities between the DG Office at USAID and the bureaus at the State Department. Now the DG Office serves only as a source of technical expertise for DRL activities, while it is part of the strategic planning process for budgets and programs at USAID. The goals of each of these organizations are different, however. Development is a long-term process, which is no less true for media
- than for other areas, and programs often produce the best results when designed with a longer-term view by specialists with deep expertise and supported with longer-term funding.
- Within USAID, a focus on the more complex task of development of media rather than media for development. Direct development of media does more to help media for development than vice versa because it addresses the fundamentals of good journalism and sound business practices necessary to sustain independent media, which can then serve the purposes of development in general.
 - An examination of the technical capacity for development programming involving media. For both USAID and the State Department, capacity is quite low. At USAID, there are a handful of people directly engaged in development of media; three others are engaged in media for development. OTI and the DG Office are among the lead units engaged in media; however, OTI's mission is to help stabilize countries in crisis, so its personnel needs are different from those of the DG Office. Given the positive effect of media assistance on democratic development; the vulnerability of an already small cadre of media experts to personnel losses; increasing demands for technical expertise on new media technologies; and

potentially increasing use of global procurement mechanisms in the DG Office, it is clear that more media development experts are needed.

- A review of the budgets and procurement mechanisms for development programming involving media. Media are instrumental in the achievement of other development goals, and budgets and procurement mechanisms follow a logic dictated by those goals. The sensitivity within media assistance to perceptions of U.S. government interference is real and must be accommodated, and the need for innovative programmatic approaches is critical. Media development in the democracy and governance sector cannot be effective as long as its funding is subsumed under civil society and procured through a funding mechanism that provides incentives for cutting out organizations with media expertise.
- An increase in budgets for media assistance to take advantage of opportunities presented by new media technologies.
- A policy of making procurements for media development projects as grants, not contracts, in order to maximize independence and promote innovation.

If the status quo is inadequate and potentially unsustainable, what alternatives exist? One is to create media as a development sector in its own right. However, the cross-sectoral nature of media does not necessarily translate into a single, coherent approach to programming across

development sectors. No matter how much the distinction between development of media and media for development has been “fudged,” in the words of one expert, their differing goals could hinder each other’s efforts.

Another alternative would be to place at least one media expert in each of USAID’s regional bureaus, in addition to the one currently working on media part time in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau. This would require the hiring of additional expert personnel. This would, however, be counter to increasing technical capacity, which is the rationale for centralized technical bureaus. Different development priorities among the regional bureaus could also reduce the voice of technical experts, possibly leading to a further diminution of media’s role in development. Ideally, media experts would be placed both in the regional bureaus and in a centralized entity or “hub.”

DRL could also hire personnel with knowledge of media development to work on its grant proposals and collaborate more closely with USAID’s media experts. Moving media development to the State Department would disconnect this set of activities from other development goals, including democracy and governance development efforts.

Recommendations:

- Clarify responsibilities and increase budgets for media development projects.
- Elevate media within USAID’s DG Office to division level, on par with the current divisions of Civil Society, Governance, Rule of Law, Elections and Political Processes, and Strategies and Research.
- Hire at least five additional media experts as permanent USAID staff, including the expert currently under contract in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau. These additional personnel should, as a group, have expertise and experience in all of the regions USAID works in.
- Create a new procurement mechanism focused on media assistance. This new funding mechanism could be a cooperative

agreement (a form of grant) with multiple awardees, perhaps along regional lines in order to engage implementers with specific regional strengths. The awardees could implement some programs on their own and make grants to local partners. Other development sectors within USAID and the State Department could transfer funds as needed to complement their media development and media for development activities, thus enhancing the division as a hub of media expertise and providing a locus for integration of lessons learned.

In this way, development of media could overcome challenges of new media technologies, technical capacity, and budgets and contribute to the support of democracy and social development.

Endnotes

¹ Steven E. Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, and Mitchell A. Seligson, “The Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990-2003,” *World Politics* 59 (3), 2007, 404-39; Steven E. Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Mitchell A. Seligson, and C. Neal Tate, “Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building,” USAID, 2008, http://www.pitt.edu/~politics/democracy/FINAL_REPORT%20v18b.pdf.

² Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 19-58.

³ U.S. Agency for International Development, “The Role of Media In Democracy: A Strategic Approach” (1999); “The Enabling Environment for Free and Independent Media: Contribution to Transparent and Accountable Governance” (2002).

⁴ U.S. Agency for International Development, “Transition Initiatives,” *Cross-Cutting Programs*, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/transition_initiatives.

⁵ Krishna Kumar, “One Size Does Not Fit All: Objectives and Priority Areas for Media Assistance in Different Societies” (National Endowment for Democracy, 2009).

⁶ Katrin Verclas and Patricia Mecheal, *A Mobile Voice: The Use of Mobile Phones in Citizen Media* (PACT, 2008).

⁷ Susan Epstein and Matthew Weed, *Foreign Aid Reform: Studies and Recommendations* (Congressional Research Service, 2009), <http://openers.com/document/R40102>.

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