

Public Service Broadcasting and Development

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The use of broadcasting to assist development has its roots in the aspirations of the earliest public service broadcasting, and in the current search by aid agencies for ways to transform attitudes quickly and cheaply. It seems an almost perfect union. It has led to the present-day industry in which huge sums of money and large numbers of employees use broadcasting to help the developing world.

Development broadcasting is now an important sub-section in the media world. It is funded primarily by international donor agencies. Some is also funded by the broadcasters themselves, or by commercial or charitable donors, particularly in health or education, but the bulk of the funding is from international Government aid agencies.

Most of it is concerned with promoting good governance, free and fair elections, anti-corruption measures, gender awareness, and ways to slow down climate change. The sums involved are now very large. In the year up to 31 March 2012, the income of just one UK organisation making programmes for development purposes - BBC Media Action - was £29.5 million¹. Their largest funder is the UK's international

¹ BBC Media Action Annual Report for the year to 31 March 2012.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/about/finance>

development agency, DFID, which is giving them nearly £90 million over the five years from 2011. This, of course, is only a tiny part of Britain's total aid budget. For 2015-16, the UK aid budget is £12.2 billion, which is 1.8% of total UK Government expenditure.² I do not think a figure exists for what DFID spends just on broadcasting for development, or a figure for the entire world spend on broadcasting for development. This is because broadcasting in the development context is a means not an end in itself. The spend is found within budgets devoted to health, education etc rather than in budgets allocated just for broadcasting. Broadcasting generally supports aid projects rather than runs entire initiatives.

Development broadcasting is now a viable career for someone who wants to combine assisting people out of poverty with an interesting and demanding media career. Most of the production jobs at BBC Media Action, for example, are in the developing countries they serve. Nothing is forever however. Note the present opposition in the UK to the ring-fencing of the UK aid budget, and the current calls for some of DFID's budget to be diverted to flood relief here in the UK. If donor support were to waver – and any adverse measurements of the effectiveness of broadcasting for development could be very influential in this – then within a few years this sector could be reduced to a shadow of what it is now.

Another hazard ahead for this part of the media industry could be changes ahead in the way broadcasting is structured and financed, and in the new platforms on which people may prefer to receive their broadcasting. Public Service Broadcasting has been under attack for many years in most countries of the world from people with commercial and cost-cutting motives. Now new technologies could also destroy audiences on TV sets, which would lead in turn to the collapse of licence fees. This in turn could lead to the collapse or diminution of certain PSBs. What is essential is for the PSBs to make content for all possible platforms, and to update ways of collecting the licence fees – as the BBC DG Tony Hall put it in February 2014: “Our view is that there is room for modernisation so that the fee applies to the consumption of

² <http://www.ukan.org.uk/aid-quantity/uk-aid-budget/>

BBC TV programmes, whether live on BBC One or on-demand via BBC iPlayer.”³ If this policy were to be adopted in the UK by the Government, it could be wise to adopt it soon, while the numbers affected would be low.

If the PSBs manage to adapt in both their technologies and in their funding mechanisms, there is no reason why Development Broadcasting should not grow in the years ahead. This is because the partnership works. TV and radio, along with the use of the internet and mobile phones for mass messaging, all of which are a forms of broadcasting, are the most effective way of reaching, and influencing, large numbers of people. Academic studies, books and newspapers can reach the opinion-forming elite, and can have a trickle-down effect, but to reach mass audiences directly, there is nothing better than broadcasting. In the UK, for example – one of the countries for which there are figures – TV was the main source of information for 76 % of those surveyed. This is in Ofcom’s 2012 report on UK audience attitudes⁴. There are age differences, however, which will doubtless affect things in the years ahead. In the UK, those aged 16-34 were most likely to say that the internet was their main source of news. Of course this pattern varies hugely around the world. In many developing countries it is still radio which is the primary source of information, especially outside large cities

It is interesting that in Russia, where as many as 7 in 10 people now have access to internet at home, a majority said that they receive their news from the internet at least once a week. This figure was issued on 10 February 2014 by the Russian Broadcasting Board of Governors.⁵

³ Oxford Media Convention. 26.2.14 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2014/dg-oxford.html>

⁴UK audience attitudes to the broadcast media. Ofcom 2012. For all respondents TV was the main source of news about what is going on in the UK and around the world (76%), followed by newspapers (8%) and the internet (7%). Older respondents were more likely to say TV is their main source of UK/world news (84% of those aged 55+ compared to 68% of 16-34s). Those aged 16-34 were the group most likely to say the internet was their main source of UK and world news (13%).

⁵ <http://aib.org.uk/russians-turning-to-internet-for-unbiased-news>

This is more than those who access newspapers and magazines (50%) and more than radio (44%). The reason is clear in a Gallup world poll survey of Russia carried out in 2013⁶. It showed that only 48% of respondents felt that the media in Russia was free. Clearly, the more people distrust their own media, the more they will turn outside their own country for news.

There are two further areas I would like to consider: how far development broadcasting, and its funding by international aid donors, fits with the proper objectives of public service broadcasting; and how effective it is in assisting those it is designed to help, and how far this can be proved -- which is the key to its future.

So now for the first area: How far does development broadcasting, and its funding by international aid agencies, fit with the objectives of public service broadcasting?

Commercial broadcasters have limited interest in promoting development, unless it brings in income. PSBs, however, are set up to serve the public, to inform, educate and entertain. They are not set up to sell goods or to make their proprietors or shareholders rich. They are there to serve the public good. Of course, PSBs round the world vary enormously in how they operate. Many do take advertising so are also partially in the world of selling goods. Many are required to contribute to “nation building” and to support government policies. But most PSBs primarily see their role as supporting social development in their own societies. Accordingly they are open to arrangements for quality programming which helps with this.

Sierra Leone, for example, passed a Broadcasting Act in 2009⁷ which transformed the old Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service into the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. Its objectives are described in the Act as being to “provide information, education, and entertainment and reflect all shades of opinion throughout Sierra Leone”. SLBC is required to provide, as a public service, “independent and impartial broadcasting

⁶ <http://aib.org.uk/russians-turning-to-internet-for-unbiased-news>

⁷ <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2010-1.pdf>

services for general reception throughout the country and include a minimum level of regional programmes broadcast nationally every week.” The new organisation has faced all sorts of difficulties but the intention is there that it should be a full PSB, with a substantial role in education and information.

In December 2013, at a meeting in Midrand in South Africa at which I was present, there was a Call for Action on Public Service Broadcasting in Africa⁸. This was at a conference at the Pan African Parliament, run by Afrimap, with support from the Pan African Parliament. It called for “the African Union to encourage states to support good governance by promoting democratic culture and to promote the establishment of the necessary conditions to foster citizen participation and access to information”. It also called for “support for the participation of citizens in democratic and development processes, and for promoting the transformation of state broadcasters into public service broadcasters.”

This call for action follows a long line of efforts to embed public service media at the heart of good governance. It was in 1948 that the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose Article 19⁹ affirms that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Over half a century later, interactive public service broadcasting, in its broadest sense, now offers these rights to the public in ways nothing else can.

So there is a good match between what the donor agencies want to do and what most PSBs, within their terms of reference, are able and are required to provide. All the same, the broadcaster has to take care to ensure that such programming does not drive listeners away. TV channels devoted entirely to development do not, in terms of audiences, compete effectively with entertainment. But within a mix of programming which includes entertainment and news and local material, development programming can be both helpful to the audience and retain reasonable

⁸<http://www.transformingbroadcasting.org.uk>

⁹ <http://www.un.org/rights/50/decla.htm>

audiences. From the broadcaster's point of view, it is highly desirable that any such programming involves local experts, local writers, local producers and local presenters. In this field, one size never fits all. And anything that looks like propaganda, promoting a particular donor agency or country, is likely to be distrusted and disliked, and to lead to massive switch-offs.

What kind of developmental programming works best on air? It is the kind which aims to change the attitudes of the general public. It can work well in spreading information about the transmission and prevention of diseases, and about likely changes in our climates. Within these areas, of course, there are sensitivities which are different for different countries. Many traditional societies can be seriously offended by programming about women's rights, or female genital mutilation, or permissiveness of homosexuality, so care has to be taken in making such programming, or it will not be shown.

The other major area of great sensitivity relates to programming promoting good governance. This is a favoured area for donor organisations, convinced as they are that poor governance lies at the root of many of the ills that afflict poor and struggling societies. But this can impact on the pride of the target government, with its implications that improvement is needed and that outsiders know better how to run good government than they do. Broadcasters introducing programming about how to conduct election coverage in a way which is fair to all political parties are not likely to endear themselves to certain governments. It is notable that Tanzania set out to transform its state broadcaster into a full PSB in 2007. Tido Mhando, ex-BBC World Service, was appointed DG and progress was made. Following the elections in 2010, in which the new principles of fair coverage were applied, with opposition figures appearing freely on air, the incumbent government only won by a very narrow margin. The contract of the DG of TBC was not renewed.¹⁰

¹⁰ "A Road Map to Public Service Broadcasting". Elizabeth Smith. 2012.

<http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/publications/A%20Road%20Map%20to%20Public%20Service%20Broadcasting.pdf>

One area where PSBs can lead the way, and which does not put them on a collision course with most governments, is if they aim to lead their viewers and listeners into the information age. This would doubtless still be unpopular in countries where the government is trying to control all access to outside information – such as North Korea. There, access to the internet is limited to the elite who have received government approval, and to foreigners living in the capital Pyongyang. Access for the general public is only via an official web portal. Radios and TVs are pre-tuned to government stations. Sets must be registered with the police and are checked.¹¹

Most developing world governments, however, are keen to develop their economies by helping their citizens use modern technology to the full. For example, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in Namibia, which is the ministry which covers broadcasting, has in its Vision Statement a commitment “to be a world class institution in creating an inclusive information society, to promote knowledge for development and to establish Namibia as a recognised regional hub in Southern Africa”. The objective is “to develop and promote ICT growth to become the main pillar of economic development in Namibia... with a view towards making Namibia an informed and knowledgeable society”.¹² The 2009 Namibian Broadcasting Act has among its provisions¹³:

- “to promote technological innovation ...and support the social and economic growth of Namibia;
- to encourage local participation in the communications sector in Namibia;
- to advance and protect the interests of the public in the providing of communications services.”

So there is a clear attempt in Namibia to give broadcasting a key role in

¹¹ “North Korea’s Tightly Controlled Media. BBC News 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16255126>

¹² <http://www.mict.gov.na/>

¹³ http://www.parliament.gov.na/acts_documents/120_4378gov_n226act_82009.pdf

leading citizens into the information society.

This can be done through connecting programming with the trusted website of the national broadcaster, encouraging two-way participation in broadcasting through debates involving the public, either in person or by email and mobile phones, introducing electronic devices into programming, and developing all kinds of interactive shows. And the PSB can lead the public into the creative use of open material on the web, such as Wikipedia, and the Open Movement for free access to software.

Another area which is relatively uncontroversial is adult or post-school education. Programmes can be made to open minds to new scientific discoveries and developments, or explain economics, or teach basic literacy to those who missed out on schooling.

So much for the appropriateness of PSBs letting themselves be used by development agencies. Now the second area I said I would look at: how effective is broadcasting in helping to bring development to the poorest and most disadvantaged, and how far this can be proved?

Certain aspects of development are easy to measure. If a bridge is built, the numbers crossing it each day can be counted. Calculations can then be made about how far it helps trade and commerce. Measuring changes in attitude is far harder. You can do attitudinal surveys. But what you really want to measure is how far any such changes in attitude have led to actions. This can be done with health topics where increases in the take-up of vaccinations, or in visits to family planning clinics, can be measured before and after the transmission of programmes. But equally worthwhile efforts to open minds to gender issues, or to ways to move towards inclusive, democratic government, are very hard to capture in figures. There are therefore sceptics, or those who have vested interests in different kinds of aid, or are hostile to aid altogether, who claim that such work is not effective. If such views become dominant, broadcasting for development will lose more and more of its funding and will wither and die.

So what are good ways of measuring the effectiveness of projects setting out to influence attitudes? More and more aid work is being focused in fragile states, that is, states which are affected by war or inter-communal violence, and afflicted by poor governance and poverty. Getting measurements of impact in such states is far harder than elsewhere. It is likely to be unsafe to send out people with clipboards asking questions about sensitive issues.

In their Business Plan 2011-2015¹⁴, and their Annual Evaluation Report July-2013¹⁵, DFID grapples with these difficult problems and tries hard to get impact results for all the projects it funds, in order to help it take evidence-based decisions. Sometimes their log frames and jargon remind me of medieval religion, where one has to move into a whole new world of invented vocabulary and concepts, and the relationship with the real world is remote. Another comparison, even less kind, is to the figures produced by farm cooperatives and factories in the Soviet Union just before it collapsed. With the prevailing attitude there: “they pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work”, output figures widely bore little connection with reality. But the current efforts by DFID and other international aid agencies are nevertheless worthwhile. They are helped by a major effort at transparency. This shows up spurious measures by exposing them to widespread scrutiny. Agencies administering the aid can also learn best practice from each other.

Looking specifically at efforts to change attitudes through using the media, an agency such as BBC Media Action uses a scale of A++ to C to assess whether outputs “substantially exceeded expectation” down to “substantially did not meet expectation” What is to be measured is agreed in advance with DFID. Targets covered in the Annual Review of

¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67658/DFID-business-plan.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/237332/annual-evaluation-report-july-2013a.pdf

the BBC Media Action Global Grant, with the review undertaken October – November 2012¹⁶, include the following:

- “50% of people reached by the intervention will report improved understanding about key governance or conflict- relevant issues as a result of the intervention and 40% reached through factual programming will believe the intervention is playing a key role in holding their government to account.
- “40% of people reached by the intervention in key target populations will report their knowledge of priority health issues (reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health, RNMCH) has increased, and 15% will report health behaviours and/or supportive social norms as defined in RMNCH , as a result of the intervention.
- “40% of people reached by the intervention will report improved understanding or resilience issues and 15% will report that their resilience to shocks and/or stresses in their environment has improved. “

Through audience surveys, BBC Media Action is able to put figures onto changes in attitude. The weakness of this as a measure of impact is that it is only able to measure how people believe their attitudes to have been altered, and also, if asked specifically about this, the impact which they believe this is having. This is not as robust a measure as say, a decline in infant mortality figures. But, with all its imperfections, and taking into account that it is only possible to do such surveys in reasonably stable states, this **is** objective assessment, which **can** be used as the basis of comparisons and of future decision making.

When trying to help develop benevolent societies, run in the interests of **all** their people, there are some changes which can only be effected by changing attitudes. Traditionally, it has been the religions of the world that have tried to alter and dominate moral attitudes. They have used institutions such as churches, temples, mosques and so on to get their messages out to the people. They have used many of the techniques

¹⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67315/bbc-media-action-global-grant-annual-review.pdf

also used by the media today - what are the New Testament Parables, for example, except human interest stories, used to illustrate a fundamental point?

These traditional methods are still very powerful, but alternative routes to people's minds are growing stronger and stronger. Top among these is the media, and within the media the most influential is broadcasting. Issues such as the rights of disadvantaged people, including ethnic minorities, the handicapped, women and children, can all be aired on the media, and minds can be opened in amazing ways to new possibilities.

There is also, in many parts of the developing world, a need for more understanding of the wider world, beyond the limited horizons of a particular culture within a particular village or town or state. There is a hunger for understanding of other societies, how their economies work, how they function in terms of modern inventions and appliances and the sciences that underpin these, how women and the disadvantaged are treated, as well as the huge variation in social customs. It is only by a partnership between broadcasting and development that we can meet these needs. There is a long way to go before they can be fulfilled, but at least a start has been made.

Let us hope that all the efforts currently being put into developing high quality measures of effectiveness prove their worth. Let us hope that PSBs survive in the coming tough decades, and provide their unique public service content on all possible platforms. We need the supporters of PSB to win these battles. We need the win/win partnership between PSB and development to flourish, so that the blight of poverty and disadvantage can be conquered in the years ahead.