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Media pluralism, media freedom and Nigeria's development:
Perspectives from international standards and indicators
Steve Buckley

Fifty years ago independence swept across much of Africa including Nigeria. Yet it is only over the last two decades that state broadcasting monopolies inherited from the colonial era have been challenged by the emergence of independent broadcasting. In 1990 there was almost no independent radio or television to be found on the African continent including here in Nigeria. Broadcasting operated as an instrument of government in the service of nation building, development and sometimes repression.

Over the last twenty years, however, the African media landscape has changed enormously. New policies, laws and regulations have been adopted that have led to an opening up of the airwaves and the emergence of private and community broadcasting services. Today there remains only a handful of African countries where state broadcasting monopolies prevail.

This changing media landscape has been accompanied by new standards for broadcasting policy, law and regulation which have been endorsed by African governments and which provide benchmarks against which progress can be measured in the development of a democratic enabling environment for the media.

From the early 1990s, in response to the changing geo-political context including the end of the cold war and a democratic re-awakening in Africa, the United Nations and UNESCO organized a series of regional events commencing with a seminar on 'Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press'. This was held in Windhoek, Namibia, in May 1991. Participants, including representatives of governments, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, adopted the Declaration of Windhoek (1991), the first of a series of regional statements on media freedom later endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference. The Declaration of Windhoek linked press freedom to the defence of democracy and I want to extract a couple of quotes from that to situate this presentation in context.

The first of these is the following:

> Consistent with article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation.

The Declaration also noted that democratization itself could facilitate media reform. It states:

> The welcome changes that an increasing number of African States are now undergoing towards multiparty democracies provide the climate in which an independent and pluralistic press can emerge.

Media reform is thus seen as both a product of democracy and a means by which democracy can be reinforced. The Declaration, together with its regional counterparts adopted in Asia, Latin America, the Arab World and Europe, are among the first substantive statements on media pluralism and independence endorsed by an intergovernmental conference within the

framework of the UN system. The UN General Assembly subsequently declared 3 May to be World Press Freedom Day to mark the anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek.

UNESCO marks World Press Freedom Day by bringing together leading media practitioners, freedom of expression defenders and UN agencies each year in an international conference to assess the state of media freedom and to address thematic issues and challenges. The first such conference to be held in Africa was organized in 2001, again in Windhoek, to mark the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek. The host organization, Media Institute of Southern Africa, together with other civil society organizations seized this occasion to develop a new standard setting document, which they called the African Charter on Broadcasting. The Charter was designed to complement and expand on the original Declaration by focusing on broadcasting. As its preamble states:

> The declaration focused primarily on the promotion of the print media and was silent on issues such as broadcasting liberalization and the globalization of the communications industry. These issues have far reaching social and economic implications for media freedom and threaten to jeopardize the production of media that reflects Africa's rich diversity (African Charter on Broadcasting, 2001).

Hence the need for the African Charter on Broadcasting. The Charter draws attention, in particular to: "the existence of serious barriers to free, independent and pluralistic broadcasting and to the right to communicate through broadcasting in Africa". At the same time it notes: "that for the vast majority of the peoples of Africa, the broadcast media remain the main source of public communication and information". The African Charter on Broadcasting sets out a recommended framework for broadcasting law and regulation grounded in a rights-based approach in which freedom of expression includes "the right to communicate and access to means of communication" and which elaborates, for the first time in Africa, a three tier system for broadcasting – public service, commercial and community.

The Charter provides a definition of community broadcasting that has since been incorporated by the National Broadcasting Commission into the 2006 version of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code. Let us have a look at what it says:

- Community broadcasting is broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is non-profit.
- There should be a clear recognition, including by the international community, of the difference between decentralised public broadcasting and community broadcasting.

This is one of the first important benchmarks in Africa to define community broadcasting and how it should be regulated. At the same time that work was underway leading to the Windhoek +10 conference and the ACB, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights was considering the development of a Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa. This was eventually adopted on 23 October 2002. This African standard setting document was largely inspired by the Windhoek Declaration and by and the African Charter on Broadcasting (2001) (MISA, 2009). It gives us further details on the policy standards and approaches for enabling community broadcasting. Let us have a look at those:

- The broadcast regulatory system shall encourage private and community broadcasting.
- There shall be equitable allocation of frequencies between private broadcasting uses, both commercial and community.
- Licensing processes shall be fair and transparent, and shall seek to promote diversity in broadcasting.
- Community broadcasting shall be promoted given its potential to broaden access by poor and rural communities to the airwaves.

I would like to stress especially the last of these points, that: "community broadcasting shall be promoted given its potential to broaden access by poor and rural communities to the airwaves". Over the last few months, with the support of Panos Institute West Africa I, together five other country level experts in West Africa, have been undertaking a comparative study of progress against the principles embedded in the African Charter on Broadcasting. We looked at five countries: Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. I think the comparison is instructive for the development of community broadcasting in Nigeria.

To put this in context it is useful to look at the major social and economic indicators before we get into the media development indicators for these countries.

Table 1: Social and economic development indicators

Indicators	Ghana	Mali	Niger	Nigeria	Senegal
Total population (millions)	22.9	12.4	14.1	147.7	11.9
Total GDP (US$ billions)	15.1	6.9	4.2	165.5	11.2
GDP per capita (US$)	646	556	294	1,118	900
Population living below US$1.25 a day (%)	30.0	51.4	65.9	64.4	33.5
Population living below US$2 a day (%)	53.6	77.1	85.6	83.9	60.3

Source: UNDP (2009) Human Development Report

First of all, if you look at the social and economic indicators, it is clear that these countries are vastly different from one another. Nigeria is economically by far the wealthiest country by virtue of its size and its oil revenues with total GDP of US$165.5 billion. Nigeria's GDP per capita is US$1,118 compared to US$900 for Senegal, US$646 for Ghana and US$556 for Mali. Niger is the poorest with per capita GDP of US$294 and total GDP of just US$4.2 billion. At the same time Nigeria's wealth is very unevenly distributed with much of it under the control of a political elite who have done little to alleviate widespread poverty. Ghana and Senegal, at 30.0 per cent and 33.5 per cent respectively, have the lowest proportion of people living below the international poverty line of US$1.25 a day. In Mali, 51.4 per cent live on less than US1.25 a day, while in Nigeria and Niger the figures are 64.4 per cent and 65.9 per

cent respectively. These figures are quite startling, given the wealth of Nigeria, that the proportion of people living below the internationally poverty line is at a similar level to Niger.

Now, if we turn to the media landscape, we can see that all of the focus countries have, to varying degrees, allowed the development of private and independent broadcasting. Mali was the first, with the establishment in 1988 of the first independent radio, Radio Rurale Kayes, followed by rapid growth after the 1991 Mali revolution. A decree of 2002 introduced a legal distinction between commercial and community services. By 2009 Mali had around 150 community broadcasting services, which is more than any of the other focus countries despite Mali also having the lowest population. It is clear that Mali, a country of just 12.4 million people has been the pioneer of community broadcasting n West Africa.

In Ghana the number of private broadcasting services has more than doubled over the last 10 years and community radio has grown from four stations on air in 2001 to 17 on air in 2009. Community radio has gained recognition in the form of administrative guidelines published by the *National Comunications Authority* in 2007. Niger has also experienced growth in the number of private commercial and community broadcasters and the legal framework has been improved by the removal of restrictions on news reporting for community radio. There are now around 120 community radios in Niger. In Senegal community radio has grown from around ten stations in 2001 to around 26 in 2009. In contrast, Nigeria still has no community broadcasters other than campus radio services.

Now let us turn to how this impacts on internationally recognized media development and press freedom indicators. The 'Freedom of the Press Index', conducted since 1996 by Freedom House as an annual survey of media independence was, at the time, the only systematic assessment providing both comparative data and annual trends analysis. It focuses largely on the press rather than the broadcast media. Its methodology relies on the judgement of international experts and it gives no weight to the presence, or otherwise, of public service or community broadcasting as part of a plural media landscape. Nevertheless its results are significant and indicative.
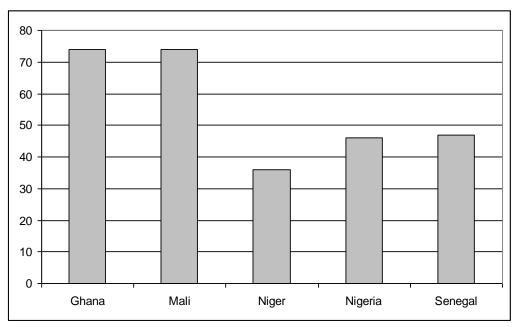

Figure 1: World Press Freedom Index 2009
Source: Freedom House (2009)

In 2008 the Freedom of the Press Index scores Ghana and Mali equal highest. Niger is the lowest, with Nigeria and Senegal in betweem.

In 2002 the French NGO Reporters sans frontières launched its own "Press Freedom Index" and has published it annually since then using a methodology also based on international expert opinion. It too focuses mainly on the press and journalists but does include questions about opposition access to and the editorial independence of state-owned media. There is no indication that either of these indices have yet taken account of the recommendations of the African Charter on Broadcasting as a blueprint for broadcast policies and laws in Africa but again it does contribute to a broader indication of the state of media development.
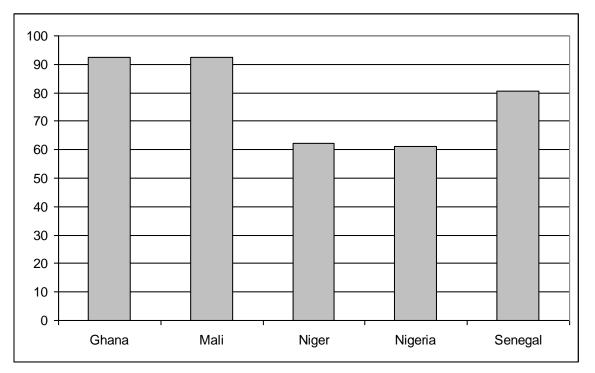

Figure 2: Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index 2008
Source: Reporteurs sans frontiers

The Reporters sans frontiers Press Freedom Index gives the highest rating to Ghana and Mali, and the lowest to Niger and Nigeria, with Senegal in between.

In 2004, Media Institute Southern Africa, who originated the African Charter on Broadcasting, together with the Media Project of the Freidrich Ebert Stiftung in Africa, started developing the African Media Barometer (AMB). This rejected the "foreign-based experts" model of Freedom House and Reporteurs sans frontièrtes. The AMB methodology was designed as a qualitative tool for country level debate. It was based on 42 indicators derived from African declarations, protocols and principles including the Windhoek Declaration; the African Charter on Broadcasting; and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

By 2009, the AMB had been implemented in 25 African countries with a total of 47 reports produced including Nigeria. It is not yet a comprehensive survey of the African continent. But

on the other hand it is an African-centred self assessment tool that incorporates the recommendations of the African Broadcasting Charter.
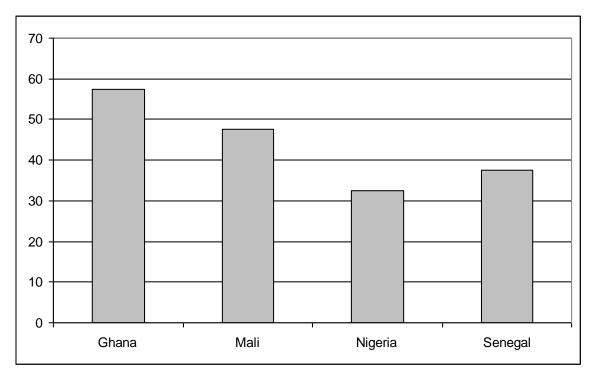

Figure 3: Africa Media Barometer 2008
Source: FESmedia/MISA (2008)

The African Media Barometer puts Ghana ahead, followed by Mali then Senegal, with Nigeria coming last and Niger not yet surveyed. So we can see that on an indicator set that includes community broadcasting Nigeria is underperforming against its counterparts.

Now we can also look at the trends across the years to tell us a more about what is happening in international perceptions of media freedom and development. We do not have sufficient data from the AMB to undertake a trends analysis but we do have sufficient data from Freedom House and Reporteurs sans frontières. So I will just give an example of one of these which is from Reporteurs sans frontières, where we can see there is a very close relationship between the media environment and the broader political environment.

What you see here is that Ghana is the country that makes a big leap up from 2002 to 2003 which is in the run up to the 2004 elections. The elections were largely seen as free and fair and the media were considered to have played an important role in assuring they were fair. Ghana continues at that level through to 2008. Mali and Senegal are at a roughly similar level over the same period. Niger starts off at quite a high level but drops significantly between 2007 and 2008 and probably deteriorated since then as well. This is in the second half of the Thandja administration and we know what happened there earlier this year. Now finally if you look at Nigeria, Nigeria started in 2002 at much the same level as the other five countries but in 2002 to 2003 it drops rather drastically, that's the election year and does not recover, and then in 2006 to 2007, another election year, it drops even more drastically to a lower level.
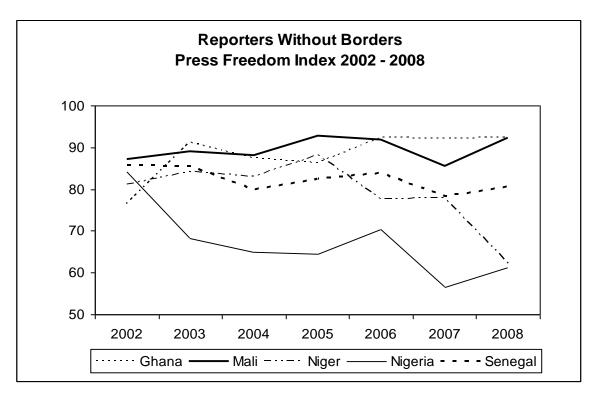
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Figure 4: Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index 2008
Source: Reporteurs sans frontiers (2002-2008)

Now the challenge is how to bring Nigeria back up again.

I believe that one of the ways of doing that is to get community broadcasting on the map. It is the single most significant change that could be made in this country with respect to the media freedom and media development environment.

Following this survey of media freedom and media development indicators let me conclude by going back to the question of international standards, because more recently there has been an important standard setting statement that has both an international as well as an African status. This is the Declaration on Diversity in Broadcasting that was adopted in December 2007. It is a joint statement that was signed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the Organisation of American States and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. These are the four international mandates on freedom of expression who have signed a this joint statement on diversity in broadcasting. Now that statement includes many elements so I want to finish by highlighting what it has to say about community broadcasting. It says:

> Community broadcasting should be explicitly recognised in law as a distinct form of broadcasting, should benefit from fair and simple licensing procedures, should not have to meet stringent technological or other licence criteria, should benefit from concessionary license fees and should have access to advertising

That is what we are seeking in this country and I hope it will happen sooner rather than later.

Thank you for listening.