



ACP rural development: why Media matters?

14th Brussels Development Briefing

12th October 2009

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On 12th October 2009, CTA and other partners convened the 14th 'Brussels Development Briefing' - part of a series of bimonthly Development Briefings on ACP-EU rural development issues. Around 220 participants gathered in Brussels to discuss the role media can play in support of rural development in ACP countries.

Partners in the Briefings:

- CTA
- European Commission
- ACP Group
- Euforic
- Concord
- IPS Europe

Introducing the 14th Brussels Development Briefing, M. Ian Barber from DG development presented the EC perspective on the role of media for development. He first emphasized the importance of media for democracy and governance: in his words media play both the role of a "watchdog", by documenting how governments operate and thus holding them to account, and that of a "gate-keeper", by ensuring that governmental functions are provided to all members of the society. Moreover media have a role to play in raising awareness in ACP and EU member states and in building public support on EU development policy. The EC, he underlined, fully recognizes these functions and media are an integral part of development policy: a Forum on Media and



Development has been organized in 2008 in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and the EC closely works with the press, audiovisual and new media.

Dr Hansjörg Neun, director of CTA, recalled the three objectives of the Brussels Briefings: to provide an overview on the role of media for development, to strengthen the collaboration between media, governments and policy decision makers and to better integrate media into development policies and strategies. He pointed out that bad news is always good news for media: in his words agricultural matters appear in the newspapers only when natural disasters are concerned and very little is said about agricultural potential and success stories. Therefore, agriculture should gain more visibility in the media as there is a need to boost productivity in order to respond to people's needs in terms of food, employment and income, in an economic and environmental

sustainable way. Increased investment in agriculture and information and communication infrastructure should be mobilized and it further requires awareness among public, private sector and policy-makers. Media has a role to play in sensitizing the general public and policy-makers by making agriculture interesting and attractive. In this context, Media represents a strategic partner for CTA which supports journalists to better understand agriculture and address hot topics, such as climate change, adaptation, etc. Moreover, CTA promotes the use of modern ICTs in order to facilitate the work of media in disseminating the information.



Feedback from the field

Susane Thorp from WREN Media presented a summary of the key issues raised in an electronic discussions with more than 2,000 participants, who have been invited to share opinions on Media and Development. All participants agreed that media is an essential partner in the agricultural and rural development sector but that they are facing real constraints: poor infrastructure, lack of equipment, low salaries, lack of education and specialization in agriculture and therefore a poor understanding of development issues. There is a mismatch between the expectations of media and the development community since media usually don't deem agriculture



worth to be addressed, while the development partners often do not trust media in reporting accurately and objectively. Even if the use of ICTs varies across ACP regions, they provide more channels and means to enhance the role of media: we need to share good practices, including those coming from other sectors such as health and education, and move away from traditional models to disseminate information and develop new models to allow interactive learning across actors linked in broad networks. To this end, national ACP governments and the international community should engage in supporting the media.

Mainstreaming media in development

The moderator, Tumi Makgabo, from the African Broadcasting and Media in South Africa and previously journalist at CNN, launched the round table with challenging questions: What should happen in order for media to play a more significant role in agriculture and RD? Why rural areas are not interesting to media?



According to Thozy Gwanya, Director General for the national Department of Land Affairs in South Africa a cultural change with media is a critical point. In South Africa journalists not go to rural areas because they have no means to get to these rural areas. Another key aspect is the role of the communities: it should be up to them to decide what is important to be communicated. We therefore need to look at the community media and their resources allocation, as well as at who owns the media and what is their agenda. Bringing capacity to educate rural population is another challenge: the use of mobile phones has demonstrated that rural people are ready to move ahead as long as you can improve this ICT infrastructure. On the relation between media and governments he stressed that highlight governmental programmes is a sensitive issue for media as they feel to be seen as instruments of governments; but if governments are the vehicles for development where will be the line dropped?



Dr. Krishendaye Rampersad, Media and Literary Consultant from Trinidad, underlined the opportunity to have such an open dialogue. We perceive media as highly technological whereas communities in ACP are largely rural and these communities' media embody different forms - drama, stage street theatres - which are not

recognized as media. Politicians associate media with the screen, television, front page news. Traditional media should be seen and appreciated as a valuable resource to get messages linked to agriculture and rural development across. In her words, the agricultural sector needs to think about how it can strengthen itself and its communication resources in order to liaise with media and get the messages across. Agricultural producers and researchers should be trained to convey scientific data to the agricultural communities through the media.

For Hon. Ignatius Jean, Representative of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Guyana, media is both loved and hated by the people and the communities but we cannot live without them. Therefore a partnership and relationship of trust need to be forged as the agricultural experts have messages to communicate to rural and urban communities and the media has a key role to play in helping them in this effort. Media has a symbiotic relationship with democracy, and brings education, transparency and accountability in the communities. The dismantling of the monopolies in the Caribbean enabled people to have increased access to communication through telephones, a more active participation in many radio programmes etc. How do the people in agriculture make use of the existing media tools to communicate, inform and entertain the people? And how to use other means of communication – like non verbal communication, music, etc. – in order to do powerful things in the society?



For H.E.Ms Brave Ndisale, Ambassador of Malawi in Brussels “media can make you or break you” and journalists should make agriculture and not break it. Agriculture is key to Africa, it offers 70% of employment, is the largest contributor to the GDP and to the foreign exchange and at least 80% of the population come from the rural areas. Therefore it represents a critical source for the livelihoods and a pathway to prosperity and poverty reduction. African Heads of State agreed that agriculture is extremely important and that at least 10% of the budgets should go to it. Shouldn't this make agriculture a key subject in the African media? Are media involved in defining policy processes and actions relevant to agriculture and considered as a key stakeholder? If not, why? Whose responsibility of this?



Jean-Philippe Rapp, Director of the International Forum Médias Nord-Sud and very well known Swiss journalist, explained the audience that journalists tend to be lazy and that they should talk about things that are not accomplished rather than those that have

been. More than 1 billion people in the world are hungry and many of them are farmers or peasants and the question is what efforts journalists could make to raise more awareness on this. Since 25 years the North-South Media Forum, which he is running, aims to bring some common thinking amongst 3000 people, to try to improve North- South relations and capacity building on topical issues by organising seminars, projecting film, sharing evenings with experts, students and journalists and disseminating the information to other journalists through recorded DVDs. This year the theme of "Food prices" has been chosen by the organizers and media participation, particularly from Africa, has been very high. A follow up on the same topic will be ensured next year in Burkina Faso.



Direct evidence from the field is key as it shows farmers' feelings. For example, when journalists talk about farmers in Switzerland they try to make these topics attractive to everyone. It would be very interesting in food prices global issues to bring farmers from Switzerland to meet farmers in Burkina Faso.

The debate highlighted the challenges in making agriculture appealing for the media and therefore how to influence media perception of what is important to be communicated. According to the panelists, it is important to establish from the beginning what message you want to convey and to use existent ways – even mediocre newspapers; crafting the message requires establishing what you want to achieve, your target group and then using the medium which better works (whether it is music or art). The real challenge that the people working in the industry face is how to make agriculture a newsworthy and sexy subject.



Another important element for journalists is to make sure that whatever they want to communicate reach the user/target. An additional key question journalists face in all areas is how to make a message to be interesting and attractive. They usually start from the false assumption that agriculture is a topic difficult to be communicated whereas, it was pointed out, a problem in a given African country could be interesting for an European farmer if it is properly transmitted, especially if there is passion, conviction and an appropriate language. People from the field should give stories to the journalists in order for them to make them interesting for the large public.

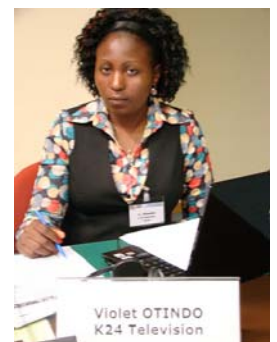
How media can better serve rural communities?

Mr. Sayouba Traoré from RFI talked about the various actors and the way they interact: researchers, policy-

makers, media, extension workers, all serving farmers. In his view, media tend to see agriculture as large scale production controlled by decision makers who are scared by journalists. Farmers have their channels of information but not in a conventional way. Moreover there are several practical obstacles that we often forget such as time needed to get visas, distances and time needed for farmers to reach some places. Agricultural researchers do not communicate properly and the complexity of some research work makes it impossible for the journalist to understand it and therefore to communicate it. Accuracy and technicity are important but not at the cost of communication. In Mali or Burkina Faso, farmers establish themselves their fact sheets and ask researchers support. Farmers' needs require consideration: this implies using a language which is meaningful to them and not considering local communities radios as sub-radios.



Violet Otindo from K24 TV in Kenya and CNN African journalist Award winner, shared her typical day as a journalist. She explained that she does research, edit, shoot, voice, scripts and every other thing her own. The lack of resources, time management, transport costs and the availability of cameras daily poses her serious problems. Political and health news, she explained, get prominence over agriculture unless there is a scandal while a balance should be found between reporting in a sensationalistic way and giving voices to rural communities. Journalists often lack education and specialized training to deal with agriculture and rural development issues: they should develop better research skills and collaborate with scientists. Scientists could win an award for teaming up with journalists and make agricultural stories more exciting and positive. Training on new technologies and strengthening professional associations, especially for young women journalists, are key elements. And finally, she recalled, more young journalists that champion agricultural and rural development issues should get recognition through awards, training and other forms of support.



Helen Hambly Odame, Professor at the University of Guelph in Canada, started by recalling that the word communication and community share the same terminological root because a community is only possible through communication. Thus the link between media and rural communities emphasizes communication as a two-way process – not simply as a media product.

Media audience in developing countries is mostly poor farmers, provided that two thirds of world's population live in rural areas and 80% of them are poor. Rural

areas suffer lack of media: media are powerful because they create and share meanings that directly affect rural communities on how the community sees itself and how others see the community. Moreover media are not sufficiently viewed as partners in agricultural and rural development: they typically are contacted at the end of an initiative/project and not at the beginning and, even if well-suited, they are highly challenged to engage in communication that fits with the needs of rural communities. Currently media professionals are more than ever before aware of their influence in terms of facilitating public engagement in development processes. Rural communities have a real demand for information that many outside journalists cannot satisfy: this is why they develop their own media and “home grown” local media specialists are increasing. Local media can satisfy local demand for news and information in local languages, and play a role in influencing national development through networking with other media beyond the local level. Some types of media can create and share power with rural communities such as community radio; participatory video which can also be linked to television and film documentaries; Telecentres that can function as community resource centres and Press that speaks about issues of importance to rural communities. We already see that future developments in mobile phones and web 2.0. applications allow rural journalism development, for example by podcasting rural communities own stories in local rural radio.



In her intervention on the global challenges that ACP media face, Tumi Makgabo raised the question of who owns the media. As in many countries, it is private individuals and they want to ensure a profitable business, they sell the products that the public is interested in. The question is what kind a stories you tell if your aim is to make more money. Very seldom women, control, own or are in executive positions in media: this implies that many stereotypes resist and they appear often as the victims. Another key point



concerns the responsibility given to a media practitioner: to communicate on communities from whom is a huge responsibility, but it is also an opportunity to know more, to be interested and involved instead of merely adapting existing press releases. Tumi acknowledged the frustration that global news network do not involve local people in telling what happens in the African continent and that not enough Africans are fighting to ensure that their stories are being told from their perspective. This will ensure a more normalized conversation about development. It is true to day that with technology, it is

easier to tell a story in different ways outside conventional media (online TV channels, websites, blogs...). In her experience working at CNN, she explained, she has difficulties in finding true stories which were not only sensationalists. According to her, seeking proactively to gain information and knowledge is also a form of training.

During the debate of panel 2 chaired by Dr Eugenia Springer, Director of E. Springer Productions Tunapuna from Trinidad and Tobago, one of the issues raised was the under-coverage of agriculture in You tube. It was pointed out that Agriculture is tagged in 300.000 videos on a total of 2.9 billion videos on you tube, that is the 0,01%. If we look for “Africa Agriculture”, we find only 1560 videos, 314 videos on Agriculture in the Pacific and 73 for the Caribbean Agricultural sector. There is a long way to go!



Another area of concern is the need to fill the gap from cities to rural areas and try to overcome barriers in people perceptions. Farmers have almost no political power and, since they don't bring business to the newspaper, they are often neglected. The two main requisites underlined for progress are freedom and consideration as often the journalists working with and in rural communities are considered as sub-journalists. Education and the development of curriculum in agricultural sciences and journalism are needed. Journalists have to create the conditions in order for farmers to get interested in technology.

Concerning the key aspect of media ethics and journalists integrity, it was also recognized that journalists need to be paid properly and to receive a minimum set of means to perform their work.



Finally researchers and farmers need to establish a partnership as to communicate on a continuous basis and not just occasionally.

Further information on the web:

The main site:
<http://brusselsbriefings.net/>

The Briefing page:
<http://tinyurl.com/briefingmedia>

The video interviews:
<http://tinyurl.com/briefingmediavideo>