

## **Media pluralism and the promotion of cultural diversity**

*A Background Paper for UNESCO*

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The mandate of this paper is “to focus on the specific issues related to the balance between political intervention and freedom of expression”, by addressing the following problems:

*-access* (“The media play a central role in today’s complex society constituting a considerable part of the public sphere and being concomitant to the visibility of culture and cultural expression. However, access to the public sphere is not guaranteed to all, being it at the legislative level or in practice.”)

*-equity* (“How do we ensure and how can we encourage the promotion of cultural diversity in the media and through the media without compromising the fundamental principle of freedom of expression yet ensuring that local, isolated, minority and other disadvantaged groups are not annulled by global flows of mainstream communication?”)

*-pluralism* (“Assuming that freedom of expression, the free flow of information and media pluralism are preconditions for the establishment of a visible culturally diverse society, what are the current opportunities made available to us by arising media trends?”)

The mandate highlights two assumptions, one of which forms the basis for a vast consensus, the other highly contested. It is generally agreed that media pluralism is one of the cornerstones of the promotion of cultural diversity, in all its forms, in the modern world. There is less agreement on the appropriate forms of political intervention necessary or desirable to ensure that media are able to play this role.

“Freedom of expression” is recognized in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as follows:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 29 of the UDHR, however, qualifies that, and all other rights, as follows:

In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

This means that national governments can – and many do – take measures that effectively deny their citizens freedom of expression, in the name of national security. The range of measures varies greatly, extending from the norm in some cases to the state of exception in others. The principle is not in question but its application in practice is far from universal. In a significant number of situations, blanket denial of freedom of expression on certain questions effectively serves to promote the dominance of one cultural group over others – or in other words to thwart the expression of cultural diversity rather than promote it.

In countries where freedom of expression is generally established, the problem is, frankly, too much media power. Media institutions, left to develop unchecked in the name of freedom of expression, result in monopolies of knowledge, cultural homogenization and market-driven services to the exclusion of others – which often are the very services which can effectively promote cultural diversity. In these situations, positive political intervention, typically through public policies, is necessary to address issues of access, equity and pluralism.

Public policy in the media sector typically takes one or more of the following forms:

- publicly-funded (or mixed) public service broadcasting (radio and television)
- support for community-owned media (especially radio)
- public funding and support for the creative sector
- public subsidies and tax exemptions for noncommercial publications
- programmes to support and promote cultural minority media
- access provisions
- concentration of media ownership thresholds
- an independent media regulator
- support for on-line services

These measures, generally, provide for enhanced media pluralism and wider cultural diversity, insofar as they make possible the provision of media content that is less attractive commercially than more homogeneous fare. They also play a critical civic role in broadening the scope of information and the nature of debate available in the public sphere.

They are however, typically challenged by libertarian free-market proponents in the name of freedom of expression (as well as by international trade agreements). UNESCO's historic insistence on the importance of cultural policies and the sovereignty of nations to make such policies is a crucial corrective to this syndrome<sup>1</sup>. It is essential to recall that public policy intervention in support of media pluralism is not a violation of freedom of expression but rather a promoter of other equally important rights and values such as cultural diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO's 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* is a milestone in this regard.

Media (press, radio, television, and increasingly, Internet communication aimed at a mass audience) are crucial to the achievement of cultural diversity. Yet media *policy* – which aims to orient the institutions of mass communication in a particular direction – tends to be considered separately from the policy discussions that aim to promote diversity.

There is a long history of debate surrounding the role of the media with respect to democracy. The debate on media and democratization has always had a dual focus: democratizing media, as a positive value in and of itself, and fostering a role for media in the democratization of societies. For some, the media have tended to be seen as value-free containers of information, but they are in fact contested spaces, objects of contention in their own right. Media activists have struggled with how to problematize this, how to make the media a social issue, rather than something that people merely suffer, and how to broaden the public discourse on the media's role in democracy. The role of the media with respect to cultural diversity has been even more diffuse, focusing primarily on critique of the media's tendency to foster cultural homogenization, rather than diversity, and overlooking the need – and the possibilities – of media reform in this regard. Media policy therefore should be seen as an enabling mechanism to enhance the media's capacity to play a positive role with respect to cultural diversity.

UNESCO has been active in this field since the 1970s, and it is useful to recall some of the highlights of its interventions. In 1980, the *International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems* (known as the MacBride Commission, after its chairperson, the Irish jurist and human rights activist Sean MacBride) reported on the inequalities embedded in the world's already increasingly global media system, and made a series of proposals towards establishing a New World Information and Communication Order. In the context of the cold war, the proposals sparked an acrimonious debate but the idea of the need for concerted public intervention with regard to media was firmly recognized.

The international community remained active around questions of cultural development throughout the 1980s. The United Nations declared the years 1988-97 to be the "decade of cultural development", and mandated UNESCO to organise a series of activities around the question. As part of this process, a World Commission on Culture and Development chaired by former United Nations secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar was established, and reported in 1995.

Several chapters of *Our Creative Diversity* and proposals relating to media and new global issues in mass communication were framed by the following question: "How can the world's growing media capacities be channeled so as to support cultural diversity and democratic discourse?"

"...communication in all its forms, from the simplest to the most sophisticated, is a key to people-centred development... Yet at whatever level the issues of communication are envisaged, there is a shared challenge. This is the challenge of

organizing our considerable capacities in ways that support cultural diversity, creativity and the empowerment of the weak and poor." (Op. cit.: 107)

The WCCD recognized that while many countries were dealing individually with various important aspects of this question, the time had come for a transfer of emphasis from the national to the international level. "There is room for an international framework that complements national regulatory frameworks" (WCCD 1995:117). While many countries still needed to be incited to put in place or modernize existing national frameworks, there was growing justification for transferring attention to the global level.

Concentration of media ownership and production is becoming even more striking internationally than it is nationally, making the global media ever more market-driven. In this context, can the kind of pluralist "mixed economy" media system which is emerging in many countries be encouraged globally? Can we envisage a world public sphere in which there is room for alternative voices? Can the media professionals sit down together with policy-makers and consumers to work out mechanisms that promote access and a diversity of expression despite the acutely competitive environment that drives the media moguls apart? (WCCD 1995:117).

The WCCD's international agenda contained a series of specific proposals aimed at "enhancing access, diversity and competition of the international media system", based on the assertion that the airwaves and space are "part of the global commons, a collective asset that belongs to all humankind" (WCCD 1995:278).

As a first step, and within a market context, the Commission suggests that the time may have come for commercial regional or international satellite radio and television interests which now use the global commons free of charge to contribute to the financing of a more plural media system. New revenue could be invested in alternative programming for international distribution (WCCD 1995:278).

An Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development organized by UNESCO in Stockholm in 1998 took this a step further, adopting an *Action Plan for Cultural Policies for Development* (UNESCO 1998) and recommending a series of policy objectives to UNESCO's member states, in keeping with the general philosophical position that communication resources constitute part of "the global commons".

The conference asked member states to:

- Promote communication networks, including radio, television and information technologies which serve the cultural and educational needs of the public; encourage the commitment of radio, television, the press and the other media to cultural development issues, while guaranteeing the editorial independence of the public service media.
- Consider providing public radio and television and promote space for community, linguistic and minority services.
- Adopt or reinforce national efforts that foster media pluralism and freedom of expression.

- Promote the development and use of new technologies and new communication and information services, stress the importance of access to information highways and services at affordable prices. (p. 6).

As mentioned earlier, the WCCD report had underscored the premise that communication media are an essential cornerstone of democracy and cultural development, as well as a part of the “global commons”, and argued for extension of conventional national policy mechanisms to the global level. A global framework for media regulation, it suggested, could provide a framework for a more pluralist media system by, for example, enabling a tax levy on transnational commercial media activities, which could be used to generate financial support for global public service and alternative media. This proactive thrust, based on the use of existing policy mechanisms and the extension of the national policy logic to the global level, did not survive the diplomatic horse-trading that culminated in the action plan adopted in Stockholm.

Furthermore, the draft version of the action plan presented at the outset of the conference was far more affirmative in encouraging member states to provide public radio and television (rather than merely “consider” their provision), and in calling for international as well as national legislation to promote media pluralism. Significantly, a proposal that such legislation foster “competition and prevent excessive concentration of media ownership” was changed to refer instead to “freedom of expression”. A proposal to “promote the Internet as a universal public service by fostering connectivity and not-for-profit user consortia and by adopting reasonable pricing policies” disappeared from the final text.

A number of other important initiatives have originated with the Council of Europe. Its 1997 report *In from the Margins* established the importance of cultural policies at large for promoting diversity. The Council of Europe explicitly seeks to create a new agenda in which culture would become "a more central part of public policy" (COE, 1997: preface). Bringing cultural policy "in from the margins" of governance is seen as integral to a strategy for empowering the disadvantaged and building communities of interest. Significantly, the report says:

"We define cultural policy as the overall framework of public measures in the cultural field. They may be taken by national governments and regional and local authorities, or their agencies. A policy requires explicitly defined goals. In order to realise these goals, there need to be mechanisms to enable planning, implementation and evaluation." (Op. cit.: 33, n. 2)

The Council's stance is supported by previous international policy jurisprudence such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts the right to participate in cultural life; UNESCO declarations of 1970 (Venice) and 1982 (Mexico City) affirming the cultural dimension of development; as well as the Report of the WCCD. It cites four broad aims for cultural policy: promotion of cultural identity, cultural diversity, creativity and participation (Op. cit.: 45).

Seen this way, cultural policy aims to maximise the potential for any society's cultural development. Specific cultural *policies* can address a range of objectives: protection of cultural heritage, promotion of cultural diversity, development of cultural industries, strengthening of national cultural identity. In general, the best possible justification for states to get involved in the cultural sphere is that effective cultural policy intervention can enhance the capacity of citizens to participate meaningfully in the life of their society. Countries which adopt this approach typically address “media” as one of the areas covered by cultural policy. But despite the advanced proposals formulated by UNESCO and others, there is still no *international* forum for dealing with media policy.<sup>2</sup>

The following are typical areas of media policy that are commonly found at the national level, but rarely if at all internationally:

- regulation of commercial media activities in the public interest, to guarantee equitable access and basic services;
- funding and institutional support for the creation and sustenance of public service and alternative media;
- limits on corporate controls resulting from transnational concentration of ownership in new and conventional media and telecommunications;
- incentives (through fiscal support measures, etc.) for production, distribution and exhibition of media content which meets public policy objectives;
- guarantees of access to available media channels on the basis of public interest criteria;
- codes and standards for curtailing the spread of abusive media content;
- measures to facilitate networking capacity through use of media technologies by not-for-profit organizations; and
- provision of public media spaces for conflict resolution and democratic dialogue on global issues.

Many countries address these issues by regulation, for example, as follows:

- licensing of public, privately owned and community broadcasting services (goal: competition, system administration);
- property transactions (goal: market pluralism, diversity);
- abusive content (goal: protection of societal norms);
- content quotas (goal: protection of and promotion of national culture);
- performance obligations (goal: public service, programming requirements);
- rates for free-to-air, subscriber, pay-per-view services (goal: consumer protection);
- access provisions (goal: equal opportunity for free expression);
- relation between public and private services (goal: system balance); and

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<sup>2</sup> A number of international institutions deal with issues that have an important *impact* on media, however: the International Telecommunications Union, the World Intellectual Property Organization, and the UN's new Internet Governance Forum, for example. The 2003 and 2005 two-phase World Summit on the Information Society was remarkable in its relative lack of attention to media issues.

- funding requirements (goal: promotion of priority services).

In today's environment of media abundance, public policy has to take a new approach. Historically, regulation sought to overcome the constraints of scarce resources - as in the case of radio and later, television, air waves, for example. In today's information environment, scarcity is no longer the problem, the problem is *access*. Today's policy issues must address the problems raised by information abundance and the need to be sure that the available cornucopia of information is meaningfully accessible to citizens and not only packaged as marketable commodities or targeted to elites.

Access to media can be defined from the point of view of the receiver or from that of the producer, that is to say, as the capacity to receive everything that is available or as the possibility to bring one's messages to the audience. To the extent that market forces alone can never guarantee access, in either of these terms, governments, regulatory authorities and media institutions must develop and implement policies designed to maximize access. The need to ensure access thus remains an important justification of the need for public policy in the sphere of communication. This is especially important where a key policy objective is to promote cultural diversity.

Measures to promote diversity may vary considerably from one context to another, but they are always, necessarily in democratic societies, part of a public policy process. Opening up the process of policymaking, policy evaluation and regulation to broader public participation is therefore an important aspect of promoting cultural diversity through access to media.

Access is also one of the key operative concepts of models that see communication technologies as instruments of social and cultural development. In general, this requires mechanisms to ensure accessibility to channels of production and distribution for all those capable of rallying a minimal public, increasing interactivity in the relations between creators and their publics, and providing for feedback which can ultimately result in corrective measures.

According to classical liberal press theory, unconstrained access to the marketplace is considered to be the best guarantee for the free expression of ideas. The limitations of the market mechanism in providing freedom of information eventually generated its own critique, in light of which the idea that access to the means of communication needed legal and even constitutional assurances rapidly gained currency in the 20th century (Barron, 1967).

In countries such as Canada, Australia, Japan and most of western Europe, access to *reception* was guaranteed in the charters of public broadcasting organizations, whose mandates obliged them to make their signals available throughout the territories in which they operated. To a greater or lesser degree, many of these organizations were also noncommercial and required to provide a range of diverse opinion in their programming.

With the emergence of an increasingly seamless global communication environment, critics concerned about the sociocultural role and democratic function of media have had to refocus their attention. The new context of technological "convergence" between established media forms demands that we develop a new conception of diversity.

To illustrate, consider what happens when conventional broadcast media and telecommunication technologies converge. The notion of access has traditionally meant different things in broadcasting and in telecommunication. In the broadcasting model, emphasis is placed on the receiver, and access refers to the capacity to choose from the entire range of content on offer. In the telecommunication model, emphasis is on the sender, and access refers to the capacity to use the means of communication to get one's messages out. Within these two models, public policy and regulation have been recognized as necessary social measures for guaranteeing diversity.

In the context of convergence, a new hybrid conception of access is necessary, and public policy needs to promote a new model of communication, which combines the social and cultural objectives of established institutional forms - not only broadcasting and telecommunication, but also libraries, the education system, and so on. Critically, realizing the social and cultural potential of media requires ensuring maximum access for people to the means of communication *both* in their capacity of receivers and consumers of services *and* as producers and senders of messages.

A policy model directed at maximizing the potential of media to promote cultural diversity should therefore address the following:

- how to ensure access to both available content and the means of communication
- how to balance universal services and costs that can be left to users
- how to guarantee free choice and fair access
- how to distinguish between public communication and private information
- how to promote both cultural and economic development
- how to situate the user as both citizen and consumer
- how to facilitate both public participation in society and quality of life

Notwithstanding the above, in some situations, negative public intervention is required to protect cultural minorities (as well as society in general) from abusive speech made in the name of freedom of expression.

In most democracies, broadcasting regulation, for example, is assigned to an independent public agency or commission, duly mandated with specific powers and responsibilities, acting transparently and answerable to elected authorities. Within this

general framework, different countries have used a variety of approaches, instruments and philosophies. The German legal scholar Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem points to two basic types of broadcast regulation: “imperative regulation with conduct control”, using guidelines, requirements, orders and prohibitions, sanctioned negatively with a range of provisions from fines to licence revocation, or positively with subsidies; and “structural regulation”, a general framework set up to influence the conduct of broadcasting entities, specifying basic structures and procedural rules, steering the actors towards desired goals, and generally influencing their overall development (Hoffmann-Riem 1996, p 281). Many countries combine both.

Hoffmann-Riem, a member of Germany’s Constitutional Court and one of the world’s leading experts on the social basis of broadcasting regulation, has argued that a regulatory regime is necessary in order to protect what he calls society’s “vulnerable values”. He writes, in his classic study *Regulating Media* (1996), that the nature of broadcasting regulation in any society is influenced by the value accorded to media freedom in that society, with the important caveat that most societies value freedom of speech not as an end in itself but as a means to reaching normative objectives such as the promotion of democracy. "Therefore, mass communication is deemed to have an important sociocultural dimension. Mass media render a service to society. Government, particularly the legislature, bears the responsibility of ensuring that the processes of informing the public, exchanging ideas, and thus shaping values take place in a truly free manner and are not jeopardized either by the state or private power-holders." (p 268)

The notion of “vulnerable values” merits some elaboration. Broadly speaking, the term refers to values that are generally accepted by society at large but that can be considered to be at risk. In Canada, where I live, for example, the social environment has been characterized in various ways. The philosopher Charles Taylor, for one, has described Canada as an experiment in multinational pluralism, where the notion of "civility" is particularly valued as an approach to problem-solving. Another scholar of the role of culture in governance, Robin Higham (1998), has written: "Canada may be as close as any society has come to balancing unity and diversity, to producing a society where belonging as a citizen is non-threatening to that citizen's cultural identity. Our weak spot is the fragility of that balance..." (p 12) In other words, in the Canadian context, cultural diversity is a vulnerable value.

Hoffmann-Riem cites 20 fields or areas which typically require protective regulatory measures in broadcasting. These include pluralism, diversity, fairness, and impartiality; public responsibility in airing different interests and countering of stereotypes; access for minorities; protection of juveniles and fostering of educational programming for children; maintenance of standards in matters of violence, sex, taste, and decency; maintenance of high-quality programming; and personal integrity. In addition to *values*, regulation can also aim to protect vulnerable social *groups*: women, children, ethnic and racial minorities, and so forth.

The need to defend vulnerable values and social groups in broadcasting, therefore, requires providing safeguards to protect those which may be generally supported by the

legal and social order but are potentially placed at risk by broadcasting content. When different values collide – say, freedom of expression and the need to protect children – authorities need to find the appropriate balance point. Societies differ as to where this optimal point lies.<sup>3</sup>

The European Commission *High Level Group on Audiovisual Policy* articulated this issue in the following way in 1998: “The European approach has traditionally been one of balance. Recognising the role of the audiovisual media as a societal, democratic, cultural and economic factor, legislators have striven to achieve a balance between conflicting demands. For example, the right to freedom of expression has to be balanced against other rights with regard to matters such as the protection of minors, racial hatred and the right to privacy.” (European Commission 1998, p 5)

The role of media is thus a complex one, and particularly so with respect to a complex construct such as cultural diversity. The emphasis on media as institutions with an important influence on social values and the exercise of citizenship recurs frequently in the academic literature. According to the U.S. communications scholar James Carey (1989), the power of media is not linear, not related to the information it “transmits”, but rather lies in the “ritual” effect that it creates by sustaining beliefs and relationships among those it reaches: in this view, “communication is linked to such terms as sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith... A ritual view is not directed towards the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs.” (p 18)

Media consumption – reading the newspaper, watching television, listening to the radio, using the Internet – can therefore be seen as a social ritual, a process of bonding with other members of society, through the mediation of communication technology. Even if our knowledge of their impact is necessarily uncertain, as a society we are entitled – indeed, obliged – to ask, in the words of John Thompson (1995, p 235): “What kind of opportunities do the media open up, and what limitations do they impose on the forms of communication that are possible in the modern world?”

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<sup>3</sup> Put differently : “Media policy to a significant degree is citizenship policy. The approach which a government takes to regulating the media tells us a great deal about the view which that government has of its citizens and their role in society.” (Hutchison, 1999, p 69).

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## **Media Pluralism and the Promotion of Cultural Diversity: Case Studies**

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### ***Little Mosque on the Prairie***

The critically acclaimed Canadian television series *Little Mosque on the Prairie* presents a fresh approach to the promotion of cultural diversity through the media. The series, launched in January 2007 by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), unabashedly challenges the dominant stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslims, using a rare twist of comedy and humour. The show's creator, Zarqa Nawaz, a Canadian Muslim woman originally from Pakistan, developed the series as a counterpoint to Western media images of Islam and Muslims.

The plot of *Little Mosque* focuses on a small Muslim community living in a fictional rural Canadian town. The show's writers entertainingly capture the mosaic of living together in a diverse environment, highlighting the everyday lived experiences of Muslims interacting with each other and with non-Muslims. The show strives to heighten the viewer's exposure to issues of diversity and provoke consideration for the taken-for-granted assumptions that are commonly held about Muslims in particular, and diversity within and between generations, cultures and communities more broadly.

The sheer popularity and international appeal of the television series suggest that mainstream public broadcasting can be critical, provocative and entertaining while at the same time seeking to promote cultural diversity. The Canadian series premiere attracted an audience of 2.1 million viewers. Thereafter it drew a weekly viewing audience of 1.2 million viewers for the first season. Now in its second season, *Little Mosque* will be translated into French and is poised for widespread international distribution and viewership. The show has already started airing in France, Switzerland and French-speaking African countries. Turkey, Finland and the United Arab Emirates recently signed distribution agreements to broadcast the series. Israeli television began distributing the series in English (with Hebrew subtitles) in October 2007. *Little Mosque* has also been made available for viewing in the West Bank and Gaza.

Notwithstanding its international popularity, the program series is not without its critics who admonish the show's representation of Muslims. For example, the *Muslim Canadian Congress* questioned why there are no depictions of secular Muslims in the community on which it is based, and further question whether the portrayal truly captures the diverse spectrum of the Muslim community in Canada (Fatah & Hassan 2007). At the same time, the show is attracting unprecedented attention at a time when relationships, perceived or real, between Muslims and non-Muslims, remain vulnerable.

*Little Mosque* has also received multiple accolades including the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television's *Canada Award* which recognizes excellence in mainstream television programming that reflects Canada's racial and cultural diversity. International awards from the 2007 *RomaFictionFest*, an international television festival, are also significant accomplishments. Most notable perhaps, *Little Mosque* was awarded the prestigious *Search for Common Ground* humanitarian award by the US human rights organization in recognition for the program's promotion of collaboration as a viable alternative to conflict. Other recipients of this honour include former US president Jimmy Carter, Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu and former heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali.

Whether *Little Mosque on the Prairie* challenges "Orientalist expectations" of Muslims (Zine et al 2007a) and provides a meaningful articulation of diversity, or, as some critics suggest, if it upholds stereotypical representations, one aspect is clear: addressing issues of cultural diversity in mainstream media is not a simple feat. But the show has generated positive worldwide attention, a laudable outcome that may inspire new approaches to cultural diversity promotion using the media as a vehicle for change. As Zarqa Nawaz, creator of the hit television sitcom says: "...people are talking about it and it's opened up dialogue" (Zine et al 2007b).

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### ***Aboriginal Peoples Television Network***

The story of national Aboriginal broadcasting in Canada represents a significant milestone for Indigenous cultural preservation and promotion through media. Launched in September 1999, the *Aboriginal Peoples Television Network*, APTN, is the first national Aboriginal television service in the world. Dedicated to Aboriginal programming, APTN promotes the diverse histories, cultures and languages of Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world. The television service provides Aboriginal programming across a variety of genres, including national news, children's animation, youth programs, and cultural and traditional programming. APTN targets both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadian audiences.

The *Aboriginal Peoples Television Network* evolved from *Television Northern Canada*, TVNC, a satellite network launched in 1991 to broadcast Northern and Aboriginal programming to parts of Northern Canada. Beyond the Northern areas, cable distributors could elect to broadcast TVNC. However, with limited commercial appeal, few regions in Canada picked it up and the network did not enjoy widespread diffusion.

TVNC subsequently made a formal request to the *Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission* (CRTC), the national regulator, to establish a nationwide Aboriginal television service. The proposed service would be a mandatory, must-carry station for all basic cable distributors throughout Canada and would include a nominal licensing fee of C\$0.15 per household, per month for each cable subscriber. The CRTC approved the application for the development of APTN, the mandatory carriage of service and the license fee, noting that APTN served the public's interest and upheld the objectives of the Canadian Broadcasting Act (1991). The Broadcasting Act explicitly recognizes the "special place of aboriginal peoples" within Canadian society and mandates that public broadcasting must reflect Canada's diverse society (Roth 2005).

The development of APTN illustrates how existing policy mechanisms, regulation, community involvement and political will can support efforts to uphold cultural diversity, prevent the erosion of traditions and languages, and influence the use of media as an instrument for Indigenous cultural promotion and preservation.

Today, APTN is broadcast to over 10 million Canadian households and businesses through various platforms, including cable, direct-to-home satellite, and fixed wireless television services. The rich linguistic traditions of Indigenous peoples is captured in APTN's diverse programming: while 56 percent of programs are broadcast in English and 16 percent in French, a notable 28 percent is broadcast in various Aboriginal languages, such as Inuktitut, Cree, Inuinaqtuun, Ojibway, Inuvialuktun, Mohawk, Dene, Gwich'in, Miqma'aq, Slavey, Dogrib, Chipweyan, Tlingit and Mechif (APTN 2006).

Further, no less than 70 percent of APTN programming is developed in Canada, offering various professional opportunities to Aboriginal writers, directors, producers, actors and news anchors. The Network also broadcasts a small portion of Indigenous programming from various other parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Central and South America.

APTN provides an innovative model for the positive promotion of cultural diversity in the media. The Network has anchored an important voice in the Canadian broadcasting landscape, provides an invaluable cultural resource for Aboriginal Canadians and the wider Canadian society, and has leveraged policy as an enabling mechanism in order to do so.

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### ***South African Broadcasting Corporation***

The *South African Broadcasting Corporation*, SABC, provides an interesting case study on the promotion of cultural diversity through public service media. First established by an Act of Parliament in 1936, the SABC would later undergo a dramatic transformation from a state-run, propagandist organization that promoted the racial divide and upheld a colonial legacy, to a public service radio/television broadcaster with a responsibility to promote South Africa's social, cultural, political and economic development.

Under the banner vision, "broadcasting for total citizen empowerment", the SABC has had to simultaneously balance the needs of a transforming post-Apartheid society, foster the development of a national identity, diffuse historical cleavages between groups, and nourish the formation of a democratic public sphere. At the same, it has had to manage its own structural transformation. In pursuit of its mandate and vision, the SABC has delineated core editorial values including diversity, nation-building, equality, human dignity, accountability and transparency.

A survey of some of its programming achievements suggests that the SABC has made a vital contribution to the social and cultural fabric of South Africa, promoting multicultural, multilingual diversity and providing innovative and contextualized radio and television programming that resonates with its vast audience base. For example, the SABC broadcasts in the 11 official languages of South Africa. SABC1 broadcasts in English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and siSwati; SABC2 broadcasts in English, Afrikaans, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, xiTsonga and tshiVenda; and SABC3, which broadcasts in English, targets a contemporary, cosmopolitan audience. The SABC has also started radio broadcasting in !Xu and Khwe!, unwritten, marginalized languages used by communities in the Northern Cape region (SABC 2006).

Popular education-based programming (edu-tainment) on issues such as HIV/AIDS awareness and early childhood development, emerges as a strong programming priority for the SABC and reflects the fundamental linkages between media, communication and development (Mjwacu 2002). In 2007, the *Commonwealth Broadcasting Association-Amnesty International Award for Human Rights Programme* was awarded to the SABC for its radio program *Soweto Water*, which underscores the vital connection between water and human rights. SABC1 introduced a popular show called *Take five*, which Mjwacu describes as an edu-tainment program that "...deals with issues of diversity, cultural differences, as well as public discussions on social issues" (Mjwacu 2002: 411).

The SABC has also raised international awareness about issues affecting youth in South Africa as they experience the transition to democracy. *Project 10-Real Stories from a Free South Africa* is a documentary series developed by the SABC in 2004, in partnership with the *National Film and Video Foundation* and the *Maurits Binger Film Institute*, Amsterdam. Young South African filmmakers were given an opportunity to participate in a developmental workshop in preparation for a one-year filming project. The end-result: thirteen narrative documentaries that capture a diverse array of experiences of a country-in-transition. The films received international exposure and a

selection was screened at some of the world's most eminent film festivals, including Berlin and Sundance (Africultures 2004).

Without question, the SABC will continue to experience the challenges of a reformed broadcaster, particularly in an era of globalization where diffuse technological issues influence programming, audience reach and message development. However, the SABC has undoubtedly established itself as a recognized broadcaster that strives to serve the public's interest and continues to forge the essential linkages between diversity, development and democracy.

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### *Australia, Special Broadcasting Service*

Australia's *Special Broadcasting Service* (SBS) is the only national public broadcaster (radio/television/online) in the world that is exclusively dedicated to multicultural and multilingual programming. First introduced in 1978, the SBS evolved from a small radio station experiment that broadcast ethnic programming for four hours daily in Sydney and Melbourne, to become a multi-media public broadcaster that delivers programming in 68 languages on *SBS Radio*, more than 60 languages on *SBS Television* and offers multilingual text and on-demand services through *SBS New Media* (online).

Established in 1991 by the SBS Act, the SBS carries a distinct mandate with an obligation to reflect multicultural Australian society. *SBS Television* broadcasts both Australian and international programs from over 600 national and international sources and draws a weekly television viewing audience of more than seven million Australians per week. Non-English programming is accessible to all Australians using English subtitles (SBS 2007).

*SBS Television* promotes cultural diversity from a variety of perspectives and contexts. For example, the factual entertainment series *Here Comes the Neighbourhood*, celebrates the similarities and shared values between different cultural communities in Australia. *The Bridge at Midnight Trembles*, the critically acclaimed documentary series, creates a moving portrait of an actor diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and documents his struggle. *Global Village* chronicles the lifestyles, traditions and hopes of people from around the world (SBS 2007).

Described as a "medium for inclusion", *SBS Radio* delivers multilingual programming to over 3 million listeners who speak a language other than English, through its vast radio network. *SBS Radio's* programme *World View*, broadcast twice daily Monday through Friday, offers insights about different cultures that make up the diverse cultural base of Australia. In addition to fostering cultural exchange, the radio program presents a forum to address current issues that affect multicultural society (SBS 2002).

As a public broadcaster, SBS has had and continues to have a central role influencing the changing perceptions of diversity and difference in contemporary Australian society, underscoring the role that media plays in shaping identity, belonging and inclusion. In this regard, in 2002, the SBS commissioned a research project called *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future*. Researchers surveyed a diverse sample of 3,500 people. The report, described as groundbreaking, found that "cultural diversity is a fact of life in Australia that most Australians are increasingly at ease with" (Ang *et al* 2002: 4).

A follow-up report, also commissioned by the SBS, published in March 2006, revealed a more complex picture of cultural diversity. *Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes of Multicultural Australia* surveyed young people (16 to 40 years of age) and found that media remain central to identity formation of young, culturally diverse Australians. However, results showed, among other key findings, that there exists a degree of frustration directed at the media, particularly in news and current affairs programming, about specific media messages, notions of impartiality, objectivity, and relevance. The

report encourages media to better engage youth as audiences *and* as citizens (Ang *et al* 2006).

This latter report suggests that even with a fully dedicated multicultural, multilingual public broadcaster such as SBS, media must consistently seek feedback from their audiences in order to continuously generate a robust approach to cultural diversity promotion, address issues of inclusion and integration, and harness the capacity of young people as instigators for change by fruitfully engaging them on issues of diversity.

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### ***The Association for Progressive Communications***

The *Association for Progressive Communications*, APC, is an international network of civil society organizations that promotes social justice and development. APC leverages the strategic use of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) with a view to ensuring that "...all people have easy, equal and affordable access to the creative potential of ICTs to improve their lives and create more democratic and egalitarian societies" (APC Vision, [www.apc.org](http://www.apc.org)).

With a global membership from 34 countries, and representation from both the global North and the global South, APC upholds the inextricable link between human rights and social justice. For example, the *APC Internet Rights Charter*, first developed by APC members and partner organizations in 2001-02, promotes a rights-based approach to the Internet, its use, and governance. The Charter promotes, among other key themes, Internet access for all, freedom of expression and association, access to knowledge and shared learning and creation. The Charter references various existing rights-based instruments including the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (1948) and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1980).

APC focuses its activities on three core program areas. The first stream, *Communications and Information Policy*, promotes the Internet and ICTs as "powerful tools and spaces" for justice, development and democracy. Under the rubric of ICT policy development, APC encourages awareness raising around issues relating to *access* and *civil liberties* (e.g., freedom of expression, the right to communicate, the right to privacy, etc.). As the globalization of technologies increases and issues such as digitalization, telecommunications and broadcasting converge, it is increasingly important for civil society to undertake a role in decision-making on such policy issues (APC 2003). In this way, the role of public policy is upheld as an instrument for change, and is directly related to cultural diversity promotion, specifically as it relates to the safeguarding and promotion of access and equity to ICTs.

The second stream of activities is *Strategic Use and Capacity Building*. APC encourages skills acquisition in the area of ICT and Internet use. It develops resources on strategic Internet use, understanding ICT policies, and management and learning tools for non-profit organizations. For example, APC is one of eight partners of *ItrainOnline*, an innovative resource assisting organizations in the South to gain access to and develop an array of expertise and training capacities on Internet use and ICTs (see [www.ItrainOnline.org](http://www.ItrainOnline.org)).

Finally, APC is involved in *Women's Networking Support*, *WNSP*, promoting consideration for the critical linkages between gender and ICTs. Broadly speaking, the *WNSP* strives to eliminate inequities in women's access to ICTs (especially those that relate to a woman's social or ethnic background), and provoke questions about the treatment of ICTs as gender neutral. Through the APC network structure, *WNSP* supports policy advocacy, awareness raising on gender and ICTs, participatory research, evaluation activities and the development of training materials.

The example of APC illustrates the significance of building a global civil society capacity base to influence ICT policies. It further speaks to the importance of developing progressive policies that privilege access and equity. In this way, ICTs act as enabling mechanisms, influencing the media and its capacity to promote cultural diversity and social justice in an inclusive, equitable and accessible manner.

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### *Alternative Voices: The Emergence of Pan-Regional News Services*

The emergence of pan-regional news services (television/online) onto the global media scene presents a definitive shift away from the monopoly long held by dominant, Western-based news media. News services such as *Al Jazeera*, and most recently *Nuevo Television del Sur* (commonly referred to as *Telesur*) attempt to provide news programming from a particular regional setting, present a counter-hegemonic perspective different than the heretofore dominant news sources, and deliver programming in a region's primary language. Their presence reflects the prominence of news and current affairs programming in a globalized context, the diversity of the global media audience, the need to respond to this diversity, and the limitations of mainstream, Western-based news media to provide relevant, contextualized and locally-inspired programming on global issues.

*Al Jazeera*, the Arabic news channel, was launched in 1996 with a grant from the Qatari government. Since then, it has grown considerably, expanding its channel network to include sports, children's programming, documentary, public interest and an English-based international news station called *Al Jazeera International*. It has leveraged a reputation for presenting a diversity of perspectives, and has centrally incorporated this value into its code of ethics. Also as part of its code of ethics, *Al-Jazeera* recognizes diversity between peoples and societies, acknowledging differences in cultures, beliefs, and values (Al Jazeera 2007).

As *Al Jazeera* gains a wider international reputation for being an alternative news voice, new questions arise about its position as a transnational mainstream news network and how suitably it can balance the needs of a pan-Arabian audience with those of a growing global audience (Iskandar 2006). At the same time, *Al Jazeera* appears to have inspired a methodology for other pan-regional networks and may serve as a model for the promotion of cultural diversity through the medium of news.

A new addition to the global news media scene, *Telesur*, was established in 2005 through major financial support from the government of Venezuela, as well as additional support from the governments of Cuba, Argentina and Uruguay. *Telesur* has already expressed an interest in *Al Jazeera* as a model. In 2006, the two transnational news service providers signed a cooperation agreement to share content and expertise (BBC 2006).

The reception to *Al Jazeera* and *Telesur* has been highly differentiated and at times controversial. For example, critics of *Telesur* warn that it may not have the latitude to function independently from government influence despite the fact that it has an independent and diverse Advisory Committee, with notable members such as American actor Danny Glover, Nobel laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel and writer Tariq Ali.

The development of these stations suggests that there may be a relationship between transnational news media, cultural diversity and diplomacy (ESRC 2007). For example, how will the presence of such news providers influence the development of diverse perspectives on world events and current affairs? Will the transnational news services nourish diversity and dialogue between regions and populations and should this be a

responsibility? Finally, what role can these news networks have in building a renewed public diplomacy? (ESRC 2007).

**Word count:** 505 (not including title or references).

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### ***Community Media: The Example of Community Radio***

Community media is consistently celebrated as a source of empowerment and expression for the disenfranchised, the excluded and the marginalized. It is a central vehicle for participatory development and social justice promotion, amplifying the voices of those traditionally excluded from mainstream media or without access to the resources required to establish popular voice.

The global community radio movement, in particular, is rooted in the struggle to use communication as an instrument for social and political change. Founded in 1983, the *World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters* (AMARC) has been a central catalyst of this global movement. Through a vast network that spans 110 countries and includes over 3,000 local members, AMARC builds expertise in support to the development of community and participatory radio.

The promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity is an explicit objective of the global community radio movement. For example, at the most recent AMARC General Assembly, held in Jordan in November 2006, members ratified the *Amman Declaration*. The Declaration recognizes “respect for pluralism, cultural, language, and gender diversity” and acknowledges the pivotal role of communication media to “help sustain the diversity of the world’s cultures and languages” (AMARC 2007).

A global AMARC social impact assessment on community radio released in 2007 found, among other key findings, that “...the lack of proper enabling legislation is the single principal barrier to CR [community radio] social impact” (AMARC 2007: 7). This barrier effectively jeopardizes sustainability objectives and puts community radio capacities, its operations and potential social impact at risk. To date, few countries have established the legal and regulatory environment required to promote and facilitate the development of community broadcasting. But this is beginning to change. The emergence of appropriate policy mechanisms can foster an enabling environment that supports communication rights and community radio.

Notwithstanding this barrier, community radio has a strong impact on communities, and provides a “voice for the poor and marginalized” (AMARC 2007: 9). Other areas of social impact include poverty reduction, conflict resolution, disaster prevention and relief, women’s empowerment and the inclusion of marginalized populations (*ibid.*). Moreover, community radio “has enabled people to engage in dialogue about their conditions and their livelihoods. And it has contributed to the defense of cultural and linguistic diversity” (AMARC 2007: 57).

There are numerous examples of community radio stations throughout the world’s different regions. For example, *Radio Sagarmatha* was the first independent community radio station in South Asia. Established in 1997 in Kathmandu, Nepal, the station prioritizes knowledge dissemination on issues such as health and sanitation, human rights, education and the environment. Cultural programming is also broadcast on *Radio Sagarmatha* (Radio Sagarmatha 2007). In West Sumatra, Indonesia, *Radio Suara Perempuan* (Women Voice Radio), was introduced as a means to help curb gender

violence. The radio station broadcasts in the local language Minang, and targets both men and women (AMARC 2007). In Mexico, *Radio Jèn Poj* and *Radio Uandarhi* were officially granted broadcasting licenses in December 2004. They are the first two indigenous community radio stations in Mexico and emphasize indigenous language and cultural preservation while also seeking to address relevant social and economic issues (AMARC 2007).

Community radio is an active voice in civil society development and participation. As a non-profit endeavour, it upholds the principles of pluralism and freedom of expression for cultural diversity promotion and broader human development goals. But as the AMARC global assessment reveals, the global community must promote the development of appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks that defend and nurture the growth and sustainability of community radio.

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