Utsikt mot utveckling 31

Big Brother and Empowered Sisters

The Role of New Communication Technologies in Democratic Processes

Big Brother and Empowered Sisters

The Role of New Communication Technologies in Democratic Processes

Proceedings of a conference and workshop in Uppsala, April 16 – 17, 2008

The views expressed in the papers
in this publication
represent the views of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the views
of the author´s organisation
nor of the Collegium for Development Studies.

Contents

Authors

Lars Rudebeck
Collegium for Development Studies /Uppsala Centre
for Sustainable Development, Uppsala University,
Sweden

Helen Belcastro
ICT for Development Secretariat, Sida, Stockholm,
Sweden

Robert Hårdh
Swedish Helsinki Committee, Stockholm, Sweden

Sasha Costanza-Chock
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

Walid al-Saqaf
Global Journalism, Örebro University, Sweden

Johan Hellström
UPGRAID, Uganda

Yasmine El Rafie
Journalist, Egypt/Sweden

Helena Bjuremalm
Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya

Preface

Lars Rudebeck, Johan Hellström and Mia Melin

On April 16-17, 2008, the seventh and final major conference took place in the series of conferences and workshops on democratisation and democracy assistance jointly organised since 2002 by the Collegium for Development Studies at Uppsala University and Sida, Stockholm. This time our theme was *Big Brother and Empowered Sisters. The Role of New Communication Technologies in Democratic Processes* – linking up very naturally with our 2007 conference on media and pluralism in the context of democratisation.

The idea and plan of the 2008 conference had been expressed as follows in our invitation:

Information and communication technology (ICT) entails both immense possibilities and great challenges. Globally, huge investments are made in ICT as an undisputed and essential component of almost all activities – state and corporate. It is also an integral part of international development cooperation, with the ultimate goal of poverty reduction.

Poverty includes, in addition to economic poverty and lack of physical resources, also lack of information, possibilities and power. ICT does not differ from other global public goods, where access is determined by resources, intent and power.

However, the rapid spread of ICT – mainly internet and mobile phones – has created tremendous opportunities in making information available instantly and at low cost. It can be used to seek, receive, create and impart information and ideas by anyone, at any time and for any purpose. This makes it possible for users to bypass traditional and official channels of information and communication.

Though no technology is inherently good or bad, it is probable that the use of any technology will reflect the ideology of a society's dominant power structures, as well

as contribute to the very shaping of that society. In sustainable economic and social development ICT is a powerful tool, but as far as democracy is concerned it poses both threats and opportunities.

The use of new technologies thus may lead to increased participation in democracy at all levels of society. ICT is used by social movements for horizontal networking, and it enhances civil society's possibility to mould opinion, mobilise politically, and to debate and protest.

In government, ICT may increase accountability, efficiency and transparency, and counter corruption through increased flows of information. This may lead to improved interaction and communication between government and citizens. However, the increased possibility for governments to control and monitor may also lead to less freedom for the individual.

At this conference we will address three large areas of concern for development cooperation in the area of democratisation:

- *the implications of ICT for democracy and democratic processes;*
- *ICT and the freedom of expression, not least in contexts where tolerance for opposition is low; and*
- *ICT and the formation of social movements*

At the conference as it actually materialised, there were altogether seven keynote presentations in interactive plenary sessions.[1] Five took place on the first day, receiving about ninety participants from around the world – researchers, development workers, decision makers, and students. The great majority of participants stayed on for the second day, with two plenary presentations and three separate workshops. In the latter, thematic discussions were deepened by focussing upon the cases of Kenya, Egypt, and China and the Philippines compared.

All of this went according to plan. Still, the present report book differs from the previous six ones in not directly reflecting the structure and entire scope of the conference. In fact, several of our speakers, this time, turned out to be unable to provide us with written versions of their contributions. Thus the gender perspective receives considerably less coverage in the book than it did at the conference itself (cf the title). The geographical scope is also less wide. Obviously, the reasons for these absences vary. Perhaps the field of ICT and democratisation as such is simply so new and urgent and therefore demanding that many of those dealing with it are extremely absorbed?

We are nevertheless proud and pleased to be able to publish the following seven contributions by experienced authors, jointly reflecting the perspectives of researchers, development cooperation practitioners and journalists. Each one of the contributions is significant in its own way. Viewed together they respond well to the overall purpose of the conference: in summarising the field as such; in scientifically analysing high validity data on new social movements in the network society; in dealing with human rights implications of ICT; in presenting an apparently successful attempt to use the new techniques to circumvent authoritarian power; in reflecting upon the challenges and possible way forward of 'mobile democracy'; in offering first-hand observations on the possibilities and limitations of using ICT for emancipatory purposes in the case of Egypt; and finally in setting our 2008 conference in the context of the entire series of seven held since 2002.

In summing up, Helena Bjuremalm reflects upon the fact that the series "has ventured beyond narrow notions of formal/minimal democracy... and dwelled upon substantial democracy, or put differently, political equality in determination of the conditions of peoples' lives..." (p 76). This point is as crucial to the specific ICT/democracy field as it is to the overall theme of democracy and foreign aid. In fact, formulated in terms of *access* it stands out as a core theme of the present volume.

Thus, for the new technology to realise its democratic potential, the amazingly supple and multi-dimensional modes of communication it offers must also be widely accessible to citizens at large. The fact that some of them – and most notably the mobile phone – actually *are* quite widely accessible not only in the North and West is therefore highly significant. Furthermore, the immense border transcending force of the Internet carries a lot of significance for the relay of information and culture also to citizens who do not themselves have direct access to it. At the same time, the risks for bias and marginalisation are evident in the process. "What can be done," Sasha Costanza-Chock asks in concluding his analysis of social movements in the network society (p 24), "to keep the 'new media' from becoming just another space dominated by the same hegemonic voices as broadcast media?" Several suggestions are in fact offered in his and in the other following texts.

Thus, the conference did improve our understanding of the possible benefits and risks of ICT for democracy. It also reminded us of the fact that ICT may empower not only citizens but also the state – for good and for bad.

There is no need to rehearse just how appropriate ICT systems are for the capture, processing, storage, organisation and presentation of data and information. However, this underlines even more strongly the crucial question just indica-

ted: ICT's double potential for control and freedom. Total control by the state is almost impossible to achieve – the internet and mobile/wireless networks are simply too vast and "alive" for the state to be able to block all unwanted information. In addition, the availability of technological tricks for avoiding censorship is almost infinite. Thus, ICT does empower citizens, even though some governments (and companies) try to interfere with the free flow of information. But, on the other hand – is it not also true that many people are kept on electronic leash in today's world, never able to get away from social networks, work, government institutions and commercial interests? And what about digital footprints and mobile phones revealing people's exact positions? When misused, such information can obviously interfere with civic and personal rights and freedom.

Democracy and ICT are, by themselves, complex phenomena each in their own right. Conceptualising them jointly is even more intricate. We hope our readers will be challenged and stimulated by the attempts here presented.

Uppsala and Kampala, March 2009

Note

[1] The programme of the conference as it actually took place is found at the end of the volume.

What Is New about New Technologies?

Helen Belcastro

The focus of this conference and paper is ICT – *information and communication technology* – and its possibilities to strengthen democracy and empowerment.

We tend to have short memories and to forget that what is all around us has not always been there. Following the introduction of privately run Internet Service Providers in the 1980s, the Internet expanded into popular use in the mid 1990s, and has since had a dramatic impact on culture and commerce.

ICT entails both immense possibilities and challenges. Globally, huge investments are made in ICT as an undisputed and essential component of almost all activities – state and corporate – and it is also an integral part of international development cooperation.

The over-all objective of Swedish development cooperation is to help create conditions that enable the poor to improve their lives. Poverty includes, in addition to economic poverty and lack of physical resources, also lack of information, possibilities and power.

Access to information, knowledge and power are essential to the realisation of democracy, and for the possibilities of ICT to empower people and to enhance and strengthen democratic participation. ICT does not differ from other global public goods, where access is determined by resources, intent and power.

Though no technology is inherently good or bad, it is probable that the use and existence of any prevailing technology will reflect the ideology of a society's dominant power structures – economic, political – as well as contribute to the very shaping of society. In sustainable economic and social development, ICT is a powerful tool, and for democratic development it poses both challenges and opportunities.

Conceptual definitions

For the sake of creating a common conceptual starting point, I would like to suggest some definitions of ICT and ICT for development.

ICT

ICT could broadly be defined as "technology used to process information and aid communications". More specifically, by new ICT we usually mean electronic information-processing technologies such as computers, mobile phones, the Internet and other wireless communications, networks, broadband. ICT also includes scanners, global positioning systems (GPS), internet-based radio and TV, as well as hybrid solutions, combining new and traditional media technologies, such as radio, TV, video and fixed-line telecommunications. In this paper, I will focus mainly on the new technologies, ie computers, mobile phones and the Internet.

ICT for Development

ICT4D – *information and communication technology for development* – concerns technology for the empowerment of people and society. It is about people-centred technology rather than technology-centred people. Effectively applied ICT is a tool that enables people to improve their lives. It is people and the context we live in that should be the determining factors in the application of technology – and not the other way around. ICT4D, therefore, should relate to already existing needs and patterns of communication to be effective.

ICT4D also stresses the use of a contextually relevant content and so called appropriate and sustainable technology, including free and open source software, to ensure real access (bridges.org 2005). However, real access depends on physical infrastructure, policy, regulatory, institutional and legislative frameworks, including traditional, national and international law. And it is influenced by such factors as religion, gender patterns, language, culture, tradition, ethnicity, access to or lack of resources, climate and geography.

It is important to bear in mind that our choice of technology in many ways shapes the organisation of society and influences its ideology. The rights-based approach constitutes the framework for both ICT4D and ICT for democracy. Principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability should thus be guiding the deployment of technology, as should the right to access to information and freedom of speech.

I will discuss three levels of ICT in democratic processes: ICT within government (so called e-Government), ICT in the interface between government and citizens (so called e-Governance), and ICT for the empowerment of citizens and civil society.

e-Government

e-Government can, in a narrow sense, be defined as electronic administration, where ICT mainly functions as a tool for more efficient administration and flows of information within government at all levels, ie, administrative systems and processes that handle, store and distribute internal information (within government units). In this sense, e-administration facilitates service to citizens by

- offering information via government web pages;
- facilitating access to government services (including, for instance, the possibility to make tax payments online);
- the development of depersonalised services which reduce the risk for corruption.

However, e-Government can also include the national ICT policy of a country, and the infrastructure, ie, the regulatory and legislative framework for the ICT sector. It may also entail more efficient registration of state employees, of citizens, as well as the aggregation and centralisation of facts and statistics for planning purposes.

Increased birth registration, of people in general and of girls in particular, increases both women's and men's possibilities to attain documents of identification, thus making it possible for them to participate in general elections, receive credits and loans, buy, own and inherit property – in short, enjoy their political and civil rights.

At the same time, though, increased government control by means of ICT may also lead to reduced freedom for the individual. We see this, for instance, in the context of the anti-terror legislation, which has given authorities extended power and possibilities for surveillance and control in the international arena.

The importance of rule of law in a globalised information society cannot be over-emphasised. e-Government may strengthen the rule of law, increase the confidence of citizens in the state, and in addition counter corruption through increased efficiency and transparency. But this requires continued capacity-building and monitoring from different actors and stakeholders in development cooperation.

ICT is a tool for strengthened democracy – but the combination of a strong state and a powerful tool calls for caution. There is always the risk that ICT will be used as a tool for propaganda, disinformation and control. Attention must also be paid to issues of personal integrity in connection with intensified flows and exchanges of information between government authorities, as well as between private actors using the Internet as a platform.

ICT may increase efficiency, accountability and transparency, and in addition counter corruption through increased flows of information. This may lead to improved interaction and communication within government and also between government and citizens.

Still, the aspects of e-Government mentioned so far, focus on user influence – and on citizens as consumers of information and service, rather than on citizens as agents, with increased political influence.

e-Governance

I use the term e-Governance to describe the interface between government and citizens, including increased citizen participation and political influence. This entails a strategic and conscious use of ICT for the purpose of enhancing democratic participation in addition to providing services. Examples of this are:
* enhanced communication between government, parliamentarians and citizens;
* electronic publication of proposed bills and legislation, using the web and text messaging in order to enable feedback from citizens;
* electronic election systems;
* deployment of community information centres.

e-Governance may also include citizens and civil society's use of ICT to influence opinion and political decision processes.

ICT for empowerment

In addition to enhancing communication between government and society, ICT creates new and improved possibilities for horizontal communication and networking, between individuals, civil society and other groups. Today, ICT is a prerequisite for effective communication, networking and mobilisation. It creates improved conditions for influencing opinion, independently of and outside the control of the traditional nation state, locally and globally. Furthermore, ICT is used by social movements for horizontal networking, to mould opinion, mobilise politically, to debate and protest. ICT can be used for reporting human rights violations, and for monitoring during election processes, so called *sousveillance*, as well as for providing important official and unofficial information in conflict situations.

In addition, the Internet provides unique possibilities for individuals, organisations and media for low-cost and autonomous publication, independent of official media channels. It has become possible for users and producers to bypass

traditional and official channels of information and communication. This is particularly important in contexts where access to independent media and freedom of expression is limited.

Where access to computers and internet is limited, internet can still play an intermediary role; information to and from a connected computer can be disseminated via mobile phones and via 'traditional' media, such as, radio, TV, newspapers and notice boards.

Mobiles

The rapid and wide spread of affordable mobile telephony in developing countries points to the role of mobiles as a digital bridge and a new mass medium.

Mobile phones, with their lower cost and broader accessibility as compared to traditional phones, create possibilities for enhanced information and productivity among the rural populations, as well as among small entrepreneurs in the informal sector in large cities in developing countries. This in turn affects their financial situations and indirectly increases their capacity to act and participate in democratic processes, as 'empowered' citizens.

The innovative use of mobile phones for film and photo documentation, and the use of text messages for networking and mobilisation, are important aspects of ICT in democratic processes. They point to new ICTs as important tools which strengthen freedom of expression and the right to information. There are examples of situations and regions where the Internet, or selected sites and mobile networks, have been shut down for political reasons. On the other hand, examples of the use of ICT for citizen mobilization and networking are equally numerous: the Kenya election in December 2007, Belarus 2006, Sudanese protestors in Cairo 2005-6, Ethiopia 2005, the Ukraine 2004 – and in 2001, when text messages helped topple the Philippine government by directing 700,000 demonstrators to the People Power Shrine to demand the resignation of President Estrada (Sida 2007; Wikipedia 2008).

What is new with ICT?

The rapid spread of ICT has created tremendous opportunities by making information instantly available, at no or low cost. It can be used to seek, receive, create and impart information and ideas by anyone, at any time and for any purpose.

No one and everyone is in control of the content of the Internet. The global context enters the local and vice versa. With the Internet we are exposed to new ideas and similarly export our own ideas into a global forum.

We can access information about issues which may be considered taboo and sensitive in a local context, such as important health issues, birth control and information on sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV.

However, in relation to local and personal matters being globally exposed, questions of personal integrity must be considered. Personal photos and videos on social network web sites and services, such as *Facebook* and *YouTube* may be great platforms for networking, sharing entertainment and political documentation. At the same time, there is a risk for abuse of published information and material, not least in relation to young children and ICT, and for dissemination of disinformation and hate messages. These phenomena were not invented by ICT, but broad access to the new media makes communication more effective, and thus potentially more damaging.

Through ICT, the media user is transformed from passive to active user, publisher and producer. We choose what to see and when to see. More importantly, the users create the content, invent new uses and develop new applications which in turn invent and give rise to new technology.

The innovative use of the media has created new forms of citizen journalism, to a degree unprecedented in history, such as the Wikipedia phenomenon, blogs, and discussion groups and communities.

The Internet has also given rise to a new kind of individualism and transient engagements in single-issue groups and movements. With ICT, these movements can easily be established and quickly gain strength. However, our loyalties on the web change quickly, and the endurance of global collective action depends on our mood, limitations and focus. The speed of information and communication also affects the quality of discourse and may have implications for the conducting and development of democratic processes.

In significant ways, due to economic, political and cultural globalisation, ICT also affects the independence of nation-states and their power to influence. Vast investments can be transferred from one continent to another, literally at the push of a button. Global communication ignores physical borders and is unbound by national territories.

The increased speed and quantity of information and communication can at the same time lead to fragmentation of discourse and debate. Thus, internet literacy demands focusing, screening and selection skills for critical reading, both at individual and social levels. We must ask ourselves: what is relevant, what and whom can be trusted?

ICT may also intensify existing biases in the distribution of knowledge and information and further reduce participation by distanced and marginalised voices.

Who is in and who is out? Who has the privilege of interpretation and screening? This has always been an important issue in regard to media, but the vast impact of ICT makes the question even more central. It leads to an increasingly important role for knowledge and information intermediaries who screen, collect, structure and package information. In a way, we may actually be going from an information society to a recommendation society. The importance of trust in this context cannot be over-emphasised.

ICT strengthens the possibilities of actually turning information and knowledge into global public goods – which brings us to the discourse on intellectual property rights and the global knowledge commons, somewhat of a frontier of cyberspace and internet governance, which we will need to get back to in future discussions.

New social movements

The new social movements, "distance movements", such as the so-called anti-globalisation or alter-globalisation movement, exist regardless of physical boundaries. They result from and depend on the new ICT networking possibilities. They use ICT to mobilise and to network, often also for the purpose of organising physical meetings. ICT makes this global social interaction possible – and it raises many questions:

- Are these movements replacing the old popular movements?
- Does cultural globalisation, intensified by the Internet, turn the focus of the young away from their regional contexts, thus reducing local political and social involvement?
- Is the individualised use and activity of the internet counteractive to collective social action?
- What does this imply for the impact and formation of civil society?
- Considering its potential as described above, could ICT take on the role of a Trojan horse for democracy and empowerment in general, and for development cooperation in particular, particularly in authoritarian contexts where freedom of expression is limited?
- ICT is deployed globally to a vast extent and also in development cooperation, but are we aware of its democratic potential?
- Do such factors as the Anglophone dominance of the Internet, and the development of social networking mainly in a Northern cultural context affect possibilities for ICT to empower the global South?
- In the future, will virtual meetings have to replace physical encounters also for reasons of energy saving?

References

bridges.org, 2005. The Real Access / Real Impact framework for improving the way that ICT is used in development – Concept note. URL http://www.bridges.org/files/active/0/RealAccess_concept_FINAL_26Dec05.pdf

Sida, 2007. *The innovative use of mobile applications in the Philippines – lessons for Africa*, Stockholm: Sida.

Wikipedia, 2008. Text-messaging. URL http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text_messaging

New Social Movements
in the Network Society:
Implications for Democratic Processes

Sasha Costanza-Chock

This article will discuss the implications of social movement use of *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs) for democratic processes. I will begin with a few notes on terminology, then discuss highlights of recent research on social movement ICT use, and end with some key questions about access inequality as well as recommendations for researchers and funders.

Terminology

First of all, the terms: I will use Manuel Castells' (1997, p 3) umbrella definition of *social movements*: "purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society." This allows us to look at collective action without becoming caught up in the specific organizational forms of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Social Movement Organizations (SMOs), spontaneous forms of mass action, and so on.

Second, the term 'ICT' is often used as a synonym for 'internet;' and the term 'internet' often assumes a networked personal computer (PC) as the interface device. However, there are many ICTs that predate and exist concurrently with the internet, and I argue that social movement ICT use is characterized by pervasive *multimodality* across media platforms. This means that it makes little sense to look only at internet use, since in practice social movement actors combine technologies and techniques, use media tools together in unexpected ways, and remix material from one platform to the next. In addition, it is of increasing importance to look at non-PC forms of internet access, especially *mobile phones*.

As for *democracy,* there is no room here for a serious discussion of the term, but it is worth mentioning at the outset that I will not limit the conversation to top-down 'e-Government' initiatives. Rather, I will discuss the rich field of social movement communication activity and the ways that ICTs are deployed by movements as tools in the coordination, amplification, and circulation of their struggles.

ICT tools and practices

There is by now a growing literature that describes how social movements use ICTs in general and the internet specifically; see eg Castells and Sey (2004), Downing (2001), Dyer-Witheford (1999), Juris (2005), and Kidd (2003). In 2003, I published a typology of the *repertoire of electronic contention*, or social movement internet use (Costanza-Chock 2003), that was then remixed by media activist and web designer John Emerson into the much more legible "Introduction to Activism on the Internet." Our categories included *self-representation; independent media; research; outreach; lobbying; fund-raising; tactical communication;* and *direct action (electronic civil disobedience*); examples are available online at http://www.backspace.com/action. More recently, with Manuel Castells, I worked on an analytical note that reviews the current tools and practices of *horizontal communication* (many-to-many media) as deployed by social movements around the world (Costanza-Chock 2006). Our key findings can be summarized as follows:

- There is extreme *access asymmetry* to communication tools and skills both within and between social movement organizations. This is true both in the global North and South.
- There is widespread *multimodality* (cross-media use) in social movement communication practices.
- Social movements all over the world are actively using ICTs across all media including *audio, video, mobile, social networking sites,* and *games*.
- The biggest impacts of ICT use often come via *agenda setting* for the broadcast media.
- New ICT tools and practices *circulate* through networked movements via key events (major mobilizations), tech-activist networks, face-to-face places (like hacklabs), online spaces, and recorded resources like toolkits and how-to materials.

There is no space here to delve deeply into each point. I will attempt to summarize our findings with respect to *audio*, *mobile phones*, and *social networking sites,* since the first two are the most widespread tools in the context of the developing world,

while the last raises key questions about the dangers of corporate hegemony in the new media space.

Audio

Of all ICTs, radio has the longest history. From Bolivian miners' radio (O'Conner 2004) to the first pirate station in the USA, which was linked to the Black Power movement (Tyson 1999); from the struggle for civil rights in the US South (Ward 2004) to international feminist radio collective FIRE, radio has always been a core tool of movement communication (Soley 1999). Social movement based radio played a key role in the Algerian national liberation struggle, the Berkeley counterculture in the US, and the Italian labor and social struggles of the 1970s, to name but a few important moments (Downing 2001). Today, radio remains the primary news source for the majority of the world's poor. This is true everywhere but most marked in parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, particularly where illiteracy rates are high, and where there are relatively small communities of indigenous language speakers who are marginalized from national-language media (Id21 2005).

Audio may also be the best example of *multimodality* in social movement communication, since the rise of the net combined with the spread of inexpensive high quality audio recorders leads not to a shift away from radio but rather to its amplification in importance. The widespread adoption of portable digital music players, especially the iPod, feeds the popularity of blogs built around audio recordings, or podcasts. By April 2005, about 6 million American adults had downloaded a podcast onto their portable music device (Madden 2005). Audio recordings are also circulated online via *Peer to Peer* (P2P) filesharing and live streaming, direct downloads (http or ftp), and transmission via chat clients. By 2006, many social movements and movement-based radio stations transmit audio through all of these channels directly to people who listen online, while they continue to use the net to share material for rebroadcast on AM or FM radio stations. Examples include *Kill Radio* in Los Angeles (http://killradio.org) and *Radio Insurgente*, station of the EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) in Chiapas that is rebroadcast locally by pirate radios throughout the Americas (http://radioinsurgente.org). Also notable is the growth of content exchange and distribution networks that gather material from a large number of movement based radio producers, reporting from all corners of the Earth, then assemble this content into programming to be sent out for broadcast by network affiliates. Two important examples include *Free Speech Radio News* (http://fsrn.org), based in the US but with international reach, and the *Latin American Association of Radio-*

phonic Education (ALER), which distributes programming across the hemisphere via satellite and internet with 8 uplinks, 187 satellite receivers, and 117 affiliates (http://aler.org.ec).

There is nothing inherently anti-authoritarian about multimodal social movement communication. For example, in 2006 the FCC (*Federal Communications Commission*) noted heavy rebroadcasting of popular right-wing talk radio host Howard Stern's show, legally available via satellite radio provider Sirius but illegally picked up and retransmitted by pirate stations across the USA (Chmielewski 2006). Right-wing social movement use of audio is by no means confined to the United States. Key examples from older horizontal ICTs include the role of audio cassettes in propagating a fundamentalist brand of Islam in the lead up to the Iranian revolution (Sreberny and Mohammadi 1994), and the role of *Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) in inciting and organizing genocidal violence by naming and locating targeted families in Rwanda (Des Forges 2002).

From these and many other examples we can confidently say that new forms of networked audio, including podcasts as well as multimodal innovations like web audio streams rebroadcast via FM, are currently spreading through social movement networks worldwide. We will now shift focus from the new hybrid forms of one of the 'oldest' ICTs (radio) to social movement appropriation of one of the newest ICTs: mobile phones.

Mobile phones

As of January 2008, "there are about 3.2 billion subscribers of mobile phones in the world. Since small children are not users (yet) and in poor countries families and villages usually work with one phone, even accounting for inequality in access, this represents a dramatic expansion of the communication capability distributed in the developing world" (Castells, personal communication, 2.1.2008). Mobile phones are *the* key ICT for the 2/3 world (the global South and marginalized populations within the North). Of course, the vast majority of mobile communication takes place within the personal network of family and friends. The most widespread and significant impacts of the spread of mobile phones may well be the changes in everyday life practices, youth culture, and persistent contact with friendship and family networks described in recent analyses by Ito, Okabe, and Matsuda (2005) and Castells, Fernández-Ardévol, Qiu, and Sey (2007, pp 77-126). However, our task is to examine the implications for democratic processes.

Although there are a number of government initiatives that attempt to use mobile phones to enhance democracy, most of the interesting recent developments are to be found in mobile appropriation by NGOs and social movement organi-

zations. In fact, Mallalieu's (2007) summary of existing Latin American m(obile)-government initiatives finds that they have an overwhelming failure rate of up to 85% Mallalieu 2007, pp 17-20). In addition, Galperin and Mariscal (2007, p 16) find that low-income users in Latin America and the Caribbean make practically no use at all of government services via mobile, even where such services are available (2007). However, civil society organizations have adopted and modified mobile technologies to their full range of activities, including monitoring the powerful, fundraising, information and cultural production, and tactical use during mass mobilization and direct action.

As *monitoring* tools, mobile phones are an important addition to movements' tactical arsenal. Human rights abuses are now frequently documented in photographs and video clips shot on mobile phones, then circulated by human rights organizations such as *Amnesty International* and *Witness.org*. The transnational visibility of video taken with mobile phones in Burma during the government crackdown on the Saffron Revolution is a recent high-profile example.

Examples of police abuse caught on mobile phone have been widely circulated via phone, internet, and in the mass media in Egypt, Greece, Albania, and the United States, among many other places (see http://mobileactive.org). The Albanian youth movement *Mjaft!* uses cell phones as a monitoring system to document police abuse, government meetings, and labor events, as well as to send imagery directly to mass media. At the same time, they use mobile phones as a mobilization tool to organize members into rapid response actions (Murray 2008).

Another interesting recent development is the launch of point-of-purchase company information for consumer activism. Gay and lesbian advocacy organization *Human Rights Campaign* recently announced an SMS "buyers' guide" that allows socially conscious consumers to check on firms' ratings in the *Corporate Equality Index*, where companies are reviewed based on their policies of support for gay and lesbian rights (see http://www.hrc.org/issues/ceihome.asp).

In terms of *fund-raising,* the ability to send funds via SMS has opened the door to a new general strategy by civil society organizations, CSOs. For example, the organization *United Way* aired a television ad against child obesity during the Superbowl (the most viewed annual television event in the US), with a plea for viewers to send $5 via SMS by texting "FIT" to UNITED, or 864833 (Mobile Accord 2008).

Mobile phones also serve as a platform for *cultural production and distribution* by marginalized groups of people. For example, cultural workers *Zexe.net* have helped create collective mobile blogs by motorcycle delivery boys in São Paolo, migrant Nicaraguan agricultural workers in Costa Rica, and sex workers in Spain (http://zexe.net).

In part inspired by Zexe's work, researchers at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication are currently developing a project called *Mobile Voices,* in partnership with community based organization *Institute for Popular Education of Southern California.* This is meant to be a shared platform for first-generation immigrants in Los Angeles to document their lives in images, text, and audio clips. The project is designed in a participatory process with day laborers, who will be the first users (see http://mobilevoices.net). In a similar example in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, there is now a popular community-based SMS news feed called *Alô Cidadão!* (Hello Citizen, see http://mobilefest.com.br).

Another important form of cultural production facilitated by mobile telephony is political jokes. Political humor is one of the key forms of everyday resistance available to most people, especially (but not only) in the context of societies with heavy political censorship of mass media channels. For example, widespread circulation of political humor via SMS has been reported in Iran, Zimbabwe, and the Philippines. The corruption scandal that rocked the administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was widely spread via ringtones, in fact becoming the most downloaded ringtone in Philippine history (Bogle 2006 and below).

Mobilization and tactical use of mobile phones by social movements is one of the most important developments with respect to direct democracy. One popular meme (unit of cultural ideas and symbols) that describes this phenomenon is *smart mobs* (Rheingold 2006). Although the term perhaps undermines the complex interplay of social movement organizational activity, cultural repertoires of contention, spontaneity, and ICTs, it is undeniable that mobile phones have been used repeatedly, in a range of political and cultural contexts around the world, to help coordinate large scale mobilizations with important political consequences.

Frequently cited examples include the 2004 Spanish general election, where younger voters used SMS to mobilize opinion against the incumbent party's misinformation about the Madrid bombings, leading to an upset victory of the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*; the South Korean presidential election where, again, younger voters used SMS to get out the vote and elect center-left candidate Roh Moo-Hyun over the center-right opposition; and the Philippines, first with the TXTpower movement against Estrada, later the already mentioned corruption scandal against Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the famous "Hello Garci" ringtones (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, and Sey 2004, pp 185-214; Ramey 2007).

Tactical use of mobile phones by activists includes not only the appropriation of existing services like SMS, but also the development of new applications both server-side and on the handset. For example, in the context of the mobilizations against the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, activists

developed an application called *Txtmob*. Txtmob allows for real-time mass or group text alerts, and anarchist affinity groups used it to keep up-to-date on the position of police forces and opportunities for roving direct actions. The software was released to the public and has now been used by a wide range of organizations. In Los Angeles, the *Frente Contra Las Redadas* (Front Against the Raids) presently maintains a Txtmob list to distribute alerts about workplace raids and checkpoints by officers from the Department of Homeland Security.

Finally, beyond case studies and anecdotal observations, scholars are beginning to gather more extensive information about civil society use of mobile phones. MobileActive, in partnership with the UN Foundation and the Vodafone Group Foundation, recently conducted an international survey of mobile phone use by NGOs. Of 560 respondents, they found that 86 percent use mobile phones, with those in Africa and Asia more likely to be mobile users. Respondents reported that the positive benefits of mobile phones include: "… time savings (95 percent); the ability to quickly mobilize or organize individuals (91 percent); reaching audiences that were previously difficult or impossible to reach (74 percent); the ability to transmit data more quickly and accurately (67 percent); and the ability to gather data more quickly and accurately (59 percent)." (Kinkade and Verclas 2008, p 7.)

Of course, civil society appropriation of mobile phones is a classic double-edged sword, since increased mobile activism opens the door to heightened levels of surveillance by state and corporate actors. Mobile data, gathered by network operators and easily accessed by agents of the state, can provide a fine-grained picture of activist networks, including minute-by-minute information on who communicates with whom, what the central nodes of the activist network are, even the location of phones (and their users) mapped through time and space via cell tower triangulation or GPS. State intelligence agencies can also use handsets as remote recording devices, and they can be activated without the awareness of the person carrying the device. Apparently, in the US, it is currently legal for the state to do this without a warrant (McCullagh 2006). State and corporate data mining of cell phone records is probably a more serious problem for most activists.

In general, besides problems of direct surveillance and repression of activists, mobile phone 'm-governance' initiatives will by and large be developed within, and consequently tend to enhance, existing systems of political rule. Since most current systems of political rule are either authoritarian states or representative liberal democracies with collapsing participation rates, we can expect m-governance initiatives to be top-down affairs with limited 'strong interactive democracy.' The current model for m-governance is the opinion poll, rather than the community

assembly. Finally, in terms of multimedia content, mobile service providers are successfully promoting walled-gardens where users' access to content is mostly limited to channels produced by the major media firms.

Social network sites

Social movements are also appropriating social network sites (SNS). In the US, the first SNS to receive wide attention was Friendster, soon followed by MySpace, Facebook, and a host of others (http://friendster.com; http://myspace.com; http://facebook.net). Social movement organizations have appropriated these spaces since the beginning. For example, MySpace was originally marketed as a site for independent musicians to promote their music and connect with fans, but soon became the most popular SNS for young people in the USA. By 2006, a wide spectrum of activist networks and social movement organizations including anarchists, vegans, environmentalists, and feminists all had MySpace profiles: see http://myspace.com/infoshopdotorg (anarchist infoshop); http://myspace.com.gpus (Greenpeace), and http://www.myspace.com/feminists, for example. Activists use SNS as tools to announce meetings, actions, and events, distribute movement media (especially photos and audio, but increasingly including video clips), and to reach out to young internet savvy demographics (Jesella 2006). Some SNS focus explicitly on facilitating face-to-face meetings based on shared interests. The earliest example that reached widespread mass media awareness in the US took place in 2004, when Howard Dean's campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination recognized that MeetUp and other social networking tools could help their base to self-organize during the campaign (Sey and Castells 2004). The use of MeetUp emerged first from the base of Dean supporters and was then encouraged and fostered by campaign leadership (Trippi 2004). This case, and of course the more recent net savvy tactics of the Obama campaign, illustrate how horizontal communication practices can restructure and revitalize vertical political organizational forms.

By 2008, major corporations have taken over the hegemonic 'social media' platforms, even as these platforms are now used extensively by social movements. On the one hand, we can see this as the appropriation of 'bottom-up' innovations in social media practices by the cultural industry; on the other, we might think of it as a paradigm shift produced by net users whose social media practices (including self-publishing, sharing, remixing, and collaborative information production) have massively infiltrated and (to some extent) displaced the old top-down model of the cultural industries. Social movement use of corporate SNS poses a number of dangers, namely *exploitation, surveillance, censorship,* and *lack of accountability.*

Media activists have begun to grapple with these problems: in a recent edition of *Mute magazine*, Dmytri Kleiner and Brian Wyrick (2007, p 10) denounce Web 2.0 as "a venture capitalist's paradise where investors pocket the value produced by unpaid users, ride on the technical innovations of the free software movement, and kill off the decentralizing potential of peer-to-peer production."

Andrew Lowenthal of *Engage Media* dissects the business model of Web 2.0 media darlings like YouTube and MySpace (Lowenthal 2007): "One of the key business models for these "Web 2.0" start ups has been the basic idea of providing an infrastructure and technology for users and then selling those eyes to advertisers and the contributor community to a larger company – it happened with Flickr, YouTube, MySpace and more. There is a huge rush of companies trying to create the next big site to bring in the people and make their pot of gold. Users need to become far more savvy as to the imbalance in power that is being generated and who they are helping make millionaires."

Moving from critique to action, Lowenthal is part of the team responsible for producing *Plumi*, a customized version of the Free/Open Source Software content management system Plone, tailored to the needs of video activists (http://plumi. net). This is part of a broader recognition by networked tech-activists that the construction of autonomous infrastructure must continue despite the current domination of online cultural infrastructure by corporate providers. The rise of Web 2.0 firms also forces media activists to abandon once and for all the discourse of technotopia or 'digital democracy,' and return to the long, difficult, but ultimately crucial and rewarding work of engaging with social movements of the marginalized base.

Access inequality

Many social movement ICT practices and innovations are exciting, and in some cases provide glimmers of hope for a renewal of democracy, both as a formal system and as a participatory process. However, the picture remains incomplete if we look only at success stories and fail to focus on the deep inequality of *access* to ICT tools and skills. While internet usage is in general becoming more widespread, access remains deeply structured along existing lines of social inequality. Income, gender, geography (especially urban/rural location), race/ethnicity, level of education, age – all continue to be significant predictors of ICT access and skill levels (Tolbert and Mossberger 2006).

For example, in the United States, an October 2003 Census Bureau survey of 57,000 households found that broadband access was 40.4 percent in urban areas

but 24.7 percent in rural areas. Asian American, White, Black, and Latino households had broadband access at 34.2, 25.7, 14.2 and 12.6 percent, respectively (US Department of Commerce 2004, 23). It is true that by 2008, survey data from Pew indicated that some forms of access inequality had been reduced, with White, Black, and Latino households reporting broadband at home at rates of 57, 43, and 56 percent, respectively. However, the largest ICT divide – that between the wealthy and the poor – remains in place. In fact, it may be growing worse: broadband access among low-income households in the USA (households with an annual income of $20,000 or less) peaked at 28 percent in March 2007 and actually *declined* to 25 percent by April 2008 (Horrigan 2008, p 3).

Global figures of access inequality are much starker. There are somewhere near 1.5 billion internet users in 2008; however, these users are unevenly distributed. *International Telecommunications Union* (ITU) data from 2007 shows just 5.3 percent of the world's population with broadband subscriptions, and only one-fifth (20 percent) of the world's population with any form of internet access at all. At the beginning of 2007, "just over 10 percent of the world's population in developing countries were using the Internet, compared to close to 60 percent in the developed world" (ITU 2008). Unsurprisingly, broadband internet access is concentrated almost exclusively in the world's wealthiest countries, or in the hands of local elites in major urban areas in middle income and poor countries. For example, in 2007 the African continent had just 0.2 broadband subscribers per 100 people, compared to 3.4 subscribers per 100 people in Asia, 4.2 in Brazil, 14 in the EU, and 21 in the USA (*ibid*). Ubiquitous internet access, let alone broadband access, remains a distant dream in almost all parts of the world.

Access inequality and social movements

Extreme ICT access inequality has serious implications for the theory and practice of democracy, and for the possibilities of an emergent global civil society (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2001). ICTs may indeed be key tools for transnational civil society mobilization (Keck and Sikkink 1998), but use patterns within social movement networks follow broader lines of connectivity and exclusion. In general, this means that movement organizations connected to the core geographical zones of the globalised economy enjoy greater access to communication tools and skills, have more experience with networked communication, and are more likely to integrate ICTs into their strategies, tactics, and funding (Association for Progressive Communications 2001). The opposite is true of movement organizations on the peripheries, especially in the global South and in rural areas. Key points from research on the implications of connectivity inequality include:

- *Poor-led movements are not well connected, either in the North or South.* For example, a recent study of Latin American indigenous movements found that when they are connected to the net at all, it is primarily to use only e-mail; furthermore, this e-mail use is often limited to movement leaders at the national or regional level (León, Burch, and Tamayo 2005). While poor-led movements in the global North may be somewhat more connected than their Southern counterparts, their internet use still remains largely limited to organizational staff. For example, in our ongoing investigation of ICT use by low-wage immigrant workers' organizations in Los Angeles we find that, while organizational staff are often connected via broadband access in their offices, the membership base of workers use mobile phones but not computers (Costanza-Chock 2008).

- *Networked movements may draw more resources, but also often marginalize local actors.* One recent study examined the global campaign to ban land mines. While this campaign is often painted as a successful example of internet-enabled transnational action, local organizations and activists in the countries most affected by land mines were often sidelined, cut out of strategic decisions, and passed over when it came to time for resource allocation, as a result of their lack of connectivity (Beier 2004). This example is part of a broader pattern that operates across labor, environmental, feminist, anti-war, and other social movements.

- *High levels of general connectivity do not necessarily correlate with strong democracy, let alone produce it.* For example, a study by George (2005) that compared internet activism in Malaysia and Singapore found that the latter country has a much higher rate of broadband penetration, but the former has a richer and more vibrant culture of online activism. The author explains the difference by pointing to strong social movement networks that predate the net in Malaysia, compared to a weak movement culture and high levels of political repression in Singapore.

None of this is to suggest that access inequality makes it impossible for social movements to appropriate ICTs in powerful and sometimes very effective ways. Quite the contrary: as we have seen, social movements everywhere not only use ICTs but also actively combine, repurpose, and develop new ICT tools and practices in their search for tactical innovation. However, radical access inequality to ICT tools and skills between social movement actors must be taken seriously. In what ways are the promising possibilities of local and global civil society undermined by the new landscapes of ICT access inequality? What can be done to keep the

'new media' from becoming just another space dominated by the same hegemonic voices as broadcast media? If we fail to engage these questions, at the end of the day we may find that the main impact of new ICTs has been to reinforce existing structural inequalities, with the most-connected actors able to gain recognition, attract resources, and shape agendas as never before, while the most marginalized remain relegated to an ever-deeper chasm of on- and offline invisibility.

Conclusions

I have attempted to provide a broad overview of some recent developments in the use of ICTs by networked social movements. Key points that emerge from examining social movement ICT activity include the multimodality of communication practice, the rapid adoption and in some cases innovation in new tools and software, and the creative combinations of old and new communication tools. Also critical is the differential levels of access to various communication technologies both within and between social movement organizations and networks. Based on these observations, I will conclude with a few key recommendations for researchers and grant-makers in the field of ICT for Development

- Access inequality remains a major concern. We should develop more sophisticated studies of ICT access, including a robust measure of ICT access inequality – a version of the Gini coefficient for ICT access. A shared model of ICT access inequality would help us evaluate the distributional impacts of ICT programs and policies.

- We need to develop good accountability mechanisms for ICT4D (ICT for development) projects, including participatory project design and evaluation. Some good examples of participatory research approaches include the *Communication for Social Change Consortium* (http://communicationforsocialchange. org) and the *Social Science Research Council's Collaborative Grants in Media and Communications* (http://programs.ssrc.org/media/collaborative_grants/).

- More and more people, even those with very little income, are getting access to mobile phones. Civil society organizations should develop mobile strategies, and funders should help them do so. However, mobile phones, like all ICTs, can also be used by states and corporations to monitor and track civil society actors. What's more, there is no reason to think universal access to the mobile web will happen anytime in developed countries, let alone developing countries. Therefore, regulators, civil society, and development institutions need to intervene to shape policy in ways that will promote open and universal mobile access. For example, regulators should be encouraged to ensure open

mobile platforms for both software and content, rather than the current walled garden models. Also, public policy makers in developing countries need to focus attention on pro-poor mobile telephony policies rather than continue to regard mobile phones as luxury items. In Latin America, adoption of micro-prepay systems and per-second billing could shift the distribution of telephony costs off the poor and reduce their telephony costs at an average of 22 percent (Barrantes, Agüero, Galperin and Molinari 2007, p 21). Although it will be a difficult political struggle, a new kind of universal service policy should be developed, focused on mobile rather than fixed line telephony.

• At least in the USA, it has been easier for community based organizations to get money for computers and equipment than for staff to actually learn and train others in new media production and online activism. Researchers and funders should support training for community based organizations to be able to take better advantage of the new media arena.

Hopefully these remarks have provided some food for thought. I encourage future researchers and funders to take up these points and to help social movements gain access to ICTs, appropriate them for democratic purposes, and strategically use them to achieve social justice goals.

List of acronyms

ALER, Latin American Association of Radiophonic Education
CBO, Community Based Organization
CSO, Civil Society Organization
EZLN, Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacionál
FCC, Federal Communications Commission
GPS, Global Positioning System
ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforement
IDEPSCA, Institute for Popular Education of Southern California
ITU, International Telecommunictions Union
NGO, Non-Governmental Organization
PC, Personal Computer
P2P, Peer to Peer
RTLM, Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
SMO, Social Movement Organization
SMS, Short Message Service
SNS, Social Networking Site
SSRC, Social Science Research Council

UN, United Nations
US, United States

References

Anheier, Helmut, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor, 2001. Introducing global civil society, in Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society Yearbook*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 5–27.

Association for Progressive Communications, 2001. *APC Annual Report 2000*. Retrieved 3/25/2005 from http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/annreports/apc-annual-report-2000

Barrantes, Roxana, Aileen Agüero, Hernan Galperin and Andrea Molinari, 2007. *Affordability of mobile telephony services in Latin America*. Background paper for Mobile Opportunities: Poverty and Telephony Access in Latin America and the Carribbean, Lima: DIRSI - Diálogo Regional sobre Sociedad de la Información. Retrieved 2/3/2008 from http://arnic.info/Papers/RB-AA-HG-AM-affordability_mobiles_LatAm-2007.pdf

Beier, J Marshall, 2004. 'Emailed applications are preferred': ethical practices in mine action and the idea of global civil society, *Public Administration* 31.

Bogle, Bonnie, 2006. Did you get the one about the politician on your cell phone? *Mobile Active*. Retrieved 5.15.2007 from http://mobileactive.org/sms_jokes

Castells, Manuel, 1997. *The power of identity*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Castells, Manuel and Araba Sey, 2004. From Media Politics to Networked Politics: Internet and the Political Process, in Manuel Castells (ed), *The Network Society. A Comparative Perspective*, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

Castells, Manuel, Fernández-Ardévol, Qiu, Jack Linchuan and Araba Sey, 2007. *Mobile Communication and Society : A Global Perspective,* Cambridge, MA ; London: MIT Press.

Chmielewski, Dawn, 2006. Sirius Shock: Pirates Hit Howard Stern Show, *Los Angeles Times,* February 02, 2006: A-1.

Costanza-Chock, Sasha, 2003. Mapping the Repertoire of Electronic Contention, in Andrew Opel and Donnalyn Pompper (eds), *Representing Resistance: Media, Civil Disobedience and the Global Justice Movement*. NJ: Greenwood.

Costanza-Chock, Sasha, 2006, *Analytical note: Horizontal communication and social movements*. Research note for Manuel Castells, Los Angeles: Annenberg School for Communication.

Costanza-Chock, Sasha, 2008. *Migrant Voices: Communication for Social Change with Garment Workers and Day Laborers in Los Angeles,* Project report to Social Science Research Council.

Des Forges, Alison, 2002. Silencing the Voices of Hate in Rwanda, in Monroe Price and Mark Thompson (eds), *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights and the Management of Media Space*, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Downing, John, 2001. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements,* Thousand Oaks / London / New Delhi: Sage.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick, 1999. *Cyber-Marx : cycles and circuits of struggle in high-technology capitalism*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Galperin, Hernan and Judith Mariscal, 2007. *Poverty and Mobile Telephony in Latin America and the Caribbean,* Lima: DIRSI – Diálogo Regional sobre Sociedad de la Información.

George, Cherian, 2005. The internet's political impact and the penetration/participation paradox in Malaysia and Singapore, *Media, Culture and Society* 27:903-920.

Horrigan, John B, 2008. *Home Broadband Adoption 2008*, Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved 8/1/2008 from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband_2008.pdf

International Telecommunications Union, 2008. Data from ITU ICT statistics. Available online at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics.ict/

Id21, 2005. Voices for Change: Tuning in to Community Radio, *Insights*, November 2005.

Ito, Mizuko, Okabe, Daisuke and Misa Matsuda, 2005. *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life,* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Jesella, Kara, 2006. The Friendster Effect, *Alternet.* Retrieved 1/30/2006 from http://www.alternet.org/story/31103/

Juris, Jeffrey, 2005. The new digital media and activist networking within anticorporate globalization movements, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597:189-208.

Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink, 1998. *Activists beyond borders : advocacy networks in international politics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Kidd, Dorothy, 2003. Indymedia.org: A new communications commons, in Martha McCaughey and Michael Ayers (eds), *Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice*, New York: Routledge, pp 47-69.

Kinkade, Sheila and Katrin Verclas, 2008. Wireless Technology for Social Change: Trends in Mobile Use by NGOs. *Access to Communication Publication Series, Volume 2,* Washington, DC and Berkshire, UK: UN Foundation-Vodafone Group. Retrieved 5/24/2008 from http://www.unfoundation.org/vodafone/communications_publication_series.asp

Kleiner, Dmytri and Brian Wyrick, 2007. Info-Enclosure 2.0, in *Web 2.0: Man's Best Friendster?*, *Mute* vol, 24. Retrieved 2/1/2007 from http://www.metamute.org/Web-2.0-Mans-best-friendster/

León, Osvaldo, Sally Burch and Eduardo Tamayo, 2005. *Communication in Movement,* Quito: ALAI.

Lowenthal, Andrew, 2007. Free Media vs. Free Beer. Retrieved 5.10.2007 from http://www.transmission.cc/node/86

McCullagh, Declan, 2006. FBI Taps Cell Phone Mic as Eavesdropping Tool, *ZDNet News.* Retrieved 5.19.2007 from http://news.zdnet.com/2100-1035_22-6140191.html

Mallalieu, Kim, 2007. *Pro poor mobile capabilities: service offering in Latin America and the Caribbean,* Lima: DIRSI - Diálogo Regional sobre Sociedad de la Información.

Mobile Accord, 2008. Text Donations Have Arrived! *Mobile Accord.* Retrieved 2.6.2008 from http://blog.mobileaccord.com/2008/02/02/text-donations-have-arrived

Mossberger, Caroline J and Karen Tolbert, 2006. *New Inequality Frontier: Broadband Internet Access,* EPI Working Paper No, 275. Retrieved 5/7/2007 from: http://www.epinet.org/working-papers/wp275.pdf

Murray, Sarah, 2008. Boundaries blurred as campaigners go digital, *Financial Times Online,* January 24. Retrieved 1.25.2008 from http://www.ft.com/cms/s/c7cabf38-c946-11dc-9807-000077b07658.html

O'Connor, Alan, 2004. *Community Radio in Bolivia – The Miners' Radio Stations,* Mellen Press.

Madden, Mary 2005. Podcast Downloading. Pew Internet Project. Retrieved 1/27/2006 from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_podcasting.pdf

Ramey, Corinne, 2007. *Mobile Phones in Mass Organizing: A MobileActive White Paper,* Mobile Active. Retrieved 1.25.2008 http://mobileactive.org/mobiles-in-mass-organizing

Rheingold, Howard, 2006. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution.* Available online at http://www.smartmobs.com/book/

Sey, Araba and Manuel Castells, 2004. From Media Politics to Networked Politics: The Internet and the Political Process, in Manuel Castells (ed), *The Network Society : A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elger.

Soley, Lawrence C, 1999. *Free radio : electronic civil disobedience,* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Sreberny, Annabelle and Ali Mohammadi, 1994. *Small media, big revolution : communication, culture, and the Iranian revolution,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Trippi, Joe, 2004. *The revolution will not be televised : democracy, the Internet, and the overthrow of everything,* New York: ReganBooks.

Tyson, Timothy B, 1999. *Radio Free Dixie : Robert F. Williams & the roots of Black power,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

US Department of Commerce, 2004. *A Nation Online: Entering the Broadband Age,* Washington, DC: Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration. Retrieved 3/24/2006 from http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/anol/

Ward, Brian, 2004. *Radio and the struggle for civil rights in the South,* Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Note

Big Brother and Freedom of Expression

Robert Hårdh

The ability to express opinions freely is fundamental for a democratic system. Access to all-round information is crucial to citizens' ability to take a stance and make choices. In countries where the state controls the flow of information and where there are few alternatives to government-controlled media, support given to independent voices is of vital importance. Media are essential to foster diversity and pluralism and to combat nationalism, hatred and paranoia.

The Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (2007) has a long experience of working in countries with authoritarian regimes. We have recognised civil society as a key to democratic development, and have in our international work chosen to work specifically with local human rights organisations, independent media and cultural institutions. We work together with our local partners within our three programmes: *Rule of Law, Freedom of Expression* and *Non-Discrimination.* The aim is to safeguard the individual's right to know and to act upon his or her rights, as stated in the final document of the 1975 conference held in Helsinki on security and cooperation in Europe (*Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Final Act*).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has since the end of the 90s formed an important part of our *Freedom of Expression*-programme. Difficult times call for creative solutions, and the technological developments over the last two decades have certainly paved the way for innovative activities to supply people with other information than government propaganda.

In my text I start by providing the reader with the historical background and context of the Swedish Helsinki Committee. I then describe some of the challenges faced in our work and how we deal with them, before ending with some examples of how ICT is used as a tool in our work for democracy.

The Helsinki movement[1]

The early 1970s saw the start of a series of conferences on security and co-operation in Europe. At that time, the Eastern and Western powers had still not agreed on a peace agreement following the Second World War. Neither had the country borders, which had arisen *de facto* as a result of the war, been defined and agreed upon. After several years of hard negotiations, an agreement was signed in Helsinki in 1975. A total of 35 states in Europe (all except Albania), the USA and Canada agreed on the final wording. This document, known as the Helsinki Final Act (*Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Final Act*), explicitly states that respect for human rights is an essential factor for peace and friendly relations between states.

The year after the Helsinki conference, the Moscow Helsinki Group was established. Twelve men and women undertook, inside Russia, the task of reporting on the Soviet Union's violations of human rights. The initiative was the result of the publication of the Helsinki Final Act in Pravda, the state-controlled and leading newspaper of the Soviet Union. The human rights defenders now had the support of an international document, which the Soviet Union had pledged to follow. The Group's human rights reports were spread to all the states that had adhered to the document, including the Soviet Union itself. The members of the group were persecuted, imprisoned and exiled or sent to Siberia. However, the initiative was spreading. Over the next few years, national Helsinki Committees were formed in most Warsaw Pact countries. Poland's human rights defenders joined forces in what would later come to be known as Solidarity, while in Czechoslovakia, the famous Charter 77 was formed. Helsinki Watch (later Human Rights Watch) became the US member of the Helsinki family. Together, they fought for human rights on the international arena.

Established in 1982 as a politically and religiously independent non-governmental organisation, the main purpose of the Swedish Helsinki committee was to support vulnerable human rights activists behind the iron curtain, to draw attention to their persecution and demand the liberation and rights of those in prison. Sweden's policy of neutrality meant that representatives of the Swedish Helsinki Committee found it relatively easy to obtain visas to the Soviet Union and other Eastern countries. Large-scale opinion work now got underway. The committee made regular visits to the Eastern countries, in the company of Swedish parliamentarians, lawyers and prominent scientists, in order to work for change on a broad front. After each trip, the committee organised press conferences and wrote statements about the situation. And there was huge interest. People could no longer close their eyes to what was happening behind the iron curtain. The

Helsinki Committees' concerted efforts, both in the East and West, gradually began to yield results. It became increasingly difficult for the Soviet Union to maintain good relations with the Western powers without improving its behaviour in the human rights area.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Swedish Helsinki Committee gradually shifted its focus and working methods. The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the subsequent war in the 1990s compelled us to initiate large-scale work in the Balkans. The main aim of our work was to support the democratic forces that existed and create an environment in which more independent sources of information would be able to balance the official line.

Monitoring Sweden's fulfilment of its human rights obligations is an important part of our work. Sweden has not escaped the effects of the international decline of human rights resulting from the war on terror. Fundamental and absolute rights, like the prohibition on torture, are currently in danger of being cast aside when more powerful measures are taken in response to what is seen as a threat to national security. As an example, we have engaged in raising awareness of how the frequent proposals for increased use of coercive measures constitute an invasion of privacy. Information, such as personal data, is then exchanged between security services around the world without proper mechanisms to avoid abuses of power.

Big Brother – his fears and repressive actions

It is in a repressive regime's vital interest to control the people. In order to do so, the regime has to have power over the flow of information to people at all levels. State-controlled information is mainly used for indoctrination and propaganda. Alternative sources of information are often considered enemies of the state. Regardless of what kind of communication techniques are being used in order to reach out with alternative information to the population, authoritarian states usually aim at disturbing the production and distribution od such information. Each time has its methods – new technologies call for new inventive solutions from the regime. A cat and mouse game is created between the democratic forces and the government.

In principle there is no such thing as secure communication when dealing with authoritarian regimes – the security services' knowledge of the content can only be delayed.

Methods used by repressive governments to seize control over information can, for example, include the following (the list is by no means meant to be complete):

- criminalising meetings between more than a handful of people;
- criminalising or complicating the renting of places to meet;
- state monopoly of printing houses (with limited or no access for eg independent newspapers, or differentiated rates disfavouring non-state actors);
- state monopoly of distribution channels (with limited or no access for eg independent newspapers, or differentiated rates disfavouring non-state actors);
- not granting radio frequencies to alternative voices;
- criminalising satellite receivers;
- censorship; and
- applying various administrative rules, such as licensing and registration.

Governments and government officials also use libel charges against journalists, often resulting in jail sentences or fines high enough to force newspapers to shut down. Besides such "legal" methods, independent journalists are harassed, ill treated and denied access to events attended by high state officials, even if they are open to the public.

With the introduction of new techniques for disseminating information, the governments have been forced to "modernise" their methods to regain control. The methods of secret surveillance have become more sophisticated. Smaller and so-called intelligent microphones and cameras are used, not to mention methods to track and map communication via the Internet. Telephone tapping,[2] which in general includes e-mail and the Internet since the same infrastructure is used, is common practice in authoritarian states, and so is bugging[3] and camera surveillance. The surveillance equipment can be programmed to recognise certain voices, and there are also cameras that can identify persons in a crowd. TV and radio transmitters can be jammed just as the Internet, or specific web sites can be shut down through the Internet provider, which is often the state. Recently, a colleague of mine visited Turkmenistan, which is one of the most isolated totalitarian states in the world. In an official building he found a world map where Sweden simply did not exist – instead Norway had a long coastline along the Baltic Sea![4] That is a very concrete example of how a regime may withhold information from its people. Similar manipulations are, however, used at a large scale on the Internet with the help of large multinational companies.[5]

Another way of restricting access to the Internet is to use so-called shaping-practises, which means that the Internet provider deliberately slows down access to specific IP addresses. By applying this method the authorities can escape the criticism they would face if they blocked certain websites. Instead they can claim that the websites are difficult to access due to heavy traffic. On a positive note

this shows that one should not underestimate the importance of for example international pressure on authoritarian regimes, which often are keen on keeping up appearances, although everyone has already seen through the emperor's new clothes.

The modern methods used by governments are not only applied reactively but also proactively. For instance, during the presidential "elections"[6] in Belarus in March 2006, the Belarusian KGB[7] sent out a text message to a large number of people, warning them to go to the October Square in central Minsk (the capital of Belarus) due to indications that a bomb would explode there. The October square was the focal point of the opposition's activities, thus a central place of attention for the KGB and its efforts to keep control by cracking down on the democratic forces. The Belarusian activists, many of them young, did not take the warning seriously and the KGB failed, at least temporarily, in its efforts to keep people off the square.

In many countries involved in some kind of democratisation there are other kinds of obstacles. Usually, the quality of media and journalism remains at a rather low level. Access to public information is not seldom limited, both for journalists and the public. Development is hampered by a combination of problems: stubborn legacy of the past, devastating wars and poor economic development, leaving media without functioning advertising markets. This often results in a media industry still dominated by state enterprises, a few well-financed insiders, and political groups and organised crime.

To side-step Big Brother

Not too long ago it was a lot more difficult than it is today to provide large numbers of people with alternative information. Face-to-face meetings, which once were the only way to meet, require large meeting places if you want to inform a wider public. Such meetings are easy to obstruct and infiltrate. To print a newspaper, once the only way to produce it, you need among other things newsprint and printing presses, which are difficult to smuggle across borders and hide. Radio and TV broadcasting into a closed country from the outside is politically sensitive and very costly.

In this context *samizdat* deserves to be mentioned. It began appearing following Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, largely as a revolt against official restrictions on the freedom of expression of major dissident Soviet authors. *Samizdat* is a Russian word referring to literature secretly written, copied, and circulated and usually critical of practices of the Soviet government.[8] The major genres of *samizdat* included reports of dissident activities and other news suppressed by official

media, protests addressed to the regime, transcripts of political trials, analyses of socio-economic and cultural themes. Because of the government's strict monopoly on presses, photocopiers, and other such devices, *samizdat* publications typically took the form of carbon copies of typewritten sheets and were passed by hand from reader to reader.

Technological development, especially during the last two decades, has clearly made it easier to reach out to people with independent information. Many of the techniques and methods available are inexpensive and more effective in the sense that they enable the user to reach out to more people with less effort and with less risk. A website on the Internet is available to far more people than eg a seminar with a maximum of 30-40 participants (often the already convinced) or a newspaper with a couple of thousand readers. Even in a country with fairly low internet access among the population, this makes a huge difference. For better security, the servers can be placed abroad. There are also technical solutions for avoiding the shaping and blocking of websites, even if ull protection from state interference cannot be provided.

The production and distribution of underground newspapers has become much more efficient with the help of computers and printers. Basically, distribution networks can relatively easy be built where there is a printer connected to a computer. The newsroom can be located anywhere, and its members do not have to be gathered in one place.

The Swedish Helsinki Committee has always recognised cultural projects as important for discussions, debates and mind-opening performances of various kinds, thus an important tool in our democracy work. Nowadays, such events can be recorded and distributed to a greater public than could be reached in the past.

The modern version of *samizdat*, *samizdat 2.0* if you wish, is indeed upgraded. Messages considered too political and controversial for state authorities are wrapped up smartly in eg CDs by young, talented web-designers and distributed for free to other young people. It does not cost much to copy a CD, it is easy to do and easy to pass it on to a friend.

There are numerous ways to use modern technology for information activities, and what is mentioned above is just a brief introduction to the subject.

Examples of how ICT is used to enable people to know and act upon their rights

Various examples will now be given of how ICT is used as a tool for providing information that otherwise would not have been accessible to large groups of

people. There is a difference between how ICT is used in transitional countries and how it is used in countries with authoritarian regimes, as you will see from the examples. For security reasons, certain kinds of activities and examples from countries with severe human rights situations are excluded.

MOST Citizen's Association (Macedonia)

A major concern in Macedonia is the low participation by citizens in the processes of decision-making as well as lack of knowledge about legislation. The efforts of civil society in the past to improve communication between decision-makers and their constituency brought out the difficulties to access national legislation as one of the biggest challenges in Macedonia.

The Swedish Helsinki Committee is co-operating with MOST (*MOST Citizen's Association* 2008) in the creation of *The Legal Resources Center* (*PRAVO* 2008), which is a free-of-charge and easy-to-use web portal, where citizens can find all laws in the country as well as the judicial practice of the Supreme Court. One of the main priorities of the EU Accession Partnership Agreement with Macedonia is that the country fully complies with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms *(European Partnership with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* 2006*)*. In order for the public, lawyers and others to be informed about the rulings of the court it is of utmost importance that the court's rulings are easily accessible. Therefore, the PRAVO portal now contains a new search engine for verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights. It also contains a special section for verdicts and decisions related to Macedonia.

Media Centre Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

NetNovinar

The Swedish Helsinki Committee works together with Media Centre in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Mediacentar Sarajevo* 2008) in the project *NetNovinar* (Online Centre for Investigative Reporting and Media Training) which is a very popular, comprehensive and unique web-based resource centre aimed at the self-education and networking of journalists, journalism students and other media professionals in South Eastern Europe. The web portal performs four key roles as a one-stop shop for journalists:

1. It is an easily accessible place for journalistic self-education and reference resources;
2. It is a 24-hour a day communication and co-operation hub for journalists (directory of reporters, discussion mailing list, forum);

3. It offers a wide range of announcements for training opportunities, conferences, fellowships and available jobs targeting media professionals and students in the region;

4. It is a web portal for Media Center's Training Centre, featuring all the activities and training materials of the centre.

Investigative Reporting Blended/Learning Program

There have been several attempts to improve investigative reporting in the region, but they have often failed for several reasons: absence of long-term, systematic and practical training; lack or absence of support by editors and media managers; lack of proper infrastructure and funds for carrying out investigative projects; as well as difficulties for reporters to connect with each other to share much needed information, experiences, skills and tools.

Investigative Reporting Blended/Learning Program (IRBL) is the first long-term training program in investigative reporting in the region, whose preparatory phase started in September 2004. The program results from cooperation between Media Centre Sarajevo and the Swedish Helsinki Committee and is based on cost-efficient and state-of-the-art blended/learning methods: face-to-face training reinforced by online learning educational support, and continuous supervision and support for trainees. Four investigative reporting training cycles have been implemented so far. Each training cycle is five months and consists of two face-to-face workshops held in Sarajevo and an online component using *Moodle* software. *Moodle* is a course management system – a free, open source software package designed to use good pedagogical principles to help educators create effective online learning communities.

The project aims to raise the quality of investigative reporting and at the same time enable reporters from the region to enter a long-term training project without leaving their newsroom positions.

Media on the Web (not country specific)

The *Media on the Web*-project was initiated in 2003 with the aim to establish a model for viable web publishing in emerging democracies, primarily focused on Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. The project is using open source software, centralised hosting and local implementation to create online publications for smaller and medium-size media organisations as well as for a few NGOs. A software called *CampSite* was developed in 2002. It is delivered free of charge to selected beneficiaries, who also receive training in online publishing, centralised hosting free of charge, as well as consulting and assistance

in developing their web publications to suit the needs of their editorial strategy. With 43 stable online publications (ia the Macedonian News Agency *Makfax* (www.makfax.com.mk) and developed local competence in online publishing the project is regarded as a success.

The project is a co-operation between the Swedish Helsinki Committee and Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF), which, in its own words, is "a mission-driven investment fund for independent news outlets in countries with a history of media oppression" (Media Development Loan Fund 2008).

CDMAG (Belarus)

CDMAG is a CD multimedia publication for young people in Belarus and the only independent "magazine" published in Belarus for students by students (*CDMAG in Belarus* 2008). The publication plays an important role in disseminating information about youth NGO activities, international exchange programs, higher education issues and the Belarus' student movement. In contrast to some other independent media in Belarus, *CDMAG* is a modern publication making use of new technologies. *CDMAG* is an official publication.

Concluding remarks

Large groups of people do not have access to modern technology. However, there is also a demographic problem, with on the one hand young people born and raised in the era of information technology and on the other hand an older generation that have no interest in exploiting the advantages of the Internet, etc. The latter will remain faithful to newspapers made of paper, continue to watch TV on the TV-set and listen to radio broadcasts on the radio for years to come. In our work for democracy and human rights we must be aware of these differences and make sure we do not leave certain groups behind.

It is clear that the combination of modern technology and young, creative and enthusiastic users has taken the work for democracy and human rights to a new level. The international community has to ensure that this is taken advantage of and provide sufficient support. Sometimes people fear new technology and international donors are no exception. It is not only the technique itself that frightens people; the methods themselves may seem more aggressive than traditional project activities. Thus, when assessing projects, donors have to be courageous and leave room for creativity. It is necessary to allow some experimentation and have patience when the tests fail. And, above all, the donors should not expect quick-fix solutions with immediate results. Democracy work is a long-term mission, no matter what technical solutions are applied.

I will end by quoting Sergey Kovalyov, one of the most famous dissidents and human rights defenders during the Soviet era, on the magnitude of ICT in the field of democracy and human rights. In an interview with one of the larger daily newspapers in Sweden he emphasised an important difference between the dissidents in the Soviet Union and the people who dare to stand up against the power apparatus in today's Russia (Blomgren 2006, translation into English by Robert Hårdh):

> In the old days we were literally on our knees. Now we have this one, he says laughing, pointing towards the computer sitting next to the wall: the Internet is preventing us from falling back to Soviet times.

References

Blomgren, Jan, 2006. Sluta ljuga om Ryssland, *Svenska Dagbladet*, Stockholm, 15.1.2006, www.svd.se/nyheter/utrikes/artikel_265475.svd

CDMAG in Belarus, 2008. www.labforculture.org/en/labforculture/blogitem/29507

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Final Act, 1.8.1975. Helsinki. www.hri.org/docs/Helsinki75.html

European Partnership with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 2006. http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/r18013.htm

Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2008. www.britannica.com

Human Rights Watch, 2006. *Race to the Bottom. Corporate Complicity in Chinese Internet Censorship*, New York. http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2006/08/human_rights_wa

Media Development Loan Fund, 2008. Prague. www.mdlf.org

Mediacentar Sarajevo, 2008. Sarajevo. www.media.ba/mediacentar/compiled/p882.htm

MOST Citizen's Association, 2008. Skopje. www.camost.org

PRAVO, 2008. Legal Resources Center, Skopje. www.pravo.org.mk

Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, 2007. *25 years of Human Rights*, Stockholm. www.shc.se/attachment/000000455.pdf

Notes

[1] This section is based upon a report by the Swedish Helsinki Committee (Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights 2007, pp 5-7).

[2] The secret surveillance of the communication between two (or more) telephone addresses.

[3] The secret surveillance of the communication in eg a room through the use of one or several hidden microphones.

[4] A plausible explanation why Sweden was missing on the world map is that a large number of the Turkmen opposition live in exile in Sweden.

[5] See for example Human Rights Watch's report on Chinese Internet censorship (Human Rights Watch 2006).

[6] The government in Belarus is based on unlimited presidential authority. The country's dictator Alexander Lukashenka's direct control over all branches of power ensures the weakness of representative bodies, servility of the courts, and largely ceremonial character of elections. Presidential absolutism also severely limits the legitimate space in Belarus for social autonomy, private enterprise, and freedom of expression. Belarus has been heavily criticised internationally and isolated due to its disregard for human rights.

[7] The Belarusian security service (which has not bothered to change its infamous name as many other security services did in the former Soviet Union when the Berlin wall came down).

[8] See *Encyclopædia Britannica* 2008: from Russian: *sam,* "self", and *izdatelstvo*, "publishing".

Empowering Citizens through the Web: The Yemen Portal

Walid Al-Saqaf

Fast-paced technological revolution is currently shaping the way we communicate and access information. New ideas and initiatives have started to emerge on how to promote the cause of freedom and democracy through Information Communication Technology (ICT).

This essay highlights one of those initiatives: the *Yemen Portal*, which has promoted information accessibility in Yemen. It examines results of a research that used the *Yemen Portal* to find the structure, traffic and impact of Yemeni news web sites. It also attempts to demonstrate how the *Yemen Portal* could be replicated for other countries and perhaps for the whole Arab world.

I argue that news and opinion media that could bypass government-imposed filtering would allow thousands of Arab citizens to access information more freely and broaden their knowledge. My argument is based on the premise that building a knowledge society, where members are granted their fundamental human right of accessing information, would result in well-informed citizens, who could consequently take decisions to improve their lives and shape their future.

Knowledge deficit in Arab countries

When the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued the first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) in 2002, a significant emphasis was placed on ICTs (AHDR 2002):

> The world is experiencing massive transformations driven by unprecedented and rapid technological progress in production, distribution and information and communications technologies. These world developments are linked to more openness, liberalization, transnational production integration and financial synergy

on the one hand and to a trend for nations to merge into megaeconomic blocs on the other. In this context, the role of technology and know-how in creating value added has become crucial.

Although the ICT sector in the Arab world was lagging behind other regions in 2002, this was largely a reflection of the lack of free access to information and knowledge in general terms. So much so that the UNDP decided to have the AHDR for 2003 focus on the theme of "Building a Knowledge Society"(AHDR 2003).

One of the popular Oxford Dictionary definitions of knowledge is the "*state of being aware or informed*" (OED 2008). Arab citizens are suffering from chronic deficiency in awareness of diverse views and opinions that have to do with their lives. This partially explains why the UNDP considers such awareness to be key to development.

Many studies, such as those by Milner (2002), Schindley (1996), and Bimber (2003), have shown that informed citizens can take decisions that promote democracy. This applies to all countries, regardless of their level of development. Citizens without information are deprived of knowledge, which is a fundamental human right. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, as stated in Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Access to information is arguably equal if not more important than freedom of expression. As stated by UNESCO (2008):

> In order for citizens to engage in public debate and to hold their governments and others accountable, key elements of living in a participatory democracy, citizens must have access to free, pluralistic, independent and professional media.

Without an informed citizenry, developmental growth may become difficult to achieve. And from my own experience, I conclude that many authoritarian regimes, some of which have been ruling for decades, understand the potential impact of an informed citizen. A totalitarian regime understands that if people know about corruption and inefficiencies in government circles, of injustice in courts, of torture in jails, and of other malpractices, they could actively pursue ways to change it.

Such a sad state of affairs is evident in Yemen as well as in the overwhelming majority of Arab countries. It is hence understandable that governments in this region tend to restrict freedom of expression and access to information, particularly during economic crises and tensions. It explains why newspaper journalists, who investigate corruption, oppression, injustice, or top-level mismanagement, have been harassed, prosecuted, detained, and even killed. But it also explains why the

Yemeni government censored more than two dozen news and opinion websites over the course of a few months. It conforms to the current internet censorship trend to suppress opinions online, as ICT has become increasingly common in Yemen and many Arab countries.

> Internet censorship in the Middle East and North Africa is multilayered, relying on a number of complementary strategies in addition to technical filtering; arrest, intimidation, and a variety of legal measures are used to regulate the posting and viewing of Internet content (Noman and Zarwan 2008).

Nonetheless, it is also evident that governments are finding it more difficult to suppress the flow of information in this digital age, partly due to internet via satellite and the evolution of some anti-censorship software programs. Nowadays, efforts to bypass a governmental ban of news websites are yielding results and empowering the people with information that traditional media could not deliver. Launching serious resistance efforts against censorship offers a real possibility and may reduce the restrictions regimes may apply on people's ability to access information.

> States' power to regulate social, economic, and political activities started to erode as citizens and other non-state actors, empowered by the Internet, started to create and disseminate information. The Internet, along with satellite television networks, has effectively broken the monopoly of many Middle Eastern and North African governments (Noman and Zarwan 2008).

The Internet: an opportunity on the horizon

Although the Internet, like most other means of communication, is a double-edged sword, inherently it promotes the exchange of information and facilitates cross-boundary communication in an unprecedented way. It can also generate political pressure due to its inherently democratic nature that fosters populist participation (Seib 2007). This, of course, makes it a useful tool for citizens to express their opinions and voice their concerns openly without having to channel their messages through the conventional mass media.

> The availability and accessibility of information, as well as the ability to create and disseminate information anonymously, has led to a sense of freedom among many Arab Internet users (Noman and Zarwan 2008).

The Internet has served as a platform for the common Arab citizen to openly discuss political issues that affect her or his life. Despite censorship practiced by

Arab governments, the Internet has granted many Arabs the space to fully participate in discussions tackling issues at local, regional, and international level (El Gody 2007, p 230). But authoritarian regimes in the region have therefore been eager to control the Internet – as they have controlled other media – by setting up firewalls, and some regimes have even tried to regulate the Internet by law.[1]

So far, however, the regimes referred to have been far from fully successful in controlling the Internet. This is partly so because, unlike print media, the architecture of the Internet makes it an open network that can only be controlled to a limited degree. Just as it is not easy to prevent satellite transmission waves from penetrating national skies and reaching the public, it is also not easy to censor specific digital information that reaches internet users. This feature enables people with know-how and skills to overcome censorship. Furthermore, as technology advances, new ways and methods emerge that may limit the effectiveness of tools that the governments use to restrict internet access.

The difficulty to control the Internet totally makes it an important ICT medium that may promote the development of a knowledge society. It was hence given utmost priority by the UNDP and several international development agencies – and particularly so as the use of the Internet in Arab countries remains limited, despite its great potential for stimulating growth.

This applies, albeit to varying degrees, to all Arab countries. With an internet penetration level of just over 1 (one) percent (Internet World Stats 2008), Yemen is a country that needs a boost in developing this vital sector.

The following sections will take the example of an online tool, the *Yemen Portal,* that I personally developed with an eye on how to disseminate content and information of Yemeni news websites to the widest audience possible, so as to promote access to information in my own country. I believe that my project has contributed, although in a small way, to the increase in the interest of Yemeni citizens in the Internet. I also think that if the *Yemen Portal* is developed and expanded further, it could become a basis for a much larger project for the whole Arab region and beyond.

Yemen as a starting ground

Although this study deals with a project targeting Yemen only, it could also be generalised to most if not all Arab countries, as these countries share a common culture, language, and history.

In terms of access to information, the Yemeni regime – as is the case with other Arab regimes such as Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc – has systematically

manipulated traditional media (TV, radio, and the print press), to a great extent by monopolising broadcast media and restricting newspapers with excessively tough laws.

Since former South and North Yemen united on May 22, 1990, the Republic of Yemen as a country has often been labelled "*an emerging democracy*" (Schwedler 2008, p 48). But from my experience of working in the print media for a decade, and in serving as an editor-in-chief of a national newspaper in Yemen for six years, I would say that the democratic transformation has been disappointing at best. The level of democracy deteriorated rapidly in the last few years, prior to the presidential elections of 2006. During this time, the regime resorted to various acts of intimidation and censorship against the media in particular. Justifications were based on the notion that some media outlets promoted ideas that were un-patriotic or harmed the national interest of the country, particularly as the regime had started using extensive force to curb a rebellion in the north and protests in the south. Overall, the government of Yemen continued to pursue a concerted campaign to restrict press freedom (Freedom House 2007).

Online media were affected, as many news and opinion websites were banned by the country's two state-controlled internet service providing companies, which so far have monopolised internet services. By the end of June 2008, more than two dozen Yemeni news and opinion websites were rendered inaccessible to all internet users in Yemen while they remain accessible to users around the world.

Although no justification was given by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, it is believed that the ban was due to the government's eagerness to prevent independent or oppositional views and news about the clashes between the regime and different factions in the country, which have evidently extended from the battlefields on the ground to internet websites.

There are currently about a hundred news and opinion websites on Yemen with diverse and often conflicting ideologies that often include critical content targeting the regime. This mosaic of online news and opinion content makes the country an interesting case for studies in terms of impact of news websites.

I believe that the level of diversity in Yemeni news websites stems from the fact that the country has been undergoing many political struggles between the ruling elite and opposition parties. The latter are mainly represented by the *Islamic Congregation Party for Reform* and the *Yemeni Socialist Party*, which is the party that ruled former south Yemen prior to the 1990 unity.

It was this diversity that encouraged me to build what is considered the first Arabic news search engine of its kind, the *Yemen Portal*.

The Yemen Portal

The *Yemen Portal* (yemenportal.net) is a search engine devised primarily to crawl for and fetch information from more than a thousand websites containing content related to Yemen. The website includes sections for Arabic/English news along with opinion articles, blog entries, video clips, and magazine articles. It was originally built as a media project assignment as part of a master program in Global Journalism at Örebro University in Sweden. However, soon after it was launched, it gained a high number of loyal readers and kept on attracting attention of Yemeni internet users and those with an interest in learning about developments in Yemen.

The project succeeded, mainly due to the previous lack of a website that had various headlines and story summaries from multiple news sources. Prior to the *Yemen Portal*, internet users interested in following events in Yemen had to pursue a number of different news websites, using time and effort to open and skim through the websites, one by one. At the *Yemen Portal*, the latest headlines and summaries of more than one hundred news and opinion sources are retrieved and can be searched seamlessly. The portal also retrieves content from more than 1,000 blogs, tens of discussion forums, and several video sharing websites. Over time, the *Yemen Portal* has gained a respectable volume of daily visits, allowing it to serve as a reliable research tool that could provide blueprints of the Yemeni news cyber sphere.

The portal was also used in my master thesis project[2] to find the structure, traffic, and interactivity level of 70 Yemeni news websites. A sample of about 50,000 articles was used for a content analysis to statistically figure out how the different news websites were performing, when their political affiliation is taken into account. All sources were divided into three groups: government, opposition, and independent.

Research methods and findings

I used three methods in my research. The first was a pure statistical analysis depending solely on data from the *Yemen Portal*. Through this method, the structure, content and traffic of Yemeni news websites were analysed. The second method was qualitative and based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It was used to find the ideology and bias of the sources. The third method was qualitative as well and consisted of interviews with news website experts in Yemen.

The 50,000 articles used in the quantitative analysis were grouped according to their sources' political affiliation. There were at least 70 news websites in Arabic, out of which 52 were independent, nine governmental, and another nine had an

oppositional stance. Opposition and independent websites had a higher article visit rate, despite the fact that the government had the highest number of articles per source.

In an attempt to cross-validate this finding, interviews with representatives from the most prominent news websites from the three groups were made. According to the overall conclusion, internet readers are eager to learn about news and opinions that would otherwise not be available in broadcast and print media. News websites can be seen to function as a breathing space for those who cannot have their contents published due to state monopoly of broadcast media and the restrictive press law imposed on newspapers.

Mr Nabil Al-Sufi, the Editor-in-Chief of independent website *News Yemen* told me that "the reader in Yemen is an oppositional reader or a reader with an oppositional mood." Yemeni online news readers are hungry for a different viewpoint or an unconventional news coverage that they do not expect to find in the broadcast or print media.

The study also found that the interactivity level (ie the average number of public comments posted by users on an article) is much higher for independent than for independent and opposition websites. This finding was corroborated by interviewees, who noted that independent newspapers are the freest when it comes to allowing controversial and critical comments to be published.

Another important finding was that *Aden Press* – the opposition website with the highest tone of criticism, which was and remains banned from access in Yemen – actually had the highest number of article visits within the opposition website group. This emboldens the conclusion that the more critical the website, the more readers it could be expected to have.

Among independent websites, there was a significant gap in terms of article visits and comments between the top two (*Mareb Press* and *Naba News*), and the rest. Interviewees agreed that the top two websites outperformed all other independent websites because of a higher professional standard, more exclusive content, allowing comments to be posted without many restrictions, and increased freedom to write critically about many issues viewed as taboo.

The *Yemen Portal* was also useful for finding out when readers visited the website more frequently and what content they were looking for. In doing so, it facilitated the selection of a set of articles, published by different websites, to be used in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in order to find out the ideology and bias of those articles.

Six stories covering a demonstration in the southern city of Aden on January 13, 2008, were examined through CDA. The results show government and opposition

sources to be extremely biased. The demonstration, which ended in a riot and the death of two demonstrators and the injury of several others, was downplayed and somewhat demonised by government sources, while opposition sources did the contrary by exaggerating and praising them. Out of the two independent websites that were analysed, one was leaning in an anti-government direction, while the other was more pro-government and anti-rally. This discrepancy led to the conclusion that independent websites in Yemen have no specific ideology, ranging from anti- to pro-government. It is unlikely that any prominent Yemeni independent news website would be totally neutral; the ideology of the website owners usually falls into a pro- or anti-government category.

During three days of interviews in Yemen (14-16 January, 2008) opposition, government, and independent website representatives actively participated in the discussions. The participants were introduced to the initial findings of my quantitative analysis: that users of the search engine were more interested in opposition material, and that online readers appeared to be less inclined to look at government content. This was an important indicator, showing that users react to content based on the political affiliation of the source. During the interviews, some of the government website representatives looked uneasy, yet they did acknowledge the results and explained that self-censorship and government restrictions prevented them from publishing certain types of material.

Interviewees were quite assertive considering the importance of the Internet in providing the public with information that is not available elsewhere, ie, in the broadcast and print media. The Internet seems indeed to have become a breathing space. The future prospects of the news and opinion websites are promising, according to the interviewees. Some of the website experts interviewed went so far as to claim that the Internet may be the leading source of information for other types of media, because of its ability to deliver instant information.

The Yemen Portal banned

About a week after the bloody January 13 demonstration in Aden, the *Yemen Portal* along with a few other websites was banned from access within Yemen by the Ministry of Communication. Here it is worth noting that the visit statistics of the *Yemen Portal* website showed a peak on the day of the Aden demonstration. Articles about the demonstration were most accessed, as were amateur *You Tube* videos of the demonstration. Some videos showed a calm and peaceful rally beginning, with what appeared to be thousands of participants carrying various banners. When the demonstration soon thereafter turned violent and two demonstrators were killed and many injured, the government blamed the protestors for

the killing and violence, but other videos suggested that it was the police forces that started the attack. It is likely that the videos on the *Yemen Portal*, revealing this discrepancy had to do with the ban.

Yemen TV channels or radio never broadcast this footage; nor did international or regional media, whose correspondents were prohibited from filming the event. The *Yemen Portal* here served as a website presenting all viewpoints without bias or censorship, and as a portal to alternative sources of information – but this very feature may also have been the main factor behind a full-scale confrontation with the authorities.

Despite attempts to have the ISP (Internet Service Provider) unblock the website, it has remained blocked ever since. The fact that more than 70 percent of *Yemen Portal* readers were based in Yemen had a devastating impact on the website visits. Despite many appeals to the authorities to end the ban, and despite statements issued by the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate along with many international organisations, the *Yemen Portal* remained blocked by the end of February 2009.

A multi-layered approach to resist censorship

In an attempt to neutralise the effect of the ban on all Yemeni news and opinion websites, I launched a special campaign to resist censorship. The approach was multi-layered and incorporated a number of tactics.

The first was to bring all the banned content from the different websites and put them on *one secure location* (https://yemenportal.net/blocked/yemen), which would remain updated continuously with new content from the different banned websites.

The second was the creation of a new *mirror site* of the domain every time the earlier domain was blocked, sending the new address to a mailing list of thousands of readers, who would in turn spread the word about the new domain.

The third tactic was to write *special software* that would allow people to open the website despite the ban.

The fourth was to establish a *web-based proxy* (http://yemenportal.net/blocked/) through which users could access banned websites by entering their addresses directly onto a form.

The approach and campaign proved to be a success, as the number of visitors kept on increasing since the release of 'Access *Yemen Portal*', which is a special plug-in application for Firefox. The plug-in became widely popular in Yemen and was downloadable from several alternative websites. Furthermore, the launch of '*Yemen Portal* Proxy' supplemented the anti-censorship efforts, which have marked a fundamental landmark for Internet users in Yemen as they are now liberating

internet users from censorship in a way that was never attempted in the Arab world before.

Next stage: share experience and replicate

The creation and growth of the *Yemen Portal,* followed by the launch of the anti-censorship campaign, have shown that there are ways through which local activists with the right know-how can make a difference and penetrate the wall that governments put up to deprive citizens from accessing information. However, experience shows that such efforts often go unnoticed by the international community at large and development agencies specifically. Therefore, the next stage is to launch a public relations campaign to introduce the *Yemen Portal* initiative and seek means of sharing experience and replicating the success it had, for others to benefit.

The idea is to expand the role of the *Yemen Portal* from an interface with a narrow focus on Yemen to a broader initiative targeting the Arab region, and thereafter perhaps other parts of the world that could benefit from such a project. The project might face resistance from governments, who would label such an effort interference in local affairs. But access to information is a universal human right. Any attempt to deprive people of knowledge is a direct violation of this right, and hence I am hopeful that international agencies and institutions would not be bullied into supporting such attempts.

It is true that the use of ICT, including the Internet, requires responsibility. This is why any initiative to resist censorship and promote freedom of expression online would take into account the websites to which it allows access and apply a careful assessment before attempting to put all websites in the same basket. But there must be a starting point to this selection process, and I strongly believe that the *Yemen Portal* could serve as an excellent starting point and an example of what is possible in this day and age.

References

Al-Saqaf, Walid (2008). *UNSTOPPABLE TRENDS: The Impact, Role, and Ideology of Yemeni News Websites*, MA thesis in global journalim, Örebro: Department of Humanities, Örebro University.

Bimber, Bruce, 2003. *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power,* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

El Gody, Ahmed, 2007. New Media, New Audience, New Topics, and New Forms of Censorship in the Middle East, in Seib, Philip (ed), *New Media and the New Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freedom House, 2007. *Yemen Report 2007.* URL http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7304&year=2007 (April 27, 2008).

Internet World Stats, 2008. *Yemen Internet Usage.* URL http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/ye.htm (April 27, 2008).

Milner, Henry, 2002. *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work. (Civil Society Series),* Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England.

Noman, Helmi and Elijah Zarwan, 2008. *Middle East and North Africa (Open Net Initiative Research).* URL http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena (June 13, 2008).

OED, 2008. *Oxford English Dictionary: knowledge, n.* URL http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50127602?query_type=word&queryword=knowledge (December 2, 2008)

Schindley, Wanda, 1996. *The Informed Citizen: Argument and Analysis for Today,* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Seib, Philip (ed), 2007. *New Media and the New Middle East,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schwedler, Jillian, 2002. Democratization in the Arab World? Yemen's Aborted Opening, *Journal of Democracy,* vol 13, no 4, October 2002, pp 48-55.

UNDP, 2002. *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations,* New York: UNDP.

UNDP, 2003. *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society,* New York: UNDP.

UNESCO, 2008. *Press Freedom contributes to Empowerment.* URL http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=25883 (June 13, 2008).

Notes

[1] Bahrain and Oman are two countries with laws (sometimes referred to as 'cyber law') regulating the Internet, and require the registration and licensing of websites run from the country.

[2] The author was awarded a Master Degree in Global Journalism with distinction on the basis of the thesis. For more information about the thesis, you could contact the author at admin@yemenportal.net

Mobile Democracy –
Challenges and Way Forward

Johan Hellström

Mobile democracy is about access to information, and about participation and networking through communication. It can be described as the provision of government content/information and services in formats specifically designed for mobile devices, especially mobile phones. The term also refers to how mobile phones empower the citizens and affect the way citizens interact with each other as well as with the government.

Can mobile phones really open up for deepened democracy through citizen participation, through insight into state affairs, and influence on the political decision-making process? Can slow democratic processes be combined with mobile phones that are ever-changing, quick and direct in their usage? The answer is yes. Their use will differ, though, depending on what kind of democracy we have in mind.

As technology becomes increasingly sophisticated and mobile, its usage also becomes more *ad hoc*. Mobile phones for democracy seem to match 'adhocracy' – a participatory form of democracy – better than traditional representative democracy.[1] In the book *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, Rheingold argues that mobile devices are shaping modern culture via adhocracy, "in which people cluster temporarily around information of mutual interest" (Rheingold 2002). Mobile phones provide a good complement to representative democracy by adding the dimension of quick participation and action regarding certain issues. Mobile phones can also help in holding the government accountable.

People use mobile phones in various, innovative ways. Looking at examples from around the globe, it seems likely that mobile phones have the potential of really adding to existing modes of activism and participation.

Mobile democracy has many dimensions; the underlying infrastructure and technology, applications and services offered, implementation and implications for governments and society, as well as legal, security and privacy issues. This paper will concentrate on usage by focusing first on some challenges and related facts; discussing then the social impact of mobile usage and describing some examples of mobile applications for democracy; and discussing finally some concerns before drawing conclusions and identifying a way forward.

Challenges and facts

There is a lot of hype surrounding mobile applications. Small pilot projects are too often labelled success stories despite no recipe for scaling up. So what does reality look like?

Statistics

During the past few years, the number of fixed telephones has remained stable while mobile phone growth has been and is explosive. However, comparing mobile with fixed telephony is not really viable, since that reduces the mobile phone to a traditional phone. A mobile is more powerful; not only does it have the characteristics of a traditional phone, but it handles SMS[2] and text as well. Nowadays, it usually comes with a radio, camera, calculator, and music player, and most new models are now web enabled and can function as an internet access point. Different technologies are merging into one universal gadget.

According to the Global System for Mobile communication Association (GSMA),[3] the number of active mobile numbers was more than 3 billion at the end of 2007 (GSMA 2008) compared to 2 billion in June 2006 and 1 billion at the end of 2003 (GSMA 2006). Three billion subscribers would represent half of the world's population if there was one active subscription per person (which is not the case due to multiple SIM /Subscriber Identity Module/ card[4] ownership for example in Europe, where there are more active SIM cards and mobile phones than people). Regardless, it is just a matter of time before the actual figure is 3 billion.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU),[5] there were more than a quarter of a billion mobile subscribers in Africa in early 2008, and "mobile penetration has risen from just one in fifty people in 2000 to close to a third of the population today" (ITU 2008). Worth noting is that these figures refer to active SIM cards, which is not equivalent to owning a mobile phone. Shared phone usage is a common phenomenon in developing countries. Breakdown figures for East Africa show that the penetration rate for Kenya, Tanzania

and Uganda is about 20 percent, with Rwanda lagging behind with less than 10 percent penetration (Wikipedia 2008b). Roughly 70 percent of East Africans live in areas with mobile coverage (GSMA 2007).

So, what do these figures tell us? That a mobile divide exists (ie between those who have access to mobile phones and those who do not), but that looking at the growth rate and at similar statistics for internet and computer usage, where roughly 5 percent of the African population use the Internet (Asia 15 percent, Europe 48 percent according to Internet World Stats, 2008), mobile phones ultimately hold the greatest potential to bridge the so called digital divide. As with all ICT, digital technology divides and provides. The figures also indicate that the inequality is relative. Getting hold of disaggregated data on who owns what is difficult. Ownership and access follow different economic, social and cultural patterns; it is more likely for a young urban man to own a handset than for an old woman in the countryside.

Costs and affordability

There are a number of barriers regarding phone usage, one of which is restrictions in purchasing power. A new phone (Chinese made and make, too often also fake) that is tied to one of the operators in Uganda costs roughly USD 25. For that price you get a decent mobile ready to use with a SIM card and 50 US cents to call for, but no extras such as radio or camera. You also get workers in China working their butts off for basically nothing. Practices like 72-hour work weeks with compulsory overtime and wages below subsistence level are normal (Wilde and de Haan 2006). And indirectly, you buy tantalum and coltan that fuel the crisis in DR Congo. But that is another story.

Using Uganda in the year 2008 as a reference, a SIM card costs slightly more than 1 US dollar. A typical phone call in the region costs in the range of 20 US cents per minute and an SMS costs 7 US cents. Pre-paid airtime is the most common way to subscribe, and many of the poor are on a per second scheme which makes it more expensive to talk a whole minute but much cheaper if you stay brief. People tend to trust voice more, and SMS is not widely used. The reasons for this are several. For example, a per second scheme gives more value for money when talking than using SMS does. If you hang up in time, that is. Among other possible explanations, trust in oral communication has already been mentioned. Illiteracy and/or inconvenience are others.

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, the median wage in Uganda is USD 30 per month for males, USD 12 for females. There is a difference between private and public employment, where public pays USD 90 and private USD 18.

There is also a clear difference between urban and rural employment, USD 55 and17 respectively (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2008).

Based on quick, non-systematic surveys of mobile phone users in Uganda, the majority, almost regardless of employment, find ownership and usage expensive. Communication is highly valued, though, and poor people use a large portion of their salary for communication. People want and need to communicate and are prepared to pay for it, as long as the benefits are larger than the alternative cost (time and expense savings, opportunity cost, savings on travel etc).

Why is it still relatively expensive to use mobile phones in Africa? Some would argue that it is due to high initial investment costs as well as costs associated with the roll out phase (capital expenditure, CAPEX) – but is that argument really convincing when you look at the massive profits some of the network operators are making today? Other costs that affect the end user are production costs, costs associated with the running of the network, for example running the base stations, paying salaries, maintenance (operational expenditure, OPEX) and taxes. Pre-paid airtime is also the most expensive mobile deal on the market, since the retail chain that distributes it is long.

This indicates that the whole structure of the mobile market is not really pro-poor. For example, it is more expensive to own a mobile phone in the rural, poorer areas of Uganda because one has to pay to charge the phone (see more below). There are even cases and places where one must pay more than the face value of the airtime card to take care of the added distribution costs.

Power issues

Another main barrier to phone usage, especially in rural areas, is access to power/energy. The majority of citizens in Sub-Saharan Africa lack access to reliable and clean energy supplies, making it difficult for them to charge their phones. There are a number of solutions available, and the trend of using renewable energy to charge mobile phones is just starting. Solar chargers are the most common; others use motion-harvesting technology.[6] Cost will ultimately determine whether innovative, environmentally friendly solutions will be successful or not.

Thousands of mobile base stations[7] in Africa are not connected to the electrical grid. They must therefore be powered by something else. Mostly they rely on expensive and environmentally hazardous diesel for power. Some companies and operators are exploring new ways of handling this problem. The most interesting solutions that are being tried out are bio-fuel generators and solar and wind technology.[8]

Other challenges

Statistical numbers are pointing in the right direction regarding digital inclusion, but we still see affordability as a major issue; costs regarding owning and using a mobile phone must go down. Long lasting batteries, innovative battery charging and sustainable base stations are needed. Further, we see a shortage of good content (although this is quickly changing in many countries), and the lack of local language on handsets locks out several potential users. Illiteracy is still a major barrier which could explain the relatively low usage of SMS in rural sub-Saharan Africa.

So, in view of all these obstacles and challenges when it comes to mobile phone usage, how come there are so many users in the developing world? What benefits does mobile telephony bring?

The social impact of mobiles

Development is complex and "we cannot reduce all of development into the bits and bytes that mobiles handle" (Heek and Jagun 2007, s 2). This is not news. However, despite the barriers, some of which have been mentioned above, it is clear that mobile phones in action used as a strategic tool help to deliver on each of the Millennium Development Goals (Heeks and Jagun 2007).

The simple functions of voice and SMS have allowed people to exchange information and communicate at both national and international level. Access has been the main issue within the ICT4D (ICT for Development) field for quite some time. Right to information refers to access. However, the right to information is not enough in a democracy. The right to participate, in which the right to communicate is crucial, must also be secured.

Mobile development has a lot of potential. Due to its spread and inherent characteristics, chances are high that it can be developed to something scalable and affordable for the majority. It is clear that mobile phones in the hands of the poor can lead to innovation and new solutions. Street hacks (making one SIM card out of two in order to get the most out of two networks), airtime transfers (as a means of mobile money transactions) and shared phone usage are some examples.

Heeks and Jagun argue that mobile ownership brings two types of benefits (2007):

1) *Incremental benefits,* where mobile phones improve what people already do. Mobile phones often offer faster and cheaper communication and can substitute for costly and risky journeys (however, people seem to travel more than ever – perhaps the mobile makes the journey safer?). Having access to a mobile

phone increases chances of receiving better and more timely information. A classic example is where farmers find out the current market price of their produce through the mobile, before deciding whether to sell or not and, if selling, where to sell. Another example is the job brokering service Kazi560 for unemployed youths in Kenya. When subscribing to that service, 14 US cents are deducted from your airtime every time you receive a job notification through SMS (Kazi560 2008). There are currently 30,000 subscribers to the service and over 60,000 have found employment through it. Some employers claim that this is the only recruitment form they use (OneWorld UK 2008).

2) *Transformational benefits* where the mobile "offers something new – new ways to access services and support livelihoods" (Heeks and Jagun 2007, p 1). For example, mobile phones are increasingly becoming a way to extend financial services to lower-income people without a bank account, ie a way to bank the un-banked. Mobile banking increases the possibility for poor people to make financial transactions, receive remittances and to have a small savings account. M-PESA in Kenya[9] and Wizzit in South Africa[10] are two good examples.

There are also *production benefits* from the sector itself (Heeks and Jagun 2007); the East African mobile industry employs about 500,000 people (GSMA 2007) selling mobile phones, accessories, and related services, such as offering access through Village Phone (Grameen Foundation 2008), re-selling airtime, selling ring tones, and doing repairs.

Given all this, how can mobile phones deliver when it comes to democracy? Can mobile phones for democratic purposes be both incremental and transformational?

Mobile applications for democracy

Is there any new killer application, such as M-PESA's money transfer service in Kenya, around the corner? M-PESA has shown the way: that it is possible to design scalable mobile applications that make sense given the right context. Mobile applications for democracy will come in a package whereyou can pick and choose given your needs and circumstances. Mobile applications for democracy can simply be categorised as follows:[11]

- collective action (activism through campaigns and mobilisation);
- coordination (for a specific purpose like election monitoring and voter registration); and
- communication (media, citizen journalism and citizen/state interaction).

Collective action – campaigns and mobilisation

There are numerous ways in which mobile phones can be used to campaign and to mobilise, and equally many examples of how people use smart "mobs" to become smart "mobs" (Rheingold 2002).

Apart from the simple voice function, ie to call someone saying something is happening, SMS is usually used either as SMS chain letters or bulk SMS. The former is simple; if you receive a message you pass it on to as many as you feel like. The "don't shop" SMS during the Egyptian General Strike on April 6, 2008, is a good example, even though the strike never really took off due to police interference and official media who discouraged citizens from participating (Wikipedia 2008c). A successful SMS chain letter campaign was when Joseph Estrada was forced to resign from the post as president of the Philippines as reported by Salazar (2006):

> The quick mobilisation of over a million people led to Estrada's removal from power five days after the start of the mass rallies. "People Power 2" as it is called in the Philippines is now being dubbed as the first e-revolution, where messages sent through mobile phones spread like wildfire due to its convenience, confidentiality, and instant connectivity, prompting people to amass to show distaste for a corrupt president.

Bulk SMS is a type of system by which an institution, company or organisation becomes able to send or receive a large volume of SMS, ie SMS in a bulk. As part of the *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence* in 2007, the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) in collaboration with Women's Net, and APC (Association for Progressive Communication)-Africa-Women, conducted a worldwide SMS-based campaign called "Speak out! Stand out!". The idea was to send out an SMS on each of the sixteen days of activism to allow individuals and organisations to speak out and stand out and commit themselves to prevent violence against women. Once registered, one could participate by sending a message on the theme of the campaign. If chosen, it was sent out to all participants. The tool used was SMS Bulktool which is run by the STAR programme, a public private partnership between Hivos and KPN (a Dutch telecom provider) (WOUGNET 2008).

Yet another example of bulk SMS is the *Save Mabira Forest* campaign in Uganda, where the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) played an instrumental role together with other civil society organisations in mobilising the citizenry to oppose government plans to give away one third (roughly 70 km²) of the

Mabira Forest to the Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited (SCOUL), owned by the Mehta Group, for sugarcane plantations. The most successful part of the campaign was to urge people, through SMS, to boycott Lugazi Sugar produced by the Mehta Group (ACCU 2008). The blogger Abubaker Basajjabaka shows the effectiveness of the SMS campaign in a post titled *Battle to halt Mabira Forest giveaway taken to cyberspace*: "Over the weekend, packets of Lugazi Sugar have been piling up in supermarkets besides some business owners withdrawing them from their stalls" (Basajjabaka 2007). The government consequently suspended the idea of giving away the forest.

Coordination: election monitoring and voter registration

Mobile phones have proved very useful in election monitoring. In Senegal, during the 2006 local government elections, Radio Sud had reporters and correspondents with mobile phones scattered over the country, calling in to report what they saw. There are also examples where citizens and independent election observers outside the media have used mobile phones to monitor elections. During the 2007 Nigerian election, the Network of Mobile Election Monitors (NMEM) used the tool FrontlineSMS[12] to organise parallel reporting, whereby citizens could spread news of local vote counts and any irregularities. Apparently, 10,000 messages were sent to the SMS hub, indicating "that extensive fraud and rigging were perpetrated by participating political parties in their areas of control" (NMEM 2007). Parallel reporting was also used in the Zimbabwe elections of 2008 (CNN.com 2008). Election results that were posted on the door of the polling stations were photographed with mobile phones and appeared with that day's paper. The pictures were also sent to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) headquarters who could announce preliminary results within 36 hours, which may be one of the reasons why Robert Mugabe delayed the announcement of the election results.

There are also other ways in which mobile phones may facilitate elections. Promising pilot projects for mobile voting have been carried out in local elections in the UK and Switzerland, and Estonia has prepared legislation to allow m-voting (Lallana 2007). There are still a number of challenges attached to m-voting, identification being the most problematic.

Mobile phones could also be used to educate voters on specific candidates and referenda and for fundraising. A study released by the New Voters Project shows that young people are 4.2 percent more likely to vote if they receive an SMS reminding them to show up at the polls (Dale and Strauss 2007).

Another interesting area is voter registration. In the run-up to the 2007 Kenya elections, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) launched a voter registration

service where you could SMS the register by sending your ID number to receive verification of voter registration (Electoral Commission of Kenya 2007).

Communication:
media, citizen journalism and citizen-to-state interaction

Radios and mobile phones complement each other in a good way, Radio Sud in Senegal (mentioned above) being a good example. Radio shows where listeners can call in or SMS to discuss politics are extremely popular in East Africa.

Mobile phones are also becoming a tool to receive news. There are organisations and companies that send concisely written text news and news headlines via SMS.[13] Web enabled mobile phones can be used as headline receivers, in which case the mobile receives news feeds automatically through scripts (called Mobile RSS, where RSS stands for RDF Site Summary, RDF meaning Resource Description Framework).

Mobile phones are also transforming media itself, making it possible for anyone to participate in the reporting of news events. It is a low cost option that lowers the technology barrier to set up news operations; a mobile phone is used to write articles by the use of an additional keyboard, to film and photo news material, and lastly to send the material by way of GPRS (General Packet Radio Service, mobile data transfers). A modern web enabled phone can do it all, but even a cheaper mobile with SMS and a camera can do a lot. Mobile phones make it easy to get stories out quickly to the rest of the world from remote and isolated places.[14]

> If the print media led a modern revolution and TV pulled down the Berlin Wall,
> the thumb revolution, represented by text messages from mobile phones and the
> Internet, is currently destroying the wall of a controlled society after emerging as
> a new kind of political power (Verclas 2005).

SMS citizen input arises from the ability of citizens to send SMS to ministries and parliamentarians with questions and proposals. Well, maybe in the best of worlds. A number of projects in Africa have been piloted but failed.

In countries where mobile democracy projects have reached quite far, such as Singapore and Canada, the kind of information and services – and state/citizen communication – that can be reached through the mobile are basically an extension of existing services already available via internet. For example, the Government of Singapore and its eCitizen m-government initiative (Singapore Government 2008) provide a lot of individualised information about the Central Provident Fund, ie the national social security savings plan, and notifications on library books due, key statistical releases, road tax renewal, work permit validity, parking offences,

police crime alerts (where one receives information on crimes that have occurred in the neighbourhood via SMS) etc. The government directory is public, so that citizens can obtain contact information about government agencies and public officers via SMS.

Through the Government of Canada Wireless Portal (Government of Canada, 2008) information can be had on border waiting times, hurricane and tropical storm information statements, economic indicators and basic statistics, and Government of Canada news releases. Member of Parliament contact information and Canadian company capabilities ("information on Canadian suppliers and distribution channels to determine competition, to form partnerships and to uncover export ventures", Government of Canada 2008) can be accessed as well.

There are other mobile solutions that have not been discussed above: SMS jokes (for example to lower the fear factor as regards power-holders), and ring tones to communicate something without really communicating etc. Finally, we should not underestimate the most simple use of it all – beeping power (to communicate a particular, previously decided message by calling a mobile and hanging up before the call is picked).

Concerns regarding mobile democracy

"*Sous*veillance"[15] and *sur*veillance: who is watching whom? If election monitoring and citizen media are examples of "sousveillance", there are also many cases of state surveillance. I asked my Ugandan friend who is working as a commissioner at one of the state institutions why he had two phones – and expected his answer to be "for better coverage and getting the most out of two networks". However, his answer was: "This one is the official one, therefore it is tapped."

Many governments wish to control and monopolise the flow of information.[16] Mobile communication is no exception. A first step in controlling and monitoring mobile phones is to register all SIM cards and subscriptions to connect the person to the SIM. However, knowing a person's number is enough to be able to monitor him/her. Through the phone it is also technically possible to find out a person's location, and there are cases where outspoken journalists have been tracked down and prosecuted using this tool (Glazier 2007).

There are also risks associated with the *absence* of control on subscription. With an anonymous line (SIM), phone and airtime, anyone can send an SMS to anyone else without fear of being exposed. This was used during the post-election violence in Kenya 2007, when unidentified SMS were among the means used to encourage Kenyans to participate in tribal attacks. In other words, and obviously, not all mobs mobilised through mobile phones are good. In Kenya, the government

authorities finally intervened through the help of mobile operators and sent out a mass SMS stating, as reported by AllAfrica (2008):

> The Ministry of Internal Security urges you to please desist from sending or forwarding any SMS that may cause public unrest. This could lead to your prosecution.

Mobile phones are used both for information and disinformation. It is impossible to moderate the content, and it is therefore very much up to the end user to scrutinise and critically review the source. The use of the mobile as a disinformation tool is likely to grow.

Conclusion

By facilitating communication and rapid access to information, mobile phones have the potential of fostering a participatory environment. However, pockets full of mobile phones will not be enough to build stable democratic states and hold fair elections,[17] and it might yet be too early to determine the political effects of mobile penetration. However, the examples given above do suggest that mobile phones can and do play an important role in political participation and democracy work. Mobile usage for democratic purposes is both incremental and transformational, as it supports existing structures and modes of operation, and creates new arenas and possibilities. The fact that far more people have access to mobile phones than to computers connected to the Internet evidently makes mobile phones an interesting tool to work with. And the fact that mobile phones are getting more and more sophisticated and web enabled makes them even more interesting.

Statistics show that we are going in the right direction regarding access, in terms of subscribers, coverage, technology development etc. Power/energy issues are still a question mark, despite the solutions available. At the moment and for some years to come, the high cost of diesel fuel to power generators for the base stations takes away a lot of the profit margins for the operators, forcing them to keep customers' prices high. Regarding affordability, innovative ways to lower the total cost of ownership (TCO) must be looked into. TCO consists of service fees, taxes and mobile handset price. The GSMA is arguing that excessive licence fees for operators, import duties on ICT, and taxes on phones and services all increase the total cost and must therefore be dropped (GSMA 2007). On the other hand, it is important for governments to tax mobile operators (as any other business) so as to create revenue for other public services. Operators also cite this as the reason why they should not be taxed so heavily. The role of the regulator is also important; competitive markets tend to keep prices down, while monopolies tend

to keep prices high. Generally, pro-poor pricing is more inclusive and will lead to higher participation.

How can successful mobile democracy projects effectively be scaled up? There are numerous small pilot projects scattered all over Africa. Getting an overview is difficult. More research on the topic is needed. Ultimately, applications should be scalable, replicable and useful. End users should be involved and design should be matched to local context. In other words, the success of non-voice applications involves setting up the right environment and allowing time for a critical mass of usage to develop.

What could be the role of international donors? How can development partners promote and support sustainable development in the field of mobile democracy? First, donors need to be creative and dare to integrate mobile technology in development work. Donors also need to work together with the technologists. Too often this does not happen. As posted on an online forum discussing mobile development (Song 2008):

> …you will always get technocentrics chasing new ideas and applications of technology without a clue about development, just as you will get development people chasing new ideas without a clue about technology.

Perhaps more important is getting the government on board. Existing applications are mostly developed by and for civil society organisations and the private sector. Governments are lagging behind when it comes to developing pro-poor ICT/mobile applications. If a great number of African governments cannot offer meaningful public service information on their websites, will they embrace m-government? Or will it largely remain a citizen-driven form of e-participation as far as developing countries are concerned? And, if so, are citizen efforts enough to make it catch fire?[18] Involving the government and relevant ministries in the project design might be a viable way – if the government is responsive. Civil society, and the private sector especially, must therefore engage in dialogue with governments to discuss ways of developing strategies and policies. Donors can play a role in creating this interface.

Another challenge is that people tend to be consumers rather than providers and creators of content for available services and applications. Perhaps this is a technical issue – ie local technical expertise to develop content for mobile phones may be lacking. It could also be that people do not see the benefits of sharing knowledge, since applied knowledge is power. In a society where resources are scarce, sharing the little you have may not be seen as a viable strategy.

Many challenges remain to be addressed concerning applications for mobile democracy and its usage. There are also many solutions out there. Therefore, this

paper's main conclusion is that we need to collaborate and network more. We must create fora that allow people to meet cross-sector and cross-border, to share knowledge, generate new ideas and strategic partnerships, thus moving forward. Involvement and participation does not equal setting the agenda. But it is an important step.

List of acronyms

APC, Association for Progressive Communication
CAPEX, capital expenditure, ie expenditure intended to create future benefits
ECK, Electoral Commission of Kenya
GPRS, General Packet Radio Service, mobile data transfer
GSMA, Global System for Mobile communication Association
ICT4D, Information and Communication Technology for Development
ITU, International Telecommunication Union
OPEX, operational expenditure, ie ongoing cost for running the system
RSS, RDF (Resource Description Framework) Site Summary
SCOUL, Sugar Corporation of Uganda Ltd
SIM, Subscriber Identity Module card, a device for storing information in mobile phones
SMS, Short Message Service, text messaging on mobile phones
TCO, Total Cost of Ownership
URL, Uniform Resource Locator, popularly: a web address
WOUGNET, Women of Uganda Network

References

AfricaNews.com, 2008. *Voices of Africa*. URL http://voicesofafrica.africanews.com/site (2008-09-01)

AllAfrica, 2008. *Kenya: Campaigns Benefit From Technology Boost*. URL http://allafrica.com/stories/200801080868.html (2008-09-01)

ACCU (Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda), 2008. *Annual Report January – December 2007*. URL http://www.anticorruption.or.ug (2008-09-01)

Balancing Act, 2007. *SMS ban lifted in Ethiopia after two years*. URL http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/back/balancing-act_374.html (2008-09-01)

Basajjabaka, A, 2007. *Battle to halt Mabira Forest giveaway taken to cyberspace*. URL http://blogs.bellanet.org/index.php?/archives/199-Battle-to-halt-Mabira-Forest-giveaway-taken-to-cyberspace.html (2008-09-01)

CNN.com, 2008. *Cell phones promise fairer elections in Africa*. URL http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/25/Cellphonedemocracy/ (2008-09-01)

Crisscrossed. *Mobile phones for development = grassroots innovations*. URL http://www.crisscrossed.net/2008/07/20/mobile-phones-for-development-grassroot-innovations (2008-09-01)

Dale, A and A Strauss, 2007. *Mobilizing the Mobiles: How Text Messaging Can Boost Youth Voter Turnout.* URL http://dev.newvotersproject.org/uploads/vR/2v/vR2vTV3whpkhL5XVBlkBrQ/Youth-Vote-and-Text-Messaging.pdf (2008-09-01)

Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), 2007. *Press Statement 13th September 2007, ECK policy on the sale of the voters registers.* URL *ww.eck.or.ke/downloads/policysaleregister.pdf* (2008-09-01)

Ericsson, 2006. *Ericsson, GSMA and MTN to use biofuels to expand mobile coverage, Press Release.* URL http://www.ericsson.com/ericsson/press/releases/20061011-1080473.shtml (2008-09-01)

Flexenclosure. URL http://www.flexenclosure.com/ (2008-09-01)

FronlineSMS. URL http://www.frontlinesms.com/ (2008-09-01)

G24 Innovations. URL http://www.g24i.com/ (2008-09-01)

Glazier, D, iWeek, 22 August 2007. *ICT opens the world floor to Africa's media.* URL http://www.iweek.co.za/ViewStory.asp?StoryID=176584 (2008-09-01)

Government of Canada, 2008. *We've Gone Mobile!* URL http://canada.gc.ca/mobile/wireless-eng.html (2008-09-01)

Grameen Foundation, 2008. *Village Phone: Connecting Technology and Innovation.* URL http://www.grameenfoundation.org/what_we_do/technology_programs/village_phone// (2008-09-01)

GSMA (Global System for Mobile communication Association), 2006. *GSM Hits Two Billion Milestone.* URL http://www.gsmworld.com/news/press_2006/press06_29.shtml (2008-09-01)

GSMA (Global System for Mobile communication Association), 2007. *Taxation and the Growth of Mobile in East Africa.* URL http://www.gsmworld.com/eastafrica/ (2008-09-01)

GSMA (Global System for Mobile communication Association), 2008. *20 facts for 20 years of mobile communications.* URL http://www.gsmworld.com/documents/20_year_factsheet.pdf (2008-09-01)

Heeks, R and A Jagun, 2007. Mobile phones and development – the future in new hands?, *id21 insights,* 69, September 2007. URL http://www.id21.org/insights/insights69/insights69.pdf (2008-09-01)

Internet World Stats, 2008. *Usage and Population Statistics.* URL http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm (2008-09-01)

ITU (International Telecommunication Union), 2008. *African Telecommunication/ICT Indicators 2008: At a Crossroads.* URL http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/africa/2008/AF2008_Flyer_web.pdf (2008-09-01)

JasmineNews, 2008. URL http://www.jnw.lk/english (2008-09-01)

Kazi560 – Kenya's Biggest Job Alerts Service. URL http://www.kazi560.co.ke/ (2008-09-01)

Lallana, E C, 2007. *m-Government and e-Democracy.* URL http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEDEVELOPMENT/Resources/20071129_mGov_and_eDemocracy_0.5.doc?resourceurlname=20071129_mGov_and_eDemocracy_0.5.doc (2008-09-01)

M2E Power. URL http://www.m2epower.com/ (2008-09-01)

NMEM (Network of Mobile Election Monitors), 2007. *Election Monitoring Report – Nigerian Presidential Elections, April 21st 2007*. URL http://www.kiwanja.net/miscellaneous/NMEM_Election_Report.pdf (2008-09-01)

OneWorld UK, *M4G in Kenya – Overview*. URL http://uk.oneworld.net/article/view/117283 (2008-09-01)

Rheingold, H, 2002. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. Basic Books Safaricom: M-PESA. URL http://www.safaricom.co.ke/index.php?id=228 (2008-09-01)

Salazar, L C, 2006. *Applying the Digital Opportunity Index to the Philippine*s. URL http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/digitalbridges/materials/salazar-paper.pdf (2008-09-01)

Singapore Government, 2008. *eCitizen - Your Gateway to All Government Services: Mobile Services*. URL http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg/mobile/index.html (2008-09-01)

Solar-Aid, 2008. URL http://solar-aid.org/ (2008-09-01)

Song, S, 2008-03-10. *m-Development Repeating ICT4D Errors?*. URL http://www.dgroups.org/groups/mDevelopment/ (2008-09-01)

Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2008. *Summary of National Labour Market Indicators 2007*. URL http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/pdf%20documents/2007%20National%20 Labour%20Market%20Indicators.pdf (2008-09-01)

Verclas, K, 2005. *Mobile Democracy*. URL http://mobileactive.org/mobile-democracy (2008-09-01)

Wikipedia, 2008a. *Adhocracy*. URL http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adhocracy (2008-09-01)

Wikipedia, 2008b. *List of mobile network operators of the Middle East and Africa*. URL http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mobile_network_operators_of_the_Middle_East_and_Africa (2008-09-01)

Wikipedia, 2008c. *2008 Egyptian general strike*. URL http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Egyptian_general_strike (2008-09-01)

Wilde, J and E de Haan, 2006. *The high cost of calling: critical issues in the mobile phone industry,* Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations. URL http://www.somo.nl/html/paginas/pdf/High_Cost_of_Calling_nov_2006_NL.pdf (2008-09-01)

WIZZIT Bank, 2008. URL http://www.wizzit.co.za/ (2008-09-01)

Voter Turnout, 2008. University of Michigan, Princeton University. URL http://www.newvoters-project.org/research/text-messaging/youth-vote-and-text-messaging.pdf (2008-09-01)

WOUGNET (Women of Uganda Network), 2008. *SMS Campaign: Speak out! Stand out! Commit to preventing Violence against Women*. URL http://www.wougnet.org/Alerts/speakoutgenderviolence.html (2008-09-01)

Notes

[1] Robert H Waterman Jr defines adhocracy as "any form of organization that cuts across normal bureaucratic lines to capture opportunities, solve problems, and get results." (Wikipedia 2008a).

[2] SMS stands for Short Message Service, text messaging on mobile phones.

[3] GSMA is the global trade association representing over 750 GSM mobile phone operators across 218 countries of the world.

[4] SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) card, a device used to store information in mobile phones.

[5] International Telecommunication Union, the leading United Nations agency for ICT.

[6] For examples see http://www.g24i.com/, http://solar-aid.org/projects/stuff/solar-charger-for-mobile-phone.html and http://www.m2epower.com/

[7] Base stations enable mobile phones to work. They receive signals from mobile phones and transmit them to other mobile or fixed networks. Also called masts.

[8] See the MTN, GSMA and Ericsson project with bio-fuels on http://www.ericsson.com/ericsson/press/releases/20061011-1080473.shtml and the company Flexenclosure solution using solar and wind http://www.flexenclosure.com/

[9] M-PESA is a mobile money transfer service in Kenya offered by Safaricom in partnership with Vodafone. Started in March 2007 and there are currently over 2.3 million registered users. (Safaricom: M-PESA 2008.)

[10] WIZZIT facilitates bank account origination and transactions via mobile targeting of South Africa's under-banked and un-banked. This is done in an alliance with The South African Bank of Athens Limited. (WIZZIT Bank 2008.)

[11] Categorisation inspired by Christian Kreutz's blog Crisscrossed (Crisscrossed 2008).

[12] An SMS bulk tool and management system that allows mass-messaging to mobile phones and makes it possible for recipients to reply to a central computer. Free to download for NGOs and non-profit organisations. (FrontlineSMS 2008.)

[13] JasmineNews for example, which sends Sri Lanka news in SMS format (JasmineNews, 2008).

[14] See Voices of Africa at http://voicesofafrica.africanews.com/site (AfricaNews.com 2008).

[15] Inverse surveillance from citizen towards government.

[16] Ethiopia being an example, where there is only one state owned operator and where an SMS ban was enforced during the political unrest that followed the highly contentious May 2005 elections. The ban was however lifted after two years and "the official ending of the ban was announced to the Ethiopian people by, (yes, you've guessed it) an SMS message! How bizarre is that? It read, "[Wishing] you [a] happy Ethiopian Millennium. And now the SMS service is launched." (Balancing Act 2007.)

[17] Ask yourself, is for instance Sweden more democratic today then 15 years ago, before the current widespread use of internet and mobile phones?

[18] Thanks to Wairagala Wakabi who raised those questions during a conversation.

Democracy and ICT in Egypt

Yasmine El-Rafie

This text is the result of a number of interviews conducted with journalists, activists and people involved in development cooperation in Egypt, all of whom are listed at the end. Opinions and reflections cited are not necessarily shared by the author, and any conclusions in the text are based on the interviews conducted.

As far as the strengthening of democracy through ICT is concerned, it is important to bear in mind that in many places there is no democracy to strengthen in the first place. However, in Egypt, ICT can with a certain success be efficient in disseminating information that otherwise would not be known, a vital condition in a democratic society as well.

Looking at the region, Egypt is – according to several human rights activists – a country where it is only *comparatively* easy to work for reform. The results may be limited, but unlike in several neighbouring countries it is still fairly rare for renowned activists and journalists to spend longer periods of time in jail for pursuing their cause, with the notable exception of the blogger Kareem Amer, who is serving a prison sentence. The fact that he had criticised religious authorities in a country where piety at the moment is in high regard made it easier for the prosecutors to attain general approval of the court case against him.

Egypt still bears traces of the country's "golden age" for civil society, which was during the first half of the 20th century. But although the number of various registered NGOs ranks high even today, most of them show no big desire to grow, according to Cairo-based Malin Stawe working for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

Compared to many other Arabs, Egyptians have traditionally been seen as easy-going and fun-loving. Many occupiers, from Romans to Ottomans, have ruled the country without too much resistance from the population against the

"pharaoh of the month", as long as the Nile was there to provide steady crops and feed the masses. In recent years, however, there has been a certain shift in mentality, as escalating inflation has caused many people to have problems even to meet their most basic needs.

"I used to work with NGOs and remember a mother who told me that she would buy cheap chicken bones and boil them with rice to add some flavour," recalls Nora Younis, correspondent for the *Washington Post*. "Nowadays, I doubt that she can even afford that," she adds. As a blogger, Nora Younis broke the story of how the police in a brutal way broke up an improvised Sudanese refugee camp at the UNHCR headquarters in Cairo on 30 December 2005.[1]

In recent years, inflation has skyrocketed in Egypt without equivalent rises of salaries, and the people are plagued by huge unemployment and increasing corruption at all levels of society. In one year, Egypt dropped from place 70 to 105 in Transparency International's annual corruption perception's index. The national lack of hope became a topic of discussion during the autumn of 2007, when Egypt for the first time witnessed tens of citizens perishing in the Mediterranean Sea, trying to make it to Italy as boat refugees in the hope of better living conditions.

Many people I have spoken to describe Egypt as balancing on the verge of – something, although unclear what. "I do not think we will go on like this much longer," says Gamal Eid, human rights activist from Human Right's Information Network. "We will either have a clear democracy or a clear dictatorship."

Facebook-initiated strike

Several democracy forces try to tap into the currently ever more general disappointment and desperation. This was most notably so during the events that developed into a national strike on April 6, 2008. The action started on the internet community *Facebook*, and quite soon picked up momentum, probably due to a clear and simple message that appealed to most Egyptians – to protest against price hikes and manifest hunger.

Despite the fact that internet penetration in Egypt is quite low and only half of the population can read, the news spread quickly that something was in the making. Part of the success was due to text messages that passed quickly from phone to phone, also between those who did not hang out on *Facebook* or own computers. "The success lay in connecting the Internet to the wider network of mobile phones," says a journalistic source that prefers to remain anonymous.

Come 6th of April, the streets were empty in Alexandria and Cairo, many shops and offices were closed and many children kept at home. The only ones taking

to the streets were tens of cars with "central security" riot police, except in the industrial town of Mahalla, where the Workers' Union had staged several protests. A few days later, the person behind the *Facebook* group was arrested – and then again released a few weeks later. It is hard to tell, however, whether the joint efforts on *Facebook* by people condemning the arrest influenced the regime.

When meeting with Gamal Eid on the day before the strike, he remained optimistic but realistic: "I see this as the final rehearsal," he said, adding that the current strategy of the regime was to prevent groups from uniting and working together, realising that the battle over the Internet was already lost; pulling the plug on one blogger would bring out ten others.

Blog journalism

In all this, the Internet remains a vital tool. *Facebook* is only one of the ways to communicate and organise co-operation. One strength of the many Egyptian bloggers is their number. Whenever a page is closed down or a blogger apprehended, the other bloggers bring the case into the light to put pressure on the authorities. Two handy tools in this struggle are the free internet services *Flickr* and *Twitter*. One blogger tells how he is never more than a text message away from spreading the news of his whereabouts to tens of thousands of people, from average readers to opposition journalists and fellow bloggers, should he be arrested or harassed. By jointly subscribing to *Twitter*, the bloggers can keep each other updated. Messages up to 140 characters long are published straight away on the *Twitter* website, through instant messaging (Rich Site Summary/RSS), text messaging, email and the arrested blogger's own website.

Flickr was originally developed in order to post mobile phone holiday pictures on an internet page for friends and family to share. This function, as well as the more well-known *YouTube*, has proved handy also in other types of situation, for instance in quickly displaying ongoing demonstrations. It was allegedly on *Flickr* that the first cell phone pictures from the London bombings were posted. The possibility to categorise the pictures as one pleases makes it possible to search for "police brutality", for example, and a country.

When Egyptian state television ignores the rare demonstrations that occur, any member of society who is present can now take pictures and send them to the Internet. This is true of course also of arrests, police brutality and harassment in the street. This power of documentation has been the starting point for several blogs, aiming to post as many pictures as possible from a demonstration for instance. As far as the selection of news is concerned, activism aiming purely at uncommented documentation of topics that traditional media avoid out of fear, can be powerful enough.

In Egypt, blogging has now reached a stage where bloggers function as feeders of news to traditional media. Several journalists testify that they may leak a story – too sensitive to publish – to a blogger, who will cover the action, get the story picked up by independent newspapers, eventually maybe even by *Al Jazeera*[2] and state media. When "the story is already out there", it is easier for independent newspapers to justify their coverage.

Wael Abbas – one example

This was the case with blogger Wael Abbas. Even though police brutality was a well known problem in Egypt, it was rarely reported on – not until Wael Abbas published and circulated a video clip that recorded how two police officers forced a truck driver they had taken into custody to commit sodomy. The clip had already circulated among cell phones for months, when Wael Abbas was approached by his sources at a demonstration he was covering. In the end, the policemen responsible for the brutality were sentenced to jail. At the time this was groundbreaking but has become more common since.

This is just one out of several cases where Wael Abbas has played a role. Sexual harassment was previously not reported upon. But after he had taken and published testimonies from girls who where assaulted during a public holiday, the information reached the masses, and created new awareness – supported by dedicated efforts of women's rights groups.

Many people have mobile phones in Egypt, and internet cafés are available everywhere (although one of the prime interests of the average visitor is often something as profane as – porn). Nevertheless, "connecting the Internet to the wider network of mobile phones" is potential dynamite, as one interviewee put it.

Bloggers lack safety nets, Wael Abbas points out. He used to be a correspondent for a foreign news agency but is now considered unhirable due to his sensitive activities. He has also been harassed by the security services and is convinced that his phone has been tapped. There is no organisation covering his back; yet, he and his fellow bloggers are the ones that get the news out there. He does not hide the fact that he pushes for democracy, which makes many colleagues in the West frown, with little understanding of working conditions for Egyptian bloggers.

According to Abbas, the bloggers are involved in more than activism. What they do is, in fact, citizen journalism. He feels that whether the mobile phone footage he posts is real or not, the government should nevertheless be obliged to investigate if a crime has been committed.

A role for Swedish development cooperation

So, finally, what role can Swedish development cooperation play in this situation?

The most common answer to the question of what kind of cooperation could be useful is "training". But according to several media workers, training of journalists is a waste of money. They point to the fact that international broadcasting corporations have trained journalists in state media for decades, with no apparent result as far as the advance of democracy and citizens' freedom of expression are concerned. Training journalists at state universities may be pointless, since sensitive departments – such as the one for media studies – are controlled by the government. However, there is a genuine need for practical know-how, since the training of journalists in Egypt tends to focus on media theory, with the notable exception of the American University of Cairo, whose students are highly sought for, for example by *Al Jazeera*.

A huge majority of those concerned by this problem ask that bloggers be educated, that they be equipped with journalistic tools that can turn these ambitious amateurs into professional journalists. For what is the point of having well educated professional journalists in the big media, if they dare not report the news conveyed by courageous bloggers, even at large risks?

Sweden could play an important role in this, as the relevant know-how is available in Sweden.[3] Furthermore, at least until recently (pre-the Mohammed caricatures), one of Sweden's strongest assets in this context was an image of neutrality and not having a hidden agenda. Of course, this is only so insofar as people know anything at all about Sweden's efforts in development cooperation! Says Nora Younis: "People know that the opera house was a gift from the Japanese, and the Aswan dam from the Russians, but they could not say what Sweden does."

There is much potential in regional cooperation between journalists with the Arabic language as their common denominator. Bloggers flourish in the Gulf area and are appearing around the Levant. Gamal Eid's human rights information network is one way of turning information into power. By publishing information from human rights activists around the Arab world, in Arabic and English, he becomes something of a journalist, making information available that otherwise would not be available.

In the land of conspiracy theory, where Israel and the USA are often believed to be behind all bad things, professor Larry Pintak has an unrewarding role to play, working against prejudice. In the Arab world, the American University of Cairo is undoubtedly a centre for information not always appreciated by state

authorities. Several of the university projects are worth noticing, such as one in rural areas, in which efforts are made to connect local journalists and local civil society in order to help overcome prejudice about one another, bringing them together in workshops. For a Western, idealistic journalist, this may be unheard of. In a country where lack of know-how and distrust of one another is omni-present, it is a necessity.

At the time of my interview with Larry Pintak, in April 2007, plans were underway to invite a handful of Egyptian bloggers to cover the US elections first hand, combined with short internships at prestigious news desks in USA. This is a model worth considering for Sweden. The language barrier maybe bigger, but at least participants will not be accused of having joined the CIA upon returning... As opposed to USAID for instance, Sida does not have funds specifically for Egypt rather than joint projects for several Arab countries.

According to Larry Pintak, bloggers have undoubtedly changed the media scene in the Arab world, just as *Al Jazeera* did for television several years earlier. He points out however that "there still has not been a democratic switch of rulers in any one of the countries."

References

Interviewed sources in Cairo (some are protected for their own security):

Bothaina Kamel, *Egyptians Against Corruption*, 3 April, 2008.

Malin Stawe, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), 4 April, 2008.

Gamal Eid, *Human Rights Information Network*, HrInfo, 5 April, 2008.

Nora Younis, blogger and correspondent for the *Washington Post*, 5 April, 2008.

Wael Abbas, blogger at misrdigital, 13 April, 2008.

Larry Pintak, Adham Center, American University of Cairo, 14 April, 2008.

Notes

[1] http://norayounis.com/2005/12/30/200830

[2] Qatar based television network modelled on CNN. See http://english.aljazeera.net/

[3] It is a different matter that most Swedish bloggers would be of little help as far as the substance is concerned, as the Swedish bloggo-sphere consists largely of opinion-driven rather than news-driven blogs.

Democratisation and Democracy Assistance:

Seven Years of Meaningful Discussion

Helena Bjuremalm

This conference has made an effort to address three large areas of concern for development cooperation in the area of democratisation:

- the implications of ICT for democracy and democratic processes;
- ICT and the freedom of expression, not least in contexts where tolerance for opposition is low; and
- ICT and the formation of social movements.

To put it more concretely, we have covered empowerment in relation to stone-throwing demonstrators, bread protests, and the use of cell phones.

The conference that we are just about to conclude is the seventh and the last one in a series of conferences on democratisation and democracy assistance. They have been organised on an annual basis since 2002. One could say that the series was born out of concerns, needs and interests of the Collegium for Development Studies at Uppsala University and Sida's Division for Democratic Governance. Both parties wanted to dwell on the intricacies and challenges of development cooperation in the field of democratisation, not least as both of us thought that this growing area tended to be treated with a certain degree of oversimplification.

Throughout the years the conferences have covered both fundamental and more specific themes ranging from:

- Democracy, Power and Partnership;
- Democracy as Actual Practice: What Does Democracy Really Bring?
- Political Corruption and Democracy;
- Violent Conflict and Democracy – Risks and Opportunities;
- Equal Representation – a Challenge to Democracy and Democracy Promotion;
- Whose Voices? Media and Pluralism in the Context of Democratisation;
  to this year's theme
- Big Brother and Empowered Sisters. The Role of New Communication Technologies in Democratic Processes.

Reports from previous conferences are all available at the Collegium's website: www.kus.uu.se.[1] (Do not be surprised if they turn up in unexpected quarters – like our ball point pens. The distribution and usage of conference products simply show that our discussions here in Uppsala go beyond this particular room.)

All of the conferences have been rich in debate and conclusions, and it would not be fair to summarise them in just a few words. I would, however, like to bring up a sample of our accumulated insights based on experience and research. I will mention five.

New insights

Firstly, we have ventured beyond narrow notions of formal/minimal definitions of democracy as a certain set of rules and institutions, and dwelled upon substantial democracy, or put differently, political equality in determination of the conditions of peoples' lives combined with interest aggregation, and peaceful regulation of conflicts of interests, that is, the content and outcome for citizens of those very rules, institutions, and decision-making processes.

Secondly, we have come to realise how extremely difficult it is to arrive at generally valid answers to questions such as "what needs to happen in post-conflict states before formal democratic political processes become useful?" Should and could "the bad guys" be brought into the "good" game without perverting it, before common rules have been accepted and implemented in practice? And what happens if they are not brought on board? This is a paraphrase of the classical paradox of tolerance formulated by Plato.

Thirdly, we have continuously discussed the role of international development cooperation. Is it merely a facilitator sowing seeds of change, or is it in reality even imposing certain kinds of change? In most complex situations there is no clear-cut solution or alternative that does not come with a price. Very often, development practitioners have to choose between difficult alternatives, all of which

have down-sides, some of which have advantages – and weighing advantages and disadvantages is quite a challenge.

Fourthly, in addition, given the institutional and resource constraints that characterise many countries in the developing world, it is possible that goals associated with democracy assistance have been too ambitious. Perhaps more modest goals set to manageable time limits would be more realistic, enabling an organic process to be nurtured without raising domestic and international expectations prematurely. The question for us to answer might no longer be "What is ideal?" but rather "What is possible in the situations we are dealing with now?".

Fifthly, this particular dilemma was essentially born out of something good: the fact that both academia and practitioners have learnt a lot in the last ten-fifteen years. However, there is a danger that the more we learn, the more impossible the task becomes, and the more demands we attach to democracy assistance. We risk creating a process that is so complicated and cumbersome and demanding that, essentially, it cannot be implemented. We started out with too simplistic programs because we did not know better. Mistakes were made, we learned and every time we learned, we added another requirement. There is a tremendous need for more analysis of what is good enough given the circumstances, even more so since the countries where we now work are becoming increasingly difficult, such as Afghanistan, Burundi and Somalia.

Cross-cutting meetings

In addition, I would like to say something about the conference format; this took a couple of conferences to refine. The Collegium and Sida ended up with a first conference day, covering the issues in a broad sense in plenary, but with group discussions around tables with a carefully selected mixture of participants from development cooperation practice, academia, students, activists, consultants, public servants, and the general public. The second day we have devoted to a workshop format focused on different country settings, with a view to relate the issues to the realities on the ground. Speakers and workshop facilitators have been invited from all walks of life and from a number of countries, including of course the developing world.

The issues covered and the format chosen have contributed to a number of results, not only the report books mentioned but also a number of policy and methods related publications by Sida, as well as processes within Sida. Let me just mention two publications (available at www.sida.se/publications):

Digging Deeper – an internal project on lessons learned and suggested future directions for cooperation in the area of democratic governance, with a

particular focus on political institutions, participation, good governance and the legal sector;

Power analysis – a method of capturing underlying patterns of power relations and structures that may drive change – or prevent it; in short, a deeper political analysis necessary for a richer understanding of the environment in which development cooperation is supposed to work.

Lastly, but not least – the format of our conferences has been successful in bringing together practitioners and researchers to debate, differ and find common ground. Such close interaction is really important for fostering understanding of one another's different roles. Development cooperation practitioners tend to view researchers as knowledgeable but "they never come up with recommendations which we can use in our work" – to this, the researcher would respond "but it is hardly our duty to make such choices for you; we would rather point you to relevant evidence and then you have to draw your own conclusions". Researchers, on the other hand, may think that development cooperation practitioners seem never to bother reading academic journals and books and make use of existing evidence-based knowledge. To this, practitioners may respond that such knowledge is too theoretical.

The fact that this is the last conference, at least for now and in this format, is due to a combination of a sense amongst the organisers of having covered a fair amount of the challenges relating to democratisation and democracy assistance – and budgetary constraints. We simply did not plan to have a perennial series; our goal was more modest: to deal with some of a number of pertinent challenges. It is, however, hoped that the Collegium and Sida will continue to cooperate, in the future, but with a slightly different focus – possibly related to civil society.

Before concluding this series, let me point to some remaining challenges in relation to democratisation and democracy assistance, *democratisation* first. I will mention five of them.

Challenges for democratisation

Firstly, more than half of the world's population live in democracies of some sort, although only some 13 percent reside in full democracies according to an article in a recent Freedom House report (Puddington 2007). Despite the advances in democracy in recent decades, almost 40 percent of the world's population still live under authoritarian rule. Given recent trends, it is unlikely that this proportion soon will decrease significantly. The percentage of countries designated as "free"

by Freedom House (same source) has failed to increase for nearly a decade, and these trends may suggest a stagnation of democratisation.

Secondly, one of the most troubling dimensions of this stagnation is a growing authoritarian backlash against civil society actors. The targets tend to be organisations, movements, and media that monitor human rights or advocate the expansion of human rights and freedoms. Moreover, it would appear that regimes in general are less likely to employ the traditional techniques of extreme repression: military rule, mass arrests, assassinations, torture and coups (although this is certainly the case in some quarters). Instead, governments often use legalistic tactics to put potential voices of opposition out of business – regime-directed economic pressure (such as discouraging advertisers from doing business with media), denial of licences to privately owned broadcasting media, slander charges against reporters, outright closure of media or gags on specific reporters' stories about first families/top business circles and linkages to grand corruption, use of the tax police to investigate non-state actors, or adoption of policies that make it difficult for domestic non-state actors to receive support from foreign sources. Such regimes have become rather advanced in their tactics, but donor and creditor responses in these cases tend to be naïve or outright cynical, to say the least. In one country which fits exactly into this picture the setbacks were described by a donor (not Sweden) as "slippages in governance" (sic!).

Thirdly, although there is a global trend indicating a loss of momentum for democratisation, the key issues and challenges for democracy in different regions have become quite distinct. For example, whereas in Latin America the issue of citizen disappointment with the performance of weak democratic systems is crucial, in the former Soviet Union a major challenge concerning democratisation is the continued centrality of long-entrenched political power structures. It is striking that different regions live in surprisingly distinct political subcultures in which both the style and substance of discussing politics varies considerably. Outside actors must thus be cautious about relying upon highly generalised ways of thinking and acting with respect to democracy around the world.

Fourthly, in spite of democracy being widely accepted in principle as the 'only game in town', it obviously suffers from defunct instruments that are unable to facilitate political equality and popular control of public affairs. The deficit is due to the monopolisation of instruments by the establishment, poor representation of people's interests and visions, and political marginalisation of democratic agents of change. Elites monopolise, bend and abuse the rules of that game. Most of the supposedly democratic rights and institutions are in place, but they are largely either defunct or deficient. Let me share a quote that speaks for itself.

In a Readers' Survey: "What makes people happy?" (*Sunday Nation* 1.10.2006), Victor, 10 years, responds as follows:

> I am normally happy when playing with my friends at school. People are happy when they win money in some radio stations, when they buy a car or a huge house and have good jobs. I think the happiest person in Kenya is the President because he has lots of money and power to control the country as he wishes.

This boy pinpoints the drawbacks of an increasingly encompassing Presidency.

Fifthly, one of the most powerful factors hurting the cause of global democracy is the rise of oil and gas prices. Energy revenue bonanzas have strengthened many resource-rich and non-democratic governments, as have the needs of the world's existing and emerging super powers. The high prices have also punished a number of weak democracies by hurting their economies. The international community has made some progress in recent years in opening up the issue of revenue accountability in resource-rich countries. This is an area that merits considerable further attention.

Challenges for democracy assistance

Challenges relating to *democracy assistance* are numerous. Let me briefly mention eight.

1) *Democratisation processes* are very complex, to say the least. The art of muddling through is a more realistic depiction than concepts like "transitions", "sequencing", or "phases" which lure us into hoping for rather automatic strides forward. Why is this so? Because democratisation is about changing power relations and involves struggles between those who push for and those who resist democratisation. Moreover, donors could, at best, try to help domestic actors to achieve what they have already decided they want for themselves, but donors hardly ever drive, lead or shape political transitions – in spite of wishing they could. Support to democratisation processes must then for obvious reasons be designed in very neatly tailor-made styles – there simply is no one-size-fits-all. Donors also need to expect longer timescales for fundamental change to take place, perhaps 15-20 years down the line rather than 3-5 years, which is considered to be a long term perspective in donor agencies. These are not always welcome observations amongst politicians guiding and monitoring performance of donor agencies.

2) A current debate concerns the issue of *sequencing*. Is it better to put off democratisation until the full foundation of an effective state and the rule of law have been established? In weighing this question, it is important to consider the potentially destabilising effect of democratisation on the one hand, against the

tendency of authoritarian forms of control to undermine effective state building and rule of law principles, as well as the feasibility and desirability of putting off citizen's desire for political participation and inclusion on the other hand. In many places, democratisation, rule of law and state building have developed simultaneously and through mutual reinforcement.

3) Donors tend to be more active in dealing with *symptoms rather than causes* of slackness. Generous funding is provided for training sessions, study tours, exchanges etc, while what really needs to be addressed is much more sensitive: such as changes in electoral systems, campaign funding, separation and balance of power between the branches of government all the way down to the community level, security sector reform as well as lots of other highly contentious issues that external actors cannot really push – unless there are internal actors doing it.

4) Moreover, some donors tend not to realise that their choices, actions and preferred processes have *political implications* – although some seem to know exactly what they are doing and why. It is natural for donors to be interested in 'politics' – they are participants. But donors should primarily be reflecting on what their routine and strategic actions *do* in the political arena – what effects do they have for political relations, institutions, processes and above all agency? A case in point is the introduction of poverty reduction strategies as a condition for debt relief and general budgetary support, including the holding of national stakeholders' consultations. These have created new arenas for political prioritisation – but have tended to favour a type of "fast-track-democracy" through civil society consultations, and subsequently undermined formal political processes such as parliamentary debates. Another phenomenon very rarely discussed is the perpetualisation of regime power due to donor support to *de facto* one-party states – where the state apparatus and that of the governing party have more or less merged. No opposition groups will ever have the resources and outreach to put up serious competition for power. In such cases donors should, as a rule, try to promote not only more fair rules of the game, but also provide direct support to alternative sources of power, including social movements and interest groups.

5) Western democracy assistance has been plagued by *controversy*. While largely welcomed by opposition groups, such assistance has been resented by incumbent governments as external intrusion and breach of national legitimacy. I am not claiming that legitimacy is a non-issue, it most certainly is an issue. Just ask yourself what you would think about a foreign government wanting to fund reforms of our Parliament or party system – institutions that constitute the heart of our political sovereignty. The point here is, to put it bluntly, that western democracy assistance has been drastically and negatively affected by the US-led war in Iraq. I will share another quote which illustrates the magnitude of this challenge:

A young man in Somalia who recently attended a community based organisation's training on democracy says (anonymous comment):

> Before I went to this training on grass-roots democracy, I thought that democracy was something that the United States forced upon other states with violent means. Now I know that democracy is about discussing with my family before making any decisions that affect us.

The key question here for the democracy assistance community is how much this discrediting attaches only to US policies and programs and how much it spills over to other actors.

6) The issue of *weak representation* has been neglected by many of democracy's supporters. Institutions aimed at promoting direct or indirect political representation are among those with the worst performance and scope. Too many elections have been staged mainly between unrepresentative and unresponsive parties and politicians. Parties are dominated by money politics and powerful vested interests; they often abuse religious and ethnic sentiments; they are bad at forming and running governments; critical issues and interests among people are not reflected; membership control and relations with constituencies are very poor. People's contact with political representatives and public officials, as well as opportunities for consultation and direct participation are similarly bad. Interest-based representation is also weak. The building of better institutions should ideally be guided and propelled by broad-based representation of basic issues and interests, rather than by a (more or less) 'enlightened' elite (Törnquist 2006). This is but one area where equal access and capacity to utilize ICT would be helpful.

7) In this conjunction, the issue of *women and political representation* needs to be brought up. Decades after the introduction of equal suffrage for men and women in most countries of the world, equal participation in politics is still not a reality. While there has been undeniable progress on inclusion through the use of quotas and other strategies, not least the emergence of highly competent women politicians, the remaining challenge relates to the quality and substance of women's engagement in politics – the so called "beyond numbers" debate.

8) A final challenge relates to the fact that there seems to be a clear *need for more evidence gathering* about what works and why. Development cooperation agencies tend to hire researchers as consultants while these researchers, at the same time, have a very hard time accessing funds for independent research where they, themselves, design the issues at hand and the methods to use. More funds for such research is a priority, in particular if carried out in and by academia in developing countries. Speaking about research, there is a good case for increased

support to local knowledge production and local formation of opinion, primarily through long-term funding of independent research (social sciences), think-tanks and other sources of alternative information. This could promote independent opinion-building and thus policy-making and re-politicisation of critical development policy choices, particularly concerning growth, productivity, employment and local accumulation.

Before concluding, let me just share a quote which captures what democracy assistance through the use of ICT can achieve in spite of all its challenges. This is a quote from a Sida financed programme on "television for change" in Nigeria (Sida 2007):

> I waited for over two hours at a voter registration center in the midst of a volatile group of people. As I considered leaving, a petite, middle-aged lady walked up and politely informed a group of men who had been arguing that fighting would not be tolerated. In less than 30 minutes, this lady organized a queue, issued numbers, distributed paper, and instructed us on what information was required. Thanks to her boundless energy and enthusiasm, we were all soon swapping life stories and joking with the officials as the registration process got underway. The lady's conviviality was so infectious that several of us volunteered to support her efforts; by 6 pm over 350 applicants were registered. As we packed up, I asked her why she stepped in. She responded, "There is a show on TV that I try never to miss. It is called The Station, and it talks about how we can all make a difference and do the right thing."

Thank you

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say *thank you* to all of you who have participated in this conference and the previous ones. We also appreciate the contributions by Marina Ottaway of the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace, Washington, who has been instrumental in introducing and concluding all of our conferences except this one; she simply was not able to attend this year. In addition, Mia Melin, Lars Rudebeck, and Johan Hellström of the Collegium for Development Studies, and all rapporteurs throughout the years deserve a very special thank you for being such good organisers and editors and for always being a very sound bouncing board to Sida.

References and literature

Carothers, Thomas, 2002. The End of the Transition Paradigm, in *Journal of Democracy*, Washington DC, vol 13, no 1, pp 5-21. http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/gratis/Carothers-13-1.pdf

Carothers, Thomas, 2007. How Democracies Emerge. The "Sequencing" Fallacy, in *Journal of Democracy*, vol 18, no 1, pp 12-27. http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/gratis/Carothers-18-1.pdf

Gould, Jeremy, 2005. Intervention or reflection? On the knowledge interests linking aid and politics, in *Methods of Analysing Power- A Workshop Report,* Sida: Stockholm, pp 30-33. http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=118&a=3485&language=en_US&searchWords=methods%20of%20analysing%20power

Puddington, Arch, 2007. Freedom in the World 2007: Freedom Stagnation Amidst Pushback Against Democracy, in *Freedom in the World 2007*, Freedom House, Washington DC. http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=130&year=2007

Sida, 2003. *Digging Deeper - A Summary of Four Reports on Democratic Governance in International Development Cooperation,* Sida: Stockholm. http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=118&a=2880&language=en_US&searchWords=digging%20deeper%20

Sida, 2006. *Power Analysis - Experiences and Challenges, Concept Note*, Department for Democracy and Social Development, Sida: Stockholm.

Sida, 2007. *Report on "Television for Change in Nigeria: The Station and The Academy": Search for Common Ground Programme funded by Sida, January - December 2006,* submitted by Search for Common Ground to Sida, July 30, 2007.

Sunday Nation (Nairobi newspaper), 1.10.2006.

Törnquist, Olle, 2006. Assessing Democracy From Below – a Framework and Indonesian Pilot Study, *Democratization*, London, vol 13, no 2, pp 227-255.

Note

[1] Since January, 2009, the Collegium with its activities has been integrated into Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD Uppsala), www.csduppsala.uu.se .

Participants List

Aboud, Georgina / Institute of Development Studies, ELDIS, University of Sussex / g.aboud@ids.ac.uk

Abou Zeid, Gihan / Consultant, Egypt / fatimanh29@yahoo.com

Agalo, Faith / agalofaith@hotmail.com

Agnemo, Tomas / Sida/SEKA / tomas.agnemo@sida.se

Al-Saqaf, Walid / Global Journalism, Örebro University / wsaqaf@gmail.com

Anderson, Christopher / NOHA, Uppsala University / chris@photodiarist.com

Arneback, Jessica / Sida/DESO / Jessica.arneback@sida.se

Bedford, Tim / Oulu University, Finland / tbe@lyseo.edu.ouka.fi

Belcastro, Helen / Sida/ICT4D Secretariat / helen.belcastro@sida.se

Bengtsson, Evert / Centre for Image Analysis, Uppsala University / evert@cb.uu.se

Bereketeab, Redie / Uppsala University / redbereketeab@yahoo.com

Berg, Niklas / Sida /niklas.berg@sida.se

Berglund, Jan / berglund_jan@hotmail.com

Beronius, Karoline / SPIDER (Swedish Network for ICT in Developing Regions) / karoline@dsv.su.se

Bjuremalm, Helena / Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya / helena.bjuremalm@foreign.ministry.se

Bordes, Julie / NOHA, Uppsala University / bordes.julie@gmail.com

Broman, Angelica / Sida/SEKA / angelica.broman@sida.se

Caicedo, Juan Pablo / NOHA, Uppsala University / caicedojp@yahoo.com

Cederqvist, Gunilla / Sida/INFO / gunilla.cederqvist@sida.se

Costanza-Chock, Sasha / University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA / costanza@usc.edu

Coulter, Chris / Department of Theology, Uppsala University / NOHA / chris.coulter@teol.uu.se

Danielson, Birgitta / Sida/DESO / birgitta.danielson@sida.se

El Rafie, Yasmine / Journalist, Sweden/Egypt / yazz@kth.se

Enekvist, Maria / Anna Lindhs Minnesfond / maria.enekvist@annalindhsminnesfond.se

Eriksson, Hans / Mirabel Development Consulting, Stockholm /
    mirabel.development@swipnet.se

Esterhuysen, Anriette / APC (Association for Progressive Communications), South Africa /
    anriette@apc.org

Hansson, Henrik / Sida / henrik.hansson@dsv.su.se

Hasan, Zeenath / Media and Communication Studies, Malmö University /
    zeenath.hasan@mah.se

Hedlund, Emma / MKFC / Stockholm College / emma@mkfc.se

Hedlund, Kalle / MKFC / Stockholm College / kalle@mkfc.se

Hellström, Johan / UPGRAID, Uganda / johan@upgraid.org

Hårdh, Robert / Swedish Helsinki Committee, Stockholm / robert@shc.se

Högberg, Bertil / Africa Groups in Sweden / bertilh@bredband.net

Hök, Jöran / Sida/ OmVärlden / joran.hok@sida.se

Hörnquist, John / john.hornquist@vansterpartiet.se

Isaksson, Viktoria / Swedish Mission Council, Stockholm / viktoria.isaksson@missioncouncil.se

Jurva, Maria-Kajsa / Frilansjournalist / mariakaisa@comhem.se

Kabani, Javeria Rizvi / Department for Intercultural Relations, Swedish Institute, Stockholm /
    javeria.rizvi.kabani@si.se

Karefelt, Anna / *Rapporteur* / Collegium for Develoment Studies, CSD Uppsala, Uppsala
    University / annakarefelt@gmail.com

Kearns, Vincent / International IDEA, Stockholm / v.kearns@idea.int

Kimani, Phyllis / Narck Kenya Scandinavia / phyllis_kimani@yahoo.com

Kodrou, Eva / Department of Anthropology, Stockholm University / evakodrou@hotmail.com

Lambert Baj, SunRa / NOHA, Uppsala University / sunralambertbaj@gmail.com

Lhådö, Sara / Kvinna till kvinna, Stockholm / sara.lhado@kvinnatillkvinna.se

Lippolis, Emmanuel / NOHA, Uppsala University / lippolis_emmanuel@hotmail.com

Lodhi, Abdulaziz / Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University /
    abdulaziz.lodhi@lingfil.uu.se

Lorenz, Elisabeth / Sida/INFO / elisabeth.lorenz@sida.se

Lundberg, Christine / Sida /DESO / christine.lundberg@sida.se

Lundberg, Olle / MKFC, Stockholm College / olle@mkfc.se

Melin, Mia / Collegium for Development Studies, CSD Uppsala, Uppsala University /
    mia.melin@kus.uu.se

Mickeviciute, Neringa / NOHA, Uppsala University / neringa_mickeviciute@yahoo.com

Millet, Baptiste / NOHA, Uppsala University / batmillet@yahoo.fr

Moksnes, Heidi / Collegium for Development Studies, CSD Uppsala, Uppsala University / heidi.moksnes@kus.uu.se

Mukaru, Winnie / ABF, Stockholm / njokimuk@hotmail.com

Munyua, Alice / KICTANet, Kenya / alice@apc.org

Mwaura, Daniel / Narc Kenya Scandinavia / mwaos20@hotmail.com

Nilsson, Gunnar / Uppsala

Njenga, Ann / mumwa@yahoo.com

Nordenson, Helen / Sida/Culture and Media / helen.nordenson@sida.se

Nordström, Sofia / Church of Sweden / sofia.nordstrom@svenskakyrkan.se

Oberger, Bengt / Sida/ ICT4D Secretariat / bengt.oberger@sida.se

Odero, Jared / Stockholm University / oderoj@hotmail.com

Okao, Patrick / NOHA, Uppsala University / patrickokao@yahoo.com

Okolloh, Ory / Mzalendo, Kenya / ookolloh@gmail.com

Opee, Odhiambo / Stockholm University / oopee80@hotmail.com

Otoya, Adriana / NOHA, Uppsala University / adriana.otoya@gmail.com

Pater, Birthe / Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Germany / birthe-annkathrijn.pater@gtz.de

Pellechi, Gregory / NOHA, Uppsala University / greg.pellechi@gmail.com

Persson, Marie / Forum Syd, Stockholm / marie.persson@forumsyd.org

Polite, Oivvio / Freelance Journalist/Sida / m4@polite.se

Quezon III, Manuel / Journalist, The Philippines / mlquezon3@gmail.com

de los Reyes, Lucy / NOHA, Uppsala University / ljdelosreyes@gmail.com

Rudebeck, Lars / Collegium for Development Studies, CSD Uppsala, Uppsala University / lars.rudebeck@uland.uu.se

Ruohomäki, Marja / Sida/DESO / marja.ruohomaki@sida.se

Rydström, Lotta / SPIDER (Swedish Network for ICT in Developing Regions) / rydstrom@dsv.su.se

Sahiar, Khan Alamdar / alamdar51@hotmail.com

Selander, Caroline / Amnesty International, Stockholm / caroline.selander@amnesty.se

Svanström, Rolf / FAIR Sweden / rms.it@telia.com

Stenner, David / Uppsala University / david.stenner.0385@student.uu.se

Stillström, Karin / karin.stillstrom@svenskakyrkan.se

Stoddard, Louise / Institute of Development Studies, ELDIS, Amsterdam / louisestoddard@hotmail.com

Strack, Sarah / NOHA, Uppsala University / sarah.strack@wanadoo.fr

von Strauss, Malin / *Rapporteur* / malinvs@hotmail.com

Tersmeden, Turid / *Rapporteur* / Swedish Development Forum (FUF) / turid.tersmeden@fuf.se

Tjernström, Maja / Sida/DESO / maja.tjernstrom@sida.se

Troften, Per-Einar / Sida/ICT4D Secretariat / per-einar.troften@sida.se

Uhrus, Ninni / Collegium for Development Studies, CSD Uppsala,Uppsala University / ninni.uhrus@kus.uu.se

Vancollie, Evelyn / NOHA, Uppsala University / evelynvancollie@gmail.com

Yahya, Ahmed / Bagdhad University, Iraq / aironatics_engineer@hotmail.com

Zhang, Yu / Independent Chinese Pen Center / yuzhang99@hotmail.com

Conference and Workshop Programme

Conference Day: April 16, 2008

Opening of Conference
   Mia Melin, Collegium for Development Studies, Uppsala University
   Helena Bjuremalm, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya

What's New about New Technologies?
   Helen Belcastro, Sida/ICT for Development Secretariat

Empowered Sisters –
Strategic Uses of ICTs to Promote Social Justice and Equality
   Anriette Esterhuysen, APC, South Africa
   Discussion in groups

Big Brother and Freedom of Expression
   Robert Hårdh, Swedish Helsinki Committee, Stockholm
   Discussion in groups

Cooperation for Empowerment
Civil society groups and national ICT policies
   Alice Munyua, KICTANet, Kenya
   Discussion in groups

New Social Movements in the Network Society
Implications for Democratic Processes
   Sasha Costanza-Chock, University of Southern California
   Discussion in groups

Joint Discussion
   Chair: Helena Bjuremalm, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya

Workshop Day: April 17, 2008

Freedom of the Press and Political Activism
Walid al-Saqaf, Global Journalism, Örebro University, Sweden / Yemen

Mobile Democracy? The role of mobile phones in democratisation processes
Johan Hellström, UPGRAID, Uganda

Workshop groups:
Kenya
Ory Okolloh, Mzalendo, Kenya, and Alice Munyua, KICTANet, Kenya
China and the Philippines
Yu Zhang, Independent Chinese Pen Center, Sweden, and Manuel L Quezon III, Journalist, the Philippines
 Egypt
Gihan Abou Zeid, Consultant, Egypt, and Yasmine El Rafie, Journalist, Egypt/ Sweden

Seven Years of Democracy Conferences – Concluding Comments
Helena Bjuremalm, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya

Earlier publications in the series

1. *Politik och ekonomi i Indien 1997*, ISBN 91-973284-0-5

2. *Civila Samhället och Demokratin 1997*, ISBN 91-973284-1-3

3. *Genpolitik och Sveriges Bistånd 1998*, ISBN 91-973284-2-1

4. *Where is Pacific Asia Heading? 1998*, ISBN 91-973284-3-X

5. *Staten – Hinder eller förutsättning? 1999*, ISBN 91-973284-4-8

6. *Utveckling på det Civila Samhällets Villkor 1999*, ISBN 91-973284-5-6

7. *Korruption och Utveckling 1999*, ISBN 91-973284-7-2

8. *Utbildning för rehabiliteringsinsatser och återuppbyggnad i politiskt labila regioner 1999,* ISBN 91-973284-8-0

9. *Defining Partnership with Africa*, ISBN 91-973284-9-9

10. *Science and Development in the Third World, 1999*, ISBN 91-973683-0-X

11. *Skolans kris i Afrika, 1999*, ISBN 91-973683-1-8

12. *Human Rights and Aid Practice, 2000*, ISBN 91-973683-2-6

13. *Utvecklingsrelaterad forskning vid Uppsala universitet – en undersökning, 2000*, ISBN 91-973683-3-4

14. *Power, Resources and Culture in a Gender Perspective, 2000*, ISBN 91-973683-5-0

15. *Kosovo and the Changing Face of Humanitarian Action, 2001*, ISBN 91-973683-4-2

16. *Aid and Academia – Reassessing the Relationship, 2002*, ISBN 91-973683-6-9

17. *Democracy, Power and Partnership – Implications for Development Cooperation, 2002*, ISBN 91-973683-7-7

18. *Breeding Inequality – Reaping Violence. Exploring Linkages and Causality in Colombia and Beyond, 2003*, ISBN 91-973683-8-5

19. *Gender and Peace Processes – an Impossible Match?, 2003*, ISBN 91-973683-9-3

20. *Democracy as Actual Practice: What Does Democracy Really Bring?, 2003*, ISBN 91-974705-0-3

21. *Med världen som arbetsfält: Kartläggning av Uppsala universitets samarbete med forskning och undervisning i tredje världen, 2004*, ISBN 91-974705-2-X

21. *Working Worldwide: A survey of research and educational collaboration between Uppsala University and third world countries, 2004*, ISBN 91-974705-4-6

22. *Developing Participation: Challenges for Policy and Practice in Approaches to Poverty Reduction and Democratisation, 2004,* ISBN 91-974705-3-8

23. *Political Corruption and Democracy – the role of Development Assistance, 2005,* ISBN 91-974705-5-4

24. *Making It Work – Experiences in Canada, the Netherlands andthe United Kingdom with Recommendationsfor Sweden's Implementation, 2005,* ISBN 91-974705-7-0

25. *The Democratisation of Finance – Future Directions for Microfinance, 2005,* ISBN 91-974705-9-7

26. *ICT – A Tool for Poverty Reduction – Challenges for Development Cooperation, 2005,* ISBN 91-974705-7-0

27. *Violent Conflict and Democracy – Risks and Opportunities, 2006,* ISBN 91-975741-0-4

28. *The World Summit on the Information Society – A Summit of Solutions?, 2006,* ISBN 91-975741-2-0

29. *Equal Representation – A Challenge to Democracy and Democracy Promotion, 2007,* ISBN 91–975741–3–9

30. *Whose Voices? – Media and Pluralism in the Context of Democratisation, 2008,* ISBN 91–975741–4–7