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THE CASE FOR COMMUNICATION RIGHTS: A rights-based approach to media development*

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Abstract

From the 1980s, international organizations have devised strategies to develop national media systems to make them more diverse and inclusive so as to both exhibit and preserve local cultures. However, these strategies have not always been successful since information has become a commodity because the interests of private actors prevent equal access to communication rights. This paper outlines a perspective on media development from a rights-based approach, derived from a critique of dominant perspectives from international organizations with a strong focus on technology provision. The paper argues for media development based on the right to communication as an alternative to commodification of information. Through examples from Brazil and Kenya, the paper illustrates that viewing communication as a basic right can lead to the inclusion of more voices in the public discourse. In addition, a model for media development is proposed, suggesting that the state and national civil society play a significant role in promoting diverse national public spheres.

Keywords: Media development, communication rights, media systems, Brazil, Kenya

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Introduction

The importance of access to information and communication technologies and skills to use these technologies for social inclusion became a much-debated topic during the first years of the 21st Century, when the term ‘digital divide’ gained currency in media and communication studies, particularly in the area of development communication (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Norris, 2001; van Dijk, 2006; van Dijk and Hacker, 2003; Warschauer, 2004). A common critique of the rhetoric of universal access to technology is that it usually relies on a needs-based approach, according to which companies and organizations in developed countries decide the needs of developing nations. This top-down approach to media development has been criticized by scholars (e.g. Wilkins, 2000). However, little attention has been paid to approaches to media development that take into account the human right to communication. It is clear that, even in the 21st Century, we are prone to looking towards media technologies and institutions as promoters of democracies, without considering the context in which policies and programs are implemented.

The inequalities in media production and representation between and within nations have been an issue discussed in international arenas since at least the 1980s, with the institution of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The consensus at that time was that a democratic, plural and inclusive national media landscape was crucial to both maintaining national and local cultures and supporting a democratic society.

With the rapid technological development which has occurred during the last three

decades, technologies have started to be seen by some (for instance Castells, 2009) as catalyzers of democratization by facilitating self-representation and communication among marginalized groups such as indigenous communities, slum dwellers, peasants or LGBTQ persons. Consequently, the focus of debates has shifted from creating the conditions for the production of media content and fostering a plural media landscape, to catering for the needs of resource-poor communities and underrepresented groups (Scott, 2014). Fuelled by partnerships with private actors in the technology sector, media development has become synonymous with access to information technologies.

This paper, therefore, analyzes the evolution of the concept of media development, and further proposes a rights-based approach to media development based on two examples from the Global South¹ — the case of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) in Brazil as well as the Voice of Kibera², a community medium in Kenya. A rights-based approach to media development considers communication a human right, without which it is impossible to participate as a citizen in society. This view is opposed to the view of communication as a commodity to be negotiated in markets where people participate as consumers and not as citizens. In the two cases, local communities and pressure groups have been working to construct a more diverse media landscape and ensure the representation of minority and marginal groups.

Our intention is not to compare the countries, but to use these examples to argue for a rights-based approach to media development that considers individuals as citizens and aims to broaden the reach of communication rights in unequal and diverse societies such as Brazil and Kenya. Both countries are former colonies in the Global South that have undergone a

democratization process in the past few decades, a process which has been marked by political pluralism, increased civil liberties, deepening of constitutionalism and the strengthening of the civil society. At the same time, both countries have high levels of social exclusion and socio-economic inequality.

A rights-based approach refers to a holistic view on development, combining human rights with traditional economic indicators of such development. It is considered to be a post needs-based approach, which in contrast is focused on catering for specific – usually material – needs³. In media development, a rights-based approach will focus on granting the right to communicate to those who lack it, as opposed to providing technologies and access to communication. The right to communicate, as we argue, entails several structural changes that facilitate representation and participation in and through the media (Carpentier, 2007).

The concept of ‘development’ and its connection to communication

The notion of international development emerged after the Second World War, which left much of Europe impoverished and led to a reassessment of the viability of colonization (Hamelink, 1994). Previous colonies were now aware of their autonomous nationhood and for the first time grappled with the issues of governance and management. The term *development* became thus concretized in the 1950s to encapsulate the idea that underdeveloped (not industrialized) nations needed to achieve a developed status, usually through modernization by the adoption of new technologies in different fields, including communication. Since much of the knowledge about incorporating mass communication into national development plans meant compressing the lessons of Western development, which took centuries, into a few decades (Mody, 1991;

Stevenson, 1994 & 1998), most of the initiatives and programmes were designed to expedite the Western experience sans the political upheaval, namely crusades, mercantile explorations, economic exploitation and cultural degradation (Mody, 1991).

Various ideas that discussed the development of the 'Third World', and the least developed countries (LDCs), by using modern technology and mass communication precipitated in one or another version of *modernization theory* (Melkote, 1991:3). There was a clear view of what development meant – often associated with economic development, access to consumption and adoption of modern technologies that were widespread in Western countries. Media technologies, media institutions and the process and practice of communication had a significant role in the modernization of the 'Third World'. The media was seen as having the capacity to inspire the populations in the 'Third World' to 'act and think in modern, Western ways' (Wilkins, 2000:2). It was through communicative processes materialized in the media that people in developing countries would have access to information on how to improve their lives.

An oft-used source in early stages of defining development was Rostow's (1960) *The States of Economic Growth*, which distinguished between traditional and modern societies, considering tradition and culture a hindrance on the path to modernity, and placed so-called traditional societies on the opposite end of the spectrum from modern societies. Rostow (1960) emphasized that economic change in Europe was slow until it reached a critical mass, after which economic change became self-sustaining (Stevenson, 1994; McPhail 2002); he considered development a unidirectional and irreversible economic growth.

As was indicative of the time, growth and development were measured in monetary terms, namely via the Gross National Product (GNP), which associated development to mass

consumption. However, this narrow view of modernization did not acknowledge the correlation between the development of the Western world and colonial exploitation of the 'Third World' (Herman & McChesney, 1997; Mody, 1991). During the same period, communication scholars who were researching the role of mass media in the development of societies they considered primitive, proposed that modernity usually follows technological changes in institutions, which open access to media, and which is often followed by a shift of values from traditional to modern, at the individual level. Mass media are at the center of this transition, because they reach large numbers of people in a short period of time (McQuail, 2000: 84).

The first proponent of mass media's ability to serve as a 'mobility multiplier' was Daniel Lerner (Thussu, 2000), whose seminal work, *The Passing of the Traditional Society*, examined the relationship between the extent to which people were exposed to radio in six Middle Eastern nations—Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria—and their tendencies towards a modern way of life (Stevenson, 1988; Thussu, 2000). Lerner concluded that those exposed to the mass media had less tendency to adhere to their 'traditional values', and therefore were more likely to adopt a 'modern' way of life.

Analogous to Rostow's (1960) stages of development, Lerner suggested a sequence of institutional developments that would initiate and hasten modernization, leading to a rise in literacy and consequently higher media exposure, which in turn correlates with higher economic and political participation by the public (Lerner, 1958: 46).

Another important component of Lerner's thesis is *empathy*, which implied that for development to occur, it was important for people to be able to imagine an improvement in their lives (Schramm, 1976: 46). Although proposing motivation as a prerequisite for advancement,

even in this case, development was suggested to take place outside the traditionally defined norms and structures of the respective society. People living below the poverty line, as still is the case in many developing nations, can hardly imagine improving their situation when a better life does not corroborate with their life's reality. Wilbur Schramm endorsed Lerner's idea in *Mass Media and National Development*, appropriately published in 1964, the UN's decade for development, and labelled mass media as a 'bridge to a wider world, as the vehicle for transferring new ideas and models from the North to the South, and within South from urban to rural areas' (Thussu, 2000: 57).

Basically, Schramm posited that mass media could raise the aspiration of people in developing countries, and serve as a catalyst for change towards development, and therefore modernization. Both Lerner and Schramm's work were used as the basis for several UN projects in the 1960s and 1970s (Thussu, 2000: 57). By the 1970s, the level of media development in a country was used as one of the indicators of progress, along with the GNP. However, with time, scholars and government officials alike began to realize that the powers attributed to media by *modernization theory* had very little evidence to support it (McPhail, 2002; Stevenson 1988; Thussu, 2000).

Therefore, based on the critique of modernization theory, we propose a contextual approach to development (and media development in particular) that is attentive to cultural and economic contexts as well as research findings in order to devise policies that are based on the concept of communication as a fundamental right. As the chart below illustrates, research implies not only scientific knowledge but also includes local and indigenous knowledge.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Development – Outside of Context?

Even though the dominant paradigm continued to guide many international development projects, by the mid 1970s, its validity was being questioned. Modernization was no longer viewed as a desired goal that followed a linear process and evolved equally in all nations. It became clear that the positivist models of development, in overlooking the role that native cultures played for societies of the South, had failed to consider the context in which modernizing variables such as urbanization, literacy, mass media use, and democratic participation were applied (Flew & Waisbord, 2015; Melkote, 1991, 2003; Narula & Pearce, 1986; Rogers, 1976; Stevenson, 1998). At the same time, evidence showed that exposure to mass communication had little correlation with embracing 'modern' values or bridging the income gap between the rich and the poor's⁴ cultural values and deeply held beliefs were very important in deciding how and when new ways of life would be adopted or when a process of change would occur. Moreover, mere exposure to media did not ensure a Western-style democracy. In fact, sometimes media exposure could be used to strengthen the same values and beliefs that the advocates of modernization theory wanted to eliminate, as has been evident in much of the Middle East (Thussu, 2000: 59).

Since Western models of communication were more communicator/sender-centered propaganda and persuasion models (Melkote, 1991), rather than empowering the receivers/target population, they only enhanced the influence of communicators. Consequently, the Western models of development came to be seen as a 'smokescreen for a new style of colonialism in which multinational communication organizations operating behind the facade of freedom, served as

advance strike forces for a coalition of political and economic interests intent on maintaining exploitative control of 'Third World' resources' (Stevenson, 1988: 4). Scholars from the developing world reminded us that their doubts about the feasibility of imposing Western models on non-Western countries were well founded, since 'the range of choice and solutions provided for modernization were provided within the context of the superiority of the western and developed nations' (Inyatullah, 1976: 58).

In a context in which the dominant paradigm of development failed to raise living standards in developed nations, dependency theory⁵ emerged in Latin America in the late 1970s both as a response to the failure of Eurocentric-modernization theory and because of the political situation in the continent (McPhail, 2002, Stevenson, 1998, Thussu 2000). The central argument in dependency theory was that if the world were an organism, its core would be the 'imperial centers' (i.e. developed countries such as the US) that controlled the flow of goods, capital, services and information between itself and the 'periphery' nations, namely the developing world, which made the South dependent on aid and information from the North (Thussu, 2000: 62).

Although all efforts towards international development were, in theory, to lead peripheral nations towards the semi-peripheral zone (McPhail, 2002), the reality was far from it. Technologies imported from the West were not always conducive to the social, cultural and economic realities of the receiving nations, and kept them in a state of dependency (Boyd-Barrett, 2003: 40). Therefore, instead of rising out of poverty and standing on their own feet, developing nations became dependent on technology and products that were neither home based nor in many cases, sustainable.

Closely related to dependency theory is the idea of cultural imperialism put forth by

Herbert Schiller (1976). After the failure of earlier development models, which excluded culture, since it was considered an impediment to modernization, the developing world defended culture as cornerstone of its strength. Although this paper does not discuss numerous definitions that culture has come to acquire, its role in development is examined in the latter part of the paper. Cultural and media imperialism remained a powerful argument for almost two decades until the liberating power of technology gained momentum and any form of imperialism was considered passé. New media and technology, supposedly, allowed developing nations to express themselves and bypass the global media structures. Castells (2009) argues for instance that communication power is crucial in times when information is a valuable currency. In his view, new media technologies and the formation of networks of different scales can facilitate the inclusion of marginal groups and equilibrate the balance of communication power among actors.

Information and communication – human rights or commodities?

The relation between establishment and maintenance of democracy and the existence of spaces for public communication is a recurrent issue in communication studies (Gangadharan, 2014; Mueller, Kuerbis, & Pagé, 2007; Padovani & Calabrese, 2014; Scifo, 2014; Waisbord & Segura, 2016). Even though there is no conclusive evidence as to whether initiatives from multi-state organisations such as UNESCO have a positive impact on the establishment of communication rights, there is a relative consensus on the role of these organizations in shaping discussions regarding public communication at national and international levels (see Calabrese, 2004; Chakravartty, 2014; Thomas, 2014). Such institutionalised efforts to discuss and address the democratic role of media and communication are relevant indicators of what issues are considered

problems or areas to be improved by the international community that is represented in these institutions. Dominant paradigms of communication rights often guide policy-making, but at the local level they may clash with social imaginaries, cultures and traditions (Thomas, 2014 p. 150-151), which emphasizes the importance of local contexts for the success of communication policies. Moreover, the development discourse of transnational actors focusing on access to technologies serves several times to legitimate agendas and partnerships that private for-profit actors rather than citizens (Chakravartty, 2014, p.285).

The dependency paradigm played an important role in putting forth the movement for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that was on top of UNESCO's agenda between the 1960s and early 1980s (Servaes 2001; Stevenson, 1988). The debate that questioned global 'information imbalance' in the 1970s stated that there was much more content being broadcasted to the developing world than was going in the opposite direction (Hamelink, 1995, 1997).

With the development of ICTs and following their unequal distribution around the world, information has surfaced as a valuable commodity, giving rise to another question in the development discourse—that of ownership and production of information. Regardless of media's role in the modernization process, access to information is important because urbanization breaks up communities that have traditionally been the repository of indigenous knowledge. Urbanization and modernization usually lead to a decreasing reliance on local and indigenous knowledge—borne out of local needs that utilized local resources—emphasizing instead the use and reproduction of practices and products considered modern and inserted in capitalist modes of production. Therefore, dissemination of cultural knowledge, which is reliant both on media

and interpersonal communication, is vital to maintaining cultural identities and social practices outside the market. Moreover, local communities should be able to protagonize social change according to their own premises.

In line with the development of ICTs and increasing internationalization of communication flows, a new UN Summit, WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) held in 2003 and 2005 devised the principles to 'build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge'. Nevertheless, the technocentric vision of WSIS, epitomized in the term 'information society', was critiqued by Ecuadorian representatives during a preparatory event for the first WSIS Summit and resulted in the adoption of the term 'information and communication societies' by civil society organizations (Burch, 2014 p.128). Thomas (2006) describes how the launching of the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) in 2001 in response to WSIS was crucial in strengthening civil society's presence in the meetings prior to WSIS Geneva. In this sense, CRIS played a role in politicizing the WSIS agenda and highlighting the social and local aspects originally downplayed by the technocentric and needs-based approach of WSIS.

The updated principles of WSIS focus less on nation-states and the creation of media products and more on individuals and communities and the production and sharing of information and knowledge. News production is now included in the principle of information sharing. Whereas the development of strong national news producers was a key issue during the 1970s and 80s, in the new millennium, the focus was on establishing the flow of information by granting access to technologies and building the knowledge and skills necessary to use these

technologies. In this context, our aim here is to problematize such agendas from the perspective of the global South (Santos, 2007), identifying key principles for inclusive global and local communication.

News production and circulation are important aspects of development processes because news representation reflects awareness about and presence of nations from the South in the international public sphere. Global news coverage is a significant determinant of the structure of international aid flows, which follow the core-periphery structure. Furthermore, news coverage (international, national, or local) represents (cf. Fraser, 2009) the issues, problems and people that are worth caring about. According to Fraser (2009), there is an interplay between political representation and symbolical representation. Consequently, those who are represented in the symbolical arenas of which media and news are a constitutive element, have better chances of being represented in political arenas. In line with Fraser, Peruzzo (2007a) considers the right to communication (both to produce and access information) a human right because it is essential to the full enjoyment of other citizen rights, such as the right to vote and to freedom of opinion and expression. Mata (2007) argues for the recognition of citizenship's communicative dimension which entails the right to know and influence the management of communication.

Representation in the news also influences the distribution of international aid since countries with a high level of news coverage receive more aid than those with less coverage (Lim et al, 2006). Additionally, the ability to produce and broadcast news within a country was crucial to national integration efforts that were a necessity for many newly independent states in post-colonial times (Hamelink, 1997). Although initially concerned with imbalance in the news flow, NWICO asked the world community to direct the development efforts in the 'Third World' with

four D's in mind: development, decolonization, democratization and demonopolization (Nordenstreng, 1984), which supports Peruzzo's argument about the role of the right to communication in granting other human rights and fostering social justice. As a consequence, if information is a human right (as is water and food) it should not be treated as a commodity. This seemed to be a consensus in the NWICO debate, which emphasized that, 'information is a social need and not a mere commodity' (Masmoudi, 1981: 86) and therefore providing information should not be treated as any other business.

We find an even stronger connection between the right to communication and other first- and second-generation human rights⁶ in Boyd-Barrett's (2003: 39) summary of the developing world's rights spelled out in the NWICO declaration, which include the right to develop independent information systems with the view to protecting national sovereignty and identity; the right to self-expression through media and culture; the right to use means of information to communicate its values to the world; and the right to participate 'in the international exchange of information under conditions of equality'. These rights could be granted by the elimination of imbalances in news flow, controlling for monopolies and concentrations, granting freedom of expression and information; and respecting and communicating cultural identities and values (Boyd-Barrett, 2003: 40).

In the wake of datafication (data defining interactions at every sphere of life) in the 2010s, it became imperative to rethink the implications of data (aggregated information on digital space) to development. The age of 'big' data, often defined by the 3vs—velocity, volume and variety—places focus on the transformation of processing capacity and availability of vast amounts of information owing to the technological changes of the 21st Century (Hilbert, 2016). While

structural inequalities and socioeconomic challenges remain, the age of big data has presented more complex problems relating to information and social justice, for example, the loss of privacy and surveillance of citizens by governments and corporations. In setting an agenda for exploration of development in the age of big data, Heeks and Renken (2016), argue that it has become imperative to consider data justice (ethical parameters of evaluating processes, practices and structures of data) at the forefront of any conceptualization of rights of citizens in developing nations. A dimension they propose to undergird data justice for development is examining big data from a ‘rights-based perspective’, in which questions such as access to information and inclusion are taken into consideration. A related perspective to this is Johnson’s (2014) conceptualization of ‘information justice’ as the calibration of the idea of open data (information to be accessed, used and shared freely), to take into account structural, political and technological hindrances to individual freedoms (263).

The view of communication as a collective, as well as individual right was somehow overlooked in the WSIS propositions, which prioritizes providing technological structures⁷. The commodification of information is also made explicit in Principle B2, paragraph 21⁸, which states that policies should attract private investment to grant the provision of ICT infrastructure and services. The focus on the provision of technologies is even clearer in WSIS’s Plan of Action, published after the first phase of the Summit in Geneva, 2003, which puts a strong focus on connecting a variety of institutions to the Internet (Section B, paragraph 5), and it is made stronger in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, which in its 13th paragraph states once again that the influx of investment by the private sector in financing ICT infrastructure, based on a ‘sound regulatory framework’, has been successful.

Another difference from NWICO is that communities and people are replaced by individuals and the civil society, revealing a more individualistic view of communication in particular and on rights in general⁹. The right to access to technology is viewed almost as a sufficient condition for the right to communication to be granted (i.e, as long as access and infrastructures are in place, people will not only receive information (and education and knowledge) but will also be able to produce information). Even though paragraph 8 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles states that 'ICTs should be regarded as tools and not as an end in themselves,' the plan of action strongly emphasizes providing access to technologies, granting free flows of information and educating people to use technologies.

This can be considered a neoliberal turn in the view to the right to communication and information, as private actors surreptitiously turn information into a commodity. Because it clearly favours the development industry, emphasizing the role of technocracy, creating measurable goals, and reducing the rights of people in the Global South as matters of connectivity, access, and structure; WSIS' principles represent a move in the direction of a Western neo-imperialist agenda.

In the post-WSIS years, several authors have critically engaged with WSIS agenda, challenging its neoliberal ethos (Chakravartty 2014), its lack of sensibility to local contexts (Thomas 2004) and the incipient civil society representation (Thomas, 2006; Burch, 2014). These tensions gain a renewed significance in the current context of increased digitalization of many kinds of interactions among individuals and individuals and institutions and the parallel commodification of the information generated in such interactions.

New era, new definitions: A *multiple* approach to development

Before the argument for communication rights is advanced, it is important to briefly look into the phenomenon of globalization and its influence on communication rights in the last decades. Among other characteristics such as merging and interdependency of economies and blurring of national boundaries, globalization is characterized by its pace, which is set by multinational corporations and international organizations located in and controlled by the West. Presently the situation of political and economic dependence, described by supporters of NWICO, still persists in many nations (Carlsson, 2005). Carlsson contends, however, that the creation of a new international order is not a viable solution in ‘an era of multilevel governance of the media and communication system’ (2005: 213) in which public and private actors from local to global levels act in interplay.

The dominance of a small number of large transnational corporations with an interest in profiting in the media and communications sector threatens the rights of minority groups and local communities to produce, access and participate in media. The commodification of communication and media also means that individuals are treated as means rather than an end, as consumers and not as citizens. As a consequence, scholars have focused on developing conceptual tools to deal with the imbalances in communication power, such as focus on self-reliance, local empowerment, increased access to information, increased participation in political discourse, protecting cultural identity, and developing local and regional media structures. Rogers (1976) suggested an emphasis on the equality of distribution of information and socio-economic benefits with a priority in development plans to rural and urban areas (Stevenson, 1988: 32), and Servaes (2001) suggested a *multiplicity* in approaches. Taking into consideration the past debates

and contentions, Waisbord (2005) presents five key concepts that must guide all development projects: centrality of empowering the target communities, combining top-down bottom-up (grassroots mobilization) approaches, a tool-kit approach that applies multiple strategies in one country, the need to combine interpersonal and multimedia activities, and finally prescribing solutions and programs based on both traditional and environmental factors of the respective society.

The argument we advance is that the development and improvement of media systems at different levels must focus on granting communication rights (Mata, 2007; Peruzzo, 2011), which can best be achieved through establishing plural and inclusive national media landscapes. The democratization of access to technologies is of course important. To ignore the role of media and technologies in bringing information to people is to ignore the strengths of our times. But to propose merely technological solutions in countries that are still dealing with basic issues such as electricity and running water makes little sense. Considering globalization as a variable that pulls developing nations into two opposing directions—a wish to isolate to protect cultural identity or a desire to join the global marketplace, despite little to contribute—we suggest that media development should not mean only providing technologies. Instead, it should showcase the diversity of a given society (cf. Fraser, 2009) through ensuring communication rights to all groups.

Almost 40 years after the publication of NWICO's report, the complaints that NWICO lodged with the world community still stand unattended. In fact, despite still being valid, the NWICO debate is usually overlooked in the face of a communication revolution that has occurred in the last two decades, which as discussed in the previous section, brings new demands for the development of communication and information systems. Today, four billion people from

developing countries are not connected to the Internet (ITU, 2015). While UNESCO has several initiatives to bridge the digital divide between the North and the South¹⁰, many nations, including some Western ones (Grosswiler, 2004: 118), are concerned about the neo-liberal global media that makes consumers rather than citizens of those who participate. Most developing countries still import more than they export, and have inadequately developed media structures and therefore consume more information, news and entertainment produced in developed countries than they did two decades ago. Apart from the loss of cultural production due to the imbalance in media production, lack of a well-functioning media system can lead to marginalization from the public debate (Deane, 2005). Also, the inequalities in the production of information mean that many communities and groups can seldom receive news coverage. Not only are they incapable of producing content, but are deliberately ignored or misrepresented by local, national and international media (examples are provided in the following sections). Despite the fact that the digital gap is diminishing, largely thanks to private actors in cooperation with the development industry, the lack of functioning and diverse national communication systems (Flew and Waisbord, 2015) means that many people and communities, mainly in the global South, do not enjoy communication rights (cf. Peruzzo, 2011). Discussing examples from China, Brazil and Australia, Flew and Waisbord (2015) conclude that nation-states are central to media processes, even in an age of media globalization. While international organizations with the collaboration of private actors, as suggested by WSIS plan of action, can be effective in operationalizing programmes and policies that grant access to technologies, the democratization of media depends on policies and measures that need to be applied at the national level.

The right to communication goes beyond the individual right to have access to

information and communication technologies that are vital in many aspects of life (health, dealing with government, education, finance, etc). According to Peruzzo (2011), the understanding of right to communication as the right to access information or freedom of information and expression, needs to be updated to include the dimension of communication as the power to communicate. Peruzzo further argues (2011: 28) that citizens and their collective organizations should have the right to access means of communication as content producers and broadcasters. Different from Castells (2009), who argues that communication power can be achieved through building networks enabled by digital communications, Peruzzo puts more faith in the democratic state, following civil society demands, as the granter of the rights that allow communication power to be exerted.

Peruzzo's view on the right to communication would be possible in a media landscape in which the principle of regulated pluralism (Thompson, 1995: 240) is applied, which requires 'the establishment of an institutional framework which would both accommodate and secure the existence of independent media organizations' (Ibid). Both the principle of regulated pluralism and the right to communication as described by Peruzzo (2011) have the goal to promote a diverse and plural media landscape, and their application does not depend on the access to technologies (although it helps) but on combined efforts from the state, government and civil society. Regulated pluralism requires thus that the democratic state should rule over private actors in ensuring communication rights to all groups represented in a given society. In practice, the right to communication cannot be attained when information and media content are treated solely as commodities, as examples in the following sections illustrate. The principles of regulated pluralism resonate with the agenda for communication rights advocated by the CRIS campaign.

As Thomas argues (2006 and 2011), rights-driven media reform at local and global levels with the participation of civil society are a necessary condition for the operationalization of Communication Rights.

Communication Rights in practice

Drawing on definitions from Fraser (2009), Mata (2007) and Peruzzo (2011), in this section we discuss how the path to granting communication rights functions in practice. We present examples from two southern developing nations, where the lack of media plurality overshadows the unbalanced cultural flow. As mentioned previously, the examples of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) in Brazil as well as the Voice of Kibera in Kenya, serve to illustrate how local communities are asserting their communication rights in a media environment with dominant media producers and marginalized majority populations. We analyze the cases based on our experiences in fieldwork among the communities where these movements and organizations operate in Brazil and Kenya. Although the digital gap is decreasing and access to technologies is becoming more widespread in both Brazil and Kenya, the media landscape is characterized by exclusion of large groups of the population, whose concerns are not adequately represented. In Brazil¹¹, for instance, a small number of families who have vested interests in other significant sectors such as construction, security and agribusiness¹² dominate the commercial media market.

Concentration of ownership in fewer hands means that groups that experience housing problems and organized rural workers, among others, are usually in a disadvantageous position when they need a forum to discuss their issues with society at large. The Landless Workers

Movement (MST), founded in 1984, and the recently established Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) are two organizations that face hostility or oblivion from large media corporations in Brazil, despite having in recent years organized different demonstrations and protests. Due to the lack of pluralism in the Brazilian media landscape, these groups do not have the power to communicate (cf. Castells, 2009).

Despite the use of digital media platforms to reach a public wider than members and sympathizers, both organizations are sceptical towards the extent to which access to technologies can increase their communication power (Sartoretto, 2015). These groups are aware of the need to change the ownership structure in Brazil, and even if they are not media activists¹³, they act in different ways—from direct action to create awareness about the concentration of media ownership and its consequences to attempts to influence law-making processes through advocacy—to promote changes in the media landscape in Brazil.

During the June 2013 demonstrations, both MST and MTST, together with the Movement for Free Transportation (MPL), staged demonstrations at the headquarters of Brazil's biggest media company, Globo TV. The demonstrations exhibited the groups' discontent that Globo TV's under-representation does not represent them and the problems they face in a fair way. The 2013 protests against Globo only surfaced as an issue that has been on the agenda of many social movements in the country—democratization of communication. Since 1990, a group of civil society organizations, trade unions and social movements have been working through an umbrella organization called the National Forum for Democratization of Communication (FNDC) to implement public policies that grant communication rights to a bigger part of the Brazilian population.

Two of the main issues in FNDC's agenda—legislation that prevents the formation of media oligopolies and prohibition for politicians of owning media outlets—are a statement to the importance of structural political measures in order to grant communication rights. FNDC's strategy of pressuring legislators for the change or adoption of new policies that foster a democratic media landscape provides an empirical backing to the idea of information and communication as rights, rather than as commodities to be explored by private actors. These strategies also show that when those who are marginalized by the media are left to act by themselves, they will choose structural change over the provision of technology. Furthermore, through changes and improvement of legislation, those who are on the wrong side of the digital gap can come closer to digital inclusion. FNDC's campaign is for more state control over providers of telecommunication services so that services become more fairly priced and accessible to communities that are currently off the grid.

The media landscape in Brazil bears similarities to that in Kenya, where five major media groups—Nation, Standard, Royal Media, Mediamax and Radio Africa—operate with interest in broadcast, print and online media. Similar to the case for Brazil, these media groups are the beneficiaries of the government's liberalization policy of the 1990s that led to the mushrooming of private media organizations. One hurtful consequence of the liberalization policy was the decline of the public service broadcaster, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), once with the widest national reach, but now mostly reaching rural populations. Today in the capital Nairobi, the private media groups target the minority middle class, a population attractive to major advertisers that are key sources of revenue to the mainstream media. The middle class has therefore had more avenues for participation and opportunities to exercise their communication

rights.

As a consequence of the domination of the media space by private organizations, there has been less diversity in coverage, with marginalized groups—mainly the urban poor and rural majority—mostly neglected (Gustafsson, 2008) in spite of the impressive internet penetration¹⁴ in Kenya. The majority urban population in Nairobi's informal settlements, for example, do not have the luxury of coverage on private radio, TV and print media. When issues of slums are covered in public or commercial service media, they are negative portrayals, with news about congestion, poor waste disposal and housing or violence. A case in point is Kenya's largest slum, Kibera¹⁵, the image of which is subject to frequent coverage of violent political riots, and particularly following post-election riots marked by inter-ethnic fights and police killings in 2007–2008 and 2017.

Voice of Kibera (VoK) is a community media project that illustrates the idea of communication rights. VoK was started as a community news website, the operations of which were hinged on a participatory mobile-media model (Cheruiyot, 2012; Tully, 2016). It was initially launched as a citizen-reporting project by Map Kibera Trust in 2010.

In 2009, Map Kibera had started a project of using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to create a digital map for Kibera. The purpose of the map was to identify locations and collect information that will be useful for local authorities and other organizations to effectively provide key services to Kiberans (Boakye, Scott & Smyth, 2010). Map Kibera then launched Voice of Kibera to expand the mapping concept by aggregating information as news stories through the help of volunteers around Kibera. Map Kibera took up a ready-made application for citizen reporting created by Ushahidi¹⁶ to be used by Voice of Kibera. The

application was designed to help participants in the community to send and receive news in form of photos, text or videos. The participants shared the content in the form of mobile text messages which were aggregated on the website, voiceofkibera.org, and then redistributed to community members who had subscribed to news alerts. Any member of the community was encouraged to send reports on topical issues or news via SMS, email or Twitter. Among the issues that were reported on the VoK platform were poor emergency, waste disposal and health services as well as frequent fire and crime incidences. There was, however, a chance to report positive stories, such as school sports events, free medical camps, HIV/Aids campaigns, donations to fire victims or young artistes with musical talents hosting a concert. Through the website, Kibera's stories found global visibility online and thus VoK further counteracted the negative portrayals of the community on local mainstream media (Tully, 2016).

In interviews conducted with volunteer editors, Cheruiyot (2012) noted that the role of Voice of Kibera was to serve as a community's main source of information and education on social and political issues. Kiberans were not only being informed and allowed to engage in community issues, but were called upon to take part in news production (Cheruiyot, 2012). By engaging citizens in the production of content, which was ultimately distributed to the community, Voice of Kibera not only ensured sustainability of the media, but offered citizens the opportunity to exercise their communication rights.

It should, however, be noted, that similar to most community media, VoK suffered from limited resources, low community engagement and low accessibility of content—due to low internet access among the slum dwellers (Tully, 2016). Indeed, the key challenges in the utilization of new media technologies by community media in Eastern Africa include lack of media literacy,

the awareness of the opportunities and skills to participate, as well as the understanding of the right of communities to express themselves through the new platforms (Nassanga, 2010: 44). In her fieldwork, Tully has further noted the clash of visions between the founders and a volunteer board of editors, which saw VoK's role as that of giving the community global visibility as opposed to an earlier focus on local audiences (Tully, 2016: 74-76). Despite the challenges, what still stood out was VoK's core goal of community participation and the reciprocal resolve by volunteers and participants to claim their rights of communication through production and sharing of community news.

Public service and commercial media may have resources that favour national reach and appeal in Kenya, but do not necessarily have an agenda to meet the needs of local communities. The neglected populations have therefore found a voice through community media such as Voice of Kibera. Community media, mostly with limited financial and technological resources, rely heavily on the local communities for moral, financial and human resource support (Kivikuru, 2015). While access and participation of local citizens inform the operations of community media (Kivikuru, 2015; Rennie, 2006), acceptability and community's resolve to reclaim their communication rights, and subsequently the opportunity to participate, is key to its success. In Kenya, reception of new media technology has played a role in citizen's claim of the media narrative and interest in the communication needs of the community.

These examples from Kenya and Brazil, although far from exhaustive, provide support to the view of communication as the condition to citizenship and participation. In all cases, communication is practiced in a dialogic way, with communities and individuals acting as protagonists of communicative processes and not as mere recipients of information.

Furthermore, a relevant aspect in the above examples is the manner in which collective needs of communities are addressed and developed through a collective rather than an individual action. The collective ethos of these initiatives invites us to consider communication as the process to make something common—to create the media in which a dialogue can be established as opposed to a linear process of transmission of information.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed a rights-based approach to media development, which takes national contexts into account. We aimed to identify initiatives and practices that could grant communication rights to marginalized groups and promote a democratic, inclusive and plural media landscape, which is an important aspect of social and political representation (Fraser, 2009). The examples we chose concretize the conceptualization of communication as a right without which it is impossible to fully exercise citizenship, in the sense that exercising control and power over individual and collective communication practices is a condition for exercising other citizen rights such as political participation through voting, influencing policy making and accessing information. Based on these examples, we argue that establishing a plural national media landscape must aim towards granting communication rights to citizens and particularly to underrepresented groups. A plural media landscape cannot be dissociated from the context in which it is promoted, and should be based on context (social and political), as the examples illustrate. Approaches to media development based on merely providing for technology needs prevent people from becoming the protagonists of social change.

In a critique of the goals and actions proposed by WSIS, we argued that they put too much focus on providing technologies to individuals, rather than creating public policies that favour a diverse national media landscape. Technological development that took place since the WSIS summits, such as increased reliance on data for decision-making processes, new forms of data collection and storage that put individual and collective rights of citizens at risk and growing influence of powerful private actors on the circulation of digital information highlight the need for democratically formed public communication policies that should address much broader problems than the digital divide. The examples presented from Kenya and Brazil show that a democratic flow of information and a plural media landscape can best be achieved when those who are the bearers of the right to communication are involved as stakeholders. Also, as the example from Kenya shows, we should be careful with modernization theory's assumption that newer technologies are always better. Instead, the context, including values and culture, in which media systems are developed should be the point of departure for policy-making.

Finally, we argue with Flew and Waisbord (2015) that even in the current reality of globalized markets and international communication and information flows, the national sphere is still important in media development. Communication, as multifaceted and complex practices and processes, unfolds within the framework of society, politics and culture, and these are, despite upholding virtues of a global citizenship, anchored in national and local symbolic universes and imaginaries. The policy changes and state control (as suggested by Thompson, 1995) are best devised within national and local contexts. Furthermore, as discussed above, for many developing countries a transnational communication flow has been brought by commercialization at the detriment of local and community interests. Lastly, the examples indicate that media development

works best when it is people centered as opposed to media centered. In other words, media development must be anchored on the right to communication and not needs constructed by international organizations based in the West.

¹ We use here Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2007) definition of Global North and South as socioeconomic and political areas rather than geographical ones.

² <http://voiceofkibera.org/>

³ See Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) for a discussion on the rights-based approach to development.

⁴ UNICEF reports state that a continuing and widening poverty gap between and within nations prompted the UN to declare 1997–2006 the first ever decade to eradicate poverty (Snyder, 2003).

⁵ For detailed information on dependency theory, refer to Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The Modern World System*. New York: Academic Press and Frank, AG. (1967). *Capitalism & Underdevelopment and the case for socialist feminism*. New York: Monthly Review Process.

⁶ First generation rights are civil and political rights that protect the individual, second generation rights are economic, social and cultural rights and grant dignified living standards, and third generation rights are collective rights borne by people as collectives, such as the right to social harmony, to benefit from economic growth, etc. According to Peruzzo (2014), the right to communication is the fourth generation right because it encompasses all others and can be defined as a 'right to have rights'.

⁷ 'Connectivity is a central enabling agent in building the Information Society. Universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to ICT infrastructure and services, constitutes one of the challenges of the Information Society and should be an objective of all stakeholders involved in building it. Connectivity also involves access to energy and postal services, which should be assured in conformity with the domestic legislation of each country.' (WSIS Declaration of Principles, B2, #21, available digitally at <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>, retrieved on October 1, 2015),

⁸ 'Policies that create a favourable climate for stability, predictability and fair competition at all levels should be developed and implemented in a manner that not only attracts more private investment for ICT infrastructure development but also enables universal service obligations to be met in areas where traditional market conditions fail to work. In disadvantaged areas, the establishment of ICT public access points in places such as post offices, schools, libraries and archives, can provide effective means for ensuring universal access to the infrastructure and services of the Information Society.'

⁹ For a discussion on the differences between community and society, particularly when it comes to media production, see Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) on 'Four approaches to alternative media'.

¹⁰ World System of Information Society (WSIS) is a UN initiative taken by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2001, that is committed to issues such as equitable access, cultural diversity, bridging the digital divide and increasing rural communication (Grosswiler, 2004: 113).

¹¹ In 2013, the organisation Reporters Without Borders released the report 'Brazil, the country of thirty Berlusconi's' which raises concerns about the concentration of media ownership in the country both nationally and regionally.

¹² Globo Participações e Comunicações is a member of the Brazilian Agribusiness Association. The family that owns RBS, the biggest media company in the south of Brazil, also owns a construction company.

¹³ Media activists' work aims to promote freedom of expression either by pressuring policy, making or by directly creating and promoting spaces for free content production and information sharing.

¹⁴ In 2017, Kenya reported 81.8% internet penetration—the percentage of Internet users per population

(Internet World Stats, 2017). See: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm#africa>.

¹⁵ Kibera has a population of about 200,000 (see Kenya Census, 2010).

¹⁶ Ushahidi crowdsources information about crises. <https://www.usahidi.com/>

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Figure 1: A rights-based approach to media development