From the Field:
Assessing the Impact of TMF on the Tanzanian Media: A Practical Approach

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Abstract: The Tanzania Media Fund (TMF) supports individual journalists and media institutions to produce quality public interest and investigative journalism content that better informs the public, contributes to debate and thereby increases public demand for greater accountability in Tanzania. TMF has used lessons learned from its first phase (2008- 2012) to develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that captures TMF's achievements in phase 2 (2012-2015) and beyond. This article provides an overview of the practical implementation of the M&E framework, and challenges encountered during implementation.

Keywords: media, M&E, content analysis, learning, Tanzania, media assistance

Background

Since its inception in 2008, TMF has provided over 520 grants to individual journalists and over 110 grants to media institutions. It is a multi-donor project with funding currently coming from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the British Department for International Development (DfiD), Irish Aid and the Embassy of Denmark, and implemented by Hivos. For phase 1 and 2 combined, it has a budget of approximately 17.8 million USD, a large part of which goes to institutional grants. However, TMF is not simply a grant making organisation: learning is part and parcel of the grants system. A fundamental part of the individual grant system is that grantee journalists are paired with a mentor who provides advice and support for the journalist and a quality control measure for TMF. For institutional grantees mentoring is not always compulsory, as it depends on the type of grant, but trainings will usually form part of any institutional grant, and such trainings will often involve TMF experts.
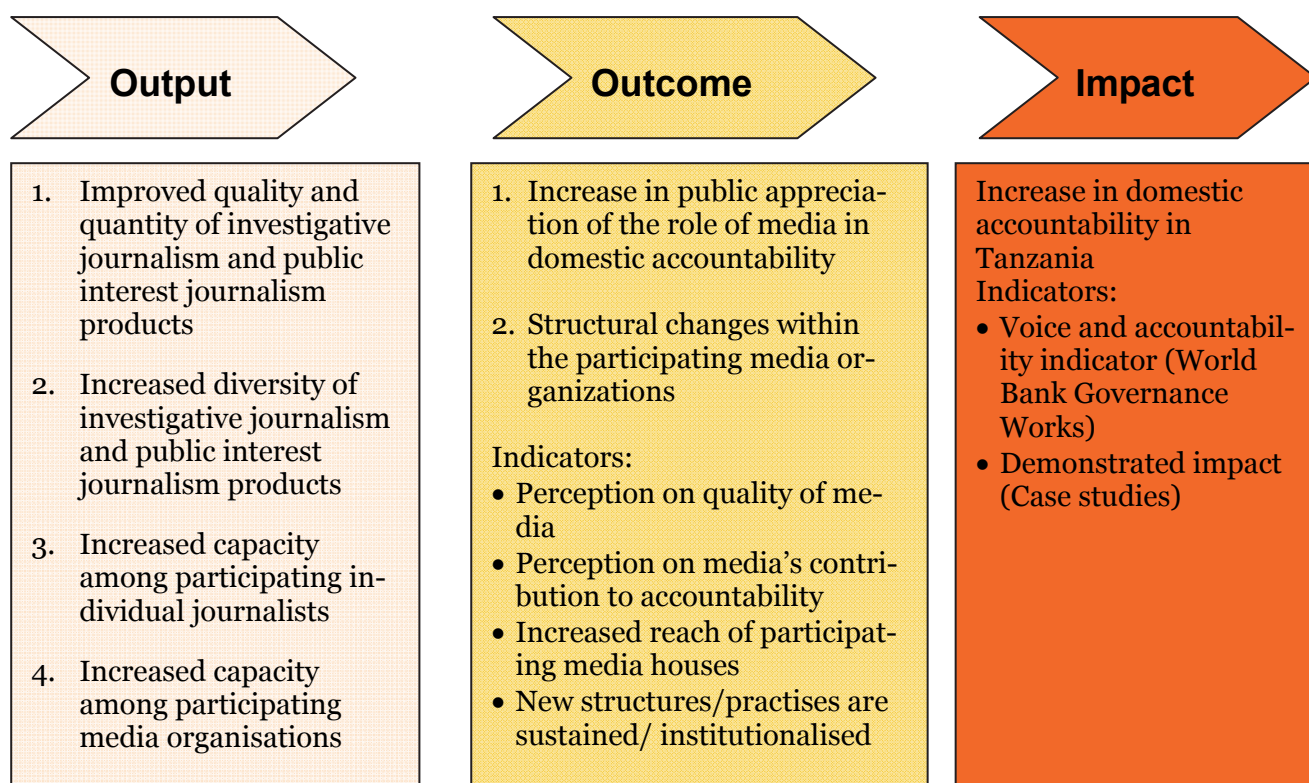
When TMF concluded phase 1, it had an impressive number of grantees and had become a valued stakeholder in the Tanzanian media sphere. But something was

missing: solid data to prove that TMF was making a difference in the Tanzanian media. While self-assessment of journalists had its value, it was not conclusive evidence that grantees had really improved their capacity and produced quality work. The internal assessment by TMF staff of grantees' products certainly had merits, but again lacked an element of objectivity in proving that TMF grantees were producing quality content. And case-by-case evidence of grantees who had some sort of impact says little about the overall ability of the media sector to hold individuals and organisations to account. TMF therefore decided to set up a more robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for phase 2.

New M&E structure

The M&E framework for phase 2 combines regular internal monitoring activities, such as reviewing grantee reports and making site visits to grantees, with three external monitoring activities: a public perception survey, a content analysis, and an audience survey. Together, these elements help monitor and evaluate the core business of TMF in an effective manner. In practice, effectiveness means making choices about what not to do, and improving the M&E framework based on lessons learned.

Having a variety of measuring tools is of inestimable value, as this allows for triangulation between different findings: the whole is more than the sum of the parts. External assessments such as the midterm review during phase 1 and a donor-initiated evaluation in phase 2 have provided additional insight into the successes of, but also room for improvement in, the M&E system. They form, as it were, an external validation of the system and provide fresh insights for further improving TMF's work and the monitoring thereof.

Figure 1: TMF results chain

Output	Outcome	Impact
1. Improved quality and quantity of investigative journalism and public interest journalism products 2. Increased diversity of investigative journalism and public interest journalism products 3. Increased capacity among participating individual journalists 4. Increased capacity among participating media organisations	1. Increase in public appreciation of the role of media in domestic accountability 2. Structural changes within the participating media organizations Indicators: • Perception on quality of media • Perception on media's contribution to accountability • Increased reach of participating media houses • New structures/practises are sustained/ institutionalised	Increase in domestic accountability in Tanzania Indicators: • Voice and accountability indicator (World Bank Governance Works) • Demonstrated impact (Case studies)

Public Perception Survey

The first main item on the M&E agenda at the start of phase 2 was to establish a baseline for the public perception of the media in Tanzania. An external research organisation was commissioned to find out how the Tanzanian public appreciated the media in terms of quality and its contribution to domestic accountability. Designing the survey was a fairly straightforward matter. Finding a meaningful way to use the outcomes of the survey to monitor progress was more challenging. While findings about the public perception were certainly useful to TMF, they seemed less useful for developing indicators and setting targets.

Lack of media quality and lack of coverage of rural areas are fundamental assumptions underlying TMF's intervention strategies, and the public perception survey was a moment to confirm whether those assumptions were still valid – which, indeed, they were. The identified gaps in the media's quality and objectivity in the public perception survey reaffirmed the necessity of interventions geared towards improving the quality of the media, and helped colour in the details: for example, it told TMF which media types were perceived as having higher quality than others (Ipsos Synovate 2012: 72). The underrepresentation for rural Tanzanians came up in several places in the survey (ibid.: 73-75), showing the continued relevance of the rural dispatch grant, TMF's largest individual grant category which focuses on stories from rural areas.

However, the public perception survey did not provide a useful baseline against which to measure progress. It confronted TMF with the fact that 'public perception of the media' is a broad definition indeed, and that it was quite difficult to point to what exactly it consisted of. The findings certainly made it necessary to rearticulate the use of the public perception survey in TMF's M&E framework. The survey was useful for reaffirming TMF's *raison d'être* of improving quality of media products and stimulating diversity, with the higher objective of accountability. It was less suitable, however, for setting targets for TMF. The results of the public perception survey are now used as a guideline to TMF's work, but not as an indicator of its success and failure. The World Bank's Voice and Accountability indicator is used in a similar manner: something to inform, but not measure, your work.

Audience survey

Another external measuring tool for the public appreciation of the role of the media in domestic accountability – and more importantly the media consumers' appreciation of grantees' media products – is the audience survey. Audience surveys can take many shapes and sizes, depending on the objective of the survey. TMF wanted an approximate idea of the reach of the media products (how many people are listening/viewing/reading) produced by its institutional grantees (media organizations as opposed to individual journalists), as well as the appreciation of the public regarding their quality. This was easier said than done. Tanzania is an enormous country with considerable infrastructural challenges. To illustrate: it can easily take 2 or 3 days just to reach a grantee. Surveyors have to overcome the same challenges if they want a fair representation of the Tanzanian population. Another challenge for the audience survey was that TMF's grantees vary from national newspapers (which are mostly read in urban centres) to very small municipal radio stations which are unknown outside their specific coverage areas, and topics covered vary from gender-based violence to availability of agricultural input vouchers for farmers.

Very few of media houses invest in (serious) audience research, with the vast majority of small radio stations simply referring to the total population in their area of coverage as their reach. For some of TMF's grantees, carrying out an audience survey themselves is part of their grant. This enables them to collect information that can help them improve their programming and their ability to generate revenue from advertising. Since grantees would be doing their own surveys according to different methodologies that fit their specific context and ability, making them impossible to compare, TMF felt it was useful to do an overall survey. The trade-off of such a broad survey – in a context where funds and time are not without limits – is that there is less detail per grantee.

The same organization that did the public perception survey also carried out the audience survey (Ipsos Synovate 2014). This included a general section, to

establish such things as 'which media type is most likely to expose poor leadership', and a specific section per grantee. From the latter section it was possible to find out, for example, what the listener of an agricultural programme had actually learned from the programme, and whether s/he had implemented this new knowledge in any way. A small number of the surveyed grantees had comparable programmes. In those cases, they were asked similar questions, and the results were compared. For example, four grantees whose programmes tested whether the promises made by leaders during campaigns had been fulfilled had identical questions (see below).

Figure 3: Comparison of performance of 4 similar grantees in audience survey

	Grantee 1	Grantee 2	Grantee 3	Grantee 4
Listened to programme (% respondents)?	28%	43%	70%	33%
Has improved in quality (% respondents)?	57%	27%	46%	40%
Action taken (% respondents)?	17%	17%	92%	3%
Estimated reach (people)	189,358	79,483	143,756	133,437

In terms of telling TMF exactly how many people listened to certain programmes, or read certain newspapers, the audience survey provided only very general figures. A country-wide random sample of about 2500 respondents simply does not provide significant data for the smaller media houses. In terms of telling TMF how popular certain programmes were, the findings were much more insightful: some programmes considered as very innovative were not as popular as had been thought, while others were much more popular with their audiences than expected. Besides popularity of a programme, another way of identifying grantees that did well was looking at the number of people who had seen steps taken – or took steps themselves – to address issues highlighted in the programme. Examples are farmers who used new knowledge to access farm inputs, and observations by listeners that leaders had taken steps to address a certain situation after this had been highlighted by their local radio station.

The audience survey proved more useful than the public perception survey in terms of finding out about issues that TMF could directly affect through its work, and also contributed to some changes being made to the indicators in TMF's original M&E framework. One was the reach of grantees. It was decided not to use reach in terms of absolute numbers as an indicator. First, the data was insufficiently reliable for the smaller media houses. Second, setting targets in terms of a 'minimum' reach of stations discriminates against small radio stations that are often very well listened to in their specific communities. And third, influencing accountability is more than simply counting consumers per media product: it is about effectiveness of that programme. A target was therefore set for the percentage of listeners, viewers or readers of a certain media outlet that listened to, viewed or read the specific funded product. The assumption is that a

higher consumption rate of a certain product means it is more appealing to the consumer.

Verification

What survey respondents claim or, indeed, what journalists report about products funded by TMF does not necessarily reflect the (full) truth. Listeners of a certain long-running radio programme who claimed that none of the targeted leaders in the programme took any action to address the false promises they had made, might have been disappointed at the relatively minor impact compared to more successful earlier episodes. The 70% of listeners who did claim a certain programme had an impact might have been easily impressed by what is one of the few local radio stations in that region. And the relatively low performance of another programme might be explained by the fact it is part of a broader morning show, and thus people may not have known the programme's official title.

It is therefore important to triangulate data from different M&E tools, and to identify issues that are worthy of further 'verification'. TMF uses the term 'verification' for missions to the field meant to confirm the claim of a grantee that a certain impact has been achieved. For example, a grantee who sets out to investigate the story of a certain dispensary which is always out of medication, might report that after publication of the story the dispensary was restocked. TMF's reporting form for individual grantees asks the grantee explicitly if, after publication, anything has changed in the issue they addressed in their story. Institutional grantees are expected to report on the same in their report. At reporting stage TMF scans the reports for any claimed impacts, and a small number of impacts are investigated in order to verify (or falsify) the claim made by the grantee.

Verifications are relatively expensive and time-consuming, and therefore TMF only verifies stories reporting a significant impact – typically about ten per year. This involves travelling to the actual location where the impact was registered and interviewing key stakeholders as well as (random) citizens. The objective is to establish 1) whether the claimed impact (e.g. dispensary restocked) actually took place and 2) to what extent the claimed impact can be attributed to the journalist (e.g. the dispensary might have been restocked because the local government had already alerted the relevant authorities before the story came out). The time available for verification is not long enough to carry out a rigorous investigation. However, it is long enough to establish whether there is a plausible case of 'media leading to accountability'. Typically, TMF will find that the claimed impact took place, often on a slightly more modest scale than reported. Rarely will the impact have been generated only by the media attention: usually there are other factors involved but the journalist has acted as a catalyst.

The decision about which story to verify can be influenced by results from the audience survey, as the audience survey may bring out things that the grantee did not report on. For example, TMF received a final report from a radio grantee that suggested a fairly successful project with some small outcomes. This was not enough to warrant a three-day verification trip to a distant location. The audience survey, however, showed an exceptionally high number of respondents indicating that that programme had had an impact, and verification confirmed that the results on the ground were more impressive than the report from the grantee suggested.

Are verifications enough to 'prove' that TMF is contributing to accountability? No, they are not. They remain anecdotal evidence from which TMF strives to learn. Lessons learned can be used in the selection process, by mentors or in other learning activities to help find and create journalistic pieces that are more likely to achieve change in society. And it provides stories to support and illustrate what the audience survey, the public perception survey and the reports of grantees are saying.

Content Analysis

The public perception survey questioned the public about quality of the media in Tanzania. The audience survey asked listeners and viewers of specific programmes about the quality of that programme. And without a doubt, grantees report extensively on the quality of what they have produced. Unfortunately, none of this proves that TMF grantees are producing quality material. The quality assessments done by TMF staff in phase 1 are problematic as evidence, since there is a considerable risk of bias. Another problem is that they did not compare TMF products with non-TMF products. A more objective way of measuring quality was needed, as well as a control group.

With the help of an external consultant provided by one of the donors (SDC), a codebook was developed with 8 quality criteria subdivided into 73 indicators. Quality was identified from TMF's perspective, linked to its own objectives. This means that, while the defined quality criteria are measured objectively, there might be quality criteria that have not been included because they are less important to TMF. Thus, another organisation might have a (slightly) different set of indicators. A number of external coders from two different Dar es-Salaam universities were trained to do the coding with the codebook, leaving any TMF judgement out of the equation. The results surprised not only TMF, but also the SDC consultant who had already had several experiences with content analyses elsewhere.

Figure 4: Representation of different source types by TMF grantees and control group

	Non TMF	TMF
Authorities (executive & central government)	45.8%	72.2%
MPs and Political Parties	17.8%	13.9%
Judiciary and Security forces	15.3%	19.1%
Ordinary people (workers, peasants and general public)	33.1%	70.8%
Doctors and Experts	19.5%	19.6%
Special (media, culture and religion)	19.5%	23.9%

The difference between TMF and the control group was described as "remarkable" (Spurk 2013: 23) in the final report of the first exercise, with TMF grantees significantly outperforming the rest of the Tanzanian media in several areas. When assessing the diversity of sources, for example, TMF grantees paid much more attention to ordinary people in their stories, and overall they had a significantly higher number of sources (7.2) than the average Tanzanian media product (2.6) (ibid.: 9). Inevitably, TMF did not outperform the rest of the Tanzanian media in all aspects. There is little difference, for example, between the coherence of a TMF-funded story and that of another Tanzanian media product (ibid.: 15).

The clear outcomes of the content analysis, and the direct relevance to what TMF has invested in, make it a good source for indicators, and a goldmine of data for the enthusiastic M&E mind. Once again, cross-referencing with other aspects of the M&E framework was important. Aspects that came out strongly in the content analysis largely correlated with issues that both grantees and their mentors had identified, in their reports, as areas in which their capacity had been built. This was a confirmation that, on the one hand, the results of the content analysis resonated with what was being reported, and on the other hand that the reporting formats for grantees and their mentors were providing TMF with relevant information – and thus were adequately designed. In short, the content analysis gave a good picture of what TMF grantees were doing well, and which areas needed more attention in the mentoring programme. It was furthermore a relatively easy method of quality measurement that can be repeated at selected times with different groups of media products. TMF aims to have about two per year.

So what then, were the challenges with the content analysis? TMF focuses on creating local capacity for producing quality media products. Setting up the content analysis – the design of the codebook, the training of coders – required a lot of time, effort and, crucially, expertise that was not available in Tanzania. While helpful in the start-up, it is a situation that TMF, its donors and, indeed, the involved consultant, want to gradually see changed. Transfer of skills to the team doing the coding to ensure that, eventually, analysis of results can also take place locally without external help, is a must. At this moment the external consultant provides mentorship to the former coordinator of the coding team to carry out the

analysis of the coded results. This approach is proving very useful and will hopefully be completed by the fourth coding exercise – at time of writing TMF was conducting its third content analysis exercise.

None of the three content analyses so far (Spurk 2013; Matumaini & Mataba 2014; TMF 2015 forthcoming) have been able to do a comparison of grantees' work before the grant with that same person's work produced during the grant. The results currently prove that TMF grantees are performing better than their non-funded counterparts, and when comparing different grant categories as well as looking at mentor/mentee reports it seems very plausible that at least part of this difference can be explained by capacity improvement of the grantees through mentorship. But it does not provide conclusive evidence that grantees have improved their capacity as a result of TMF intervention. TMF selects grantees based on the quality of their proposals, and the anticipated quality of their funded product. It is therefore not unlikely that the relative success of TMF products is also the result of a good selection process – and not just of training or mentoring provided during the project.

The reason for not doing such a before-and-after comparison is very practical: no baseline material from grantees with which to be able to make such a comparison was readily available. This weakness has been addressed through making sure such baseline material is now collected from grantees, and the fourth content analysis is expected to specifically look at quality improvement within a specific grantee group. Ideally, TMF would also, in the future, start 'tracking' ex-grantees to see how their quality endures after their grant period has finished. In a sense the content analysis presents a luxury problem: there are so many comparisons to be imagined, that one must let go of the idea that everything, always, must be measured.

Conclusion

The above provides a detailed, almost step-by-step description of how TMF has so far implemented its M&E system. As for any monitoring system, it is particular to TMF and not directly transferable to organisations working on similar issues. It is a system with strong points, as well as gaps and flaws that, in hindsight, might have been anticipated. TMF is fortunate to have the room to experiment, learn, and revise its M&E system in line with its findings. While it is unquestionably important to have a robust M&E system that does not change at every whim, it is also important to leave room for flexibility. For phase 2, TMF had the opportunity to revise the M&E structure implemented in phase 1 into something better, something more suited to its needs. But it was set up in a way that allowed for adding of specific indicators at a later stage based on actual findings – while the outcomes and outputs remained unchanged – and TMF's donors accepted that some indicators could, after all, not be more than guiding instruments.

The interconnectivity between different elements of the M&E framework was to some extent anticipated, but only in the process of implementation was it possible to fully realise its importance. On its own, the content analysis was an excellent source of data. But when interpreted in conjunction with other tools, it became a powerful tool for internal learning. Is there any correlation between the quality of a product and the popularity among its consumers? There is yet no data for a reliable comparison, but the little data available suggests that the relationship might not be quite as linear as thought. The verification exercises have been extremely useful for gathering case-by-case data on the link between specific media products and accountability outcomes, but the audience survey results give an extra dimension to them – and the latter appears to be a new source for questions to ask during verification. The conversations with citizens during verification exercises provide a useful source for better understanding the results of the public perception survey. And the public perception survey provides suggestions as to what to look for in future proposals if TMF really wants to touch upon the issues that people find important.

The challenge is using the information in a meaningful way, and keeping the M&E system practical and affordable. In an ideal situation with infinite funds, TMF would set up a public perception survey that can be repeated, perhaps by phone, every 2 or 3 months and each time look at a different issue from a media perspective. This would provide up to date information about issues that are relevant at that point in time. With those same infinite funds, TMF would be able to do audience surveys right after publication or airing of TMF-funded products, whereby one could simply ask the readers opinion about yesterdays' in-depth article, or what they learnt about farming on yesterday's local radio programme. And TMF would set up a cohort of, say, 100 individual grantees to be followed over a period of 3 years to measure the quality of the work before their TMF grant, during their TMF grant, and after their TMF grant. This would answer the burning question of what happens, in time, to all those skills that grantees presumably gain from their time with TMF.

Upon reflection, however, the limitation of funds is perhaps a blessing in disguise. With endless funds, there would always be reason to research more and more, and collect more and more information. The question that would sooner or later confront us is: can we really use all this information? At the end of the day, TMF is not a research organization but a grant-giving organization whose primary objective is to support – not research – media development. This is why TMF's M&E system is simple, and its M&E unit in phase 2 limited to one single officer. Using the variety of data at hand, TMF simply needs to make informed decisions about which interventions are most likely to support its ultimate objective: improving domestic accountability in Tanzania.

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