How "Insiders and Outsiders" Perceive Media Development Work.
Reflections on Their Relationship and Cooperation.

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Abstract: It appears to be essential to reflect different perspectives for doing media development work in contexts where foreign actors are not insiders. Here, their outside views on the needs of supported countries and on how to work together can be difficult for implementing projects, especially for actors on-site on which this article focuses. It aims to bring practical and academic reflections together for a broader understanding of how insiders and outsiders perceive media development work differently. These different perceptions bring challenges for their relationship and cooperation. Based on the author's research, a literature review, and interviews with practitioners from south-Asian media organizations, critical aspects will be discussed, such as cooperation dynamics, the effect of power inequalities and subsequent trust difficulties. The article will not only give the perspective of actors on-site and their struggles with media development "cooperation," but also suggest constructive approaches to work on an eye-level with mutual understanding.

Keywords: media development work, critical reflections, trust, (in)equality, in- and outsider's perspective, South-Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa

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The idea of creating change through media development work from a one-sided perspective

I want to shortly introduce the history of media development as it still determines today's relationships and cooperation between countries that provide funding and countries that receive such foreign funding and offers for media development. We will sometimes return to this history in the following chapters as it contextualizes research findings and discussions.

Although not the earliest point in time of development ideas, the period immediately after the end of the Cold War was characterised by a sense of optimism in "the West," mainly the US and UK, that media and its development would lead to democratization (Higgins, 2014).

> […] media assistance after the 1989–1991 collapse of communism, particularly in Central Europe, occurred in a quite different world. History was said to have ended then with the universal triumph of liberal democracy, altering the task of democracy promotion through media assistance from a battle with communism to a global mission of friendly, if insistent, conversion, at least from the perspective of Western donors […]. (Miller, 2009, p.12)

Media development work[1] (MDW) – also called media assistance – became part of international cooperation (Drefs & Thomaß, 2019), or so-called "foreign aid" (Lugo-Ocando, 2020). The funds and offers often come from countries of the so-called "global North" or "West," such as the US, Germany, and other European countries, which define themselves as "developed." The recipients are often based in countries of the so-called "global South," with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which are defined as "developing" (Cauhapé-Cazaux & Kalathil, 2015; Mayers & Juma, 2018). Here, the term "foreign aid" points already to an unequal relationship in which external actors give financial support and mostly define "development" based on their values and understandings (Lugo-Ocando, 2020, p. 13f.). This is criticized as one-sided directionality and a dominance of "western" approaches, accompanied by a lack of participation of the recipients to define and design MDW (Jacobson, 2019; Manyozo, 2012; Phiri & Fourie, 2011). Furthermore, these critics see development and modernisation theories as outdated for MDW (Dean, 2019; Manyozo, 2012; Miller, 2009; Scott, 2014):

> Beginning after the Second World War and for several decades afterwards, modernization was the dominant way in which development was conceived. The basic idea of this theory was that 'underdeveloped' societies should aim to replicate the political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of 'modern', 'developed', Western societies. (Scott, 2014, p. 33)

Hence, these theoretical assumptions ignore local peculiarities, promote "Western" ideas of modernity, and are driven by supply and not by demand (Scott, 2014, pp. 33–38; Manyozo, 2012, pp. 54–111). Another critique is based on the postcolonial theory that focuses on present international dependency relations of formerly

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[1] Even if media development is only a small share of "official development assistance" (3% between 2010 and 2015, see Mayers & Juma, 2018), it is still the biggest share of "official development assistance for media" (45% according to Cauhapé-Cazaux & Kalathil, 2015).

colonized countries (Kerner, 2012; Serwornoo, 2018). Here, the dependency still exists in power imbalances of donor and recipient countries, despite having gained independence from their former colonial powers. It is also discussed by dependency theorists (see Tietaah et al., 2018).

Despite the criticism that modernisation and development theories are outdated and obsolete, some thoughts and ideas deriving from these theories still find entry in the offers and approaches of MDW (Lugo-Ocando, 2020, pp. 20f.). Furthermore, even if these discussions are held among practitioners and theorists of MDW, the imbalance of power and economic relations among offering actors, such as donors and intermediary agencies (Price, 2002, p. 5)[2] and recipients seem to be far from being solved, as the article will show. I would like to note here that this article deliberately focuses on challenges and the perspectives of local actors on-site in order to provide food for thought and to illustrate the need for more discussions. Thus, this article will focus less on the perspectives of donor organizations, which of course face challenges and constraints, too, but they can be addressed only in part.

Another point worth mentioning here is the problematic usage of terms like "Global South," "Global North" or "the West" as they are still attributing countries as different and ranking them according to their wealth and level of development. Using these distinguishing terms, I want to refer to Jairo Lugo-Ocando (2020) who clarified in this regard his usage of "the West":

> I am very aware of the problematic nature of the term and how unprecise it is in terms of geography—as it also incorporates countries such as Australia and Japan. Hence, the use of the term here is not so much to denote a geopolitical configuration but instead a sociopolitical construction that incorporates liberal democracies that operate within a context of free market and that often aligned themselves within particular international and multilateral collaborative arrangements, such as NATO, the United Nation's system, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These countries are able to exercise international power by means of resources and military intervention and share a past that is intertwined with the colonial and neocolonial enterprises […]. (p. 2f.)

The continued use of these terms in the literature and in the field of MDW shows an ongoing shared discourse that has not yet been sufficiently reflected upon. But this distinction also shows a reality of inequality and power imbalances between different parts of the world that are labelled as "giving" and "developed" or as "receiving" and "to be developed." Hence, "Global North," "Global South," "the West" and alike will only be used when they are quoted from the literature or from practitioners. Furthermore, local actors who are on-site and receive media development support and external actors who fund and offer these projects will be described as insiders

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[2] Price (2002) described several levels of actors in the field of media development. He differentiates between donors and implementors on the top level, such as governmental organizations and foundations. At the second level he sees intermediary agencies and contractors, such as international NGOs, universities and freedom of speech organizations. And at the bottom level are the local partners, which receive funding through the donors directly or through intermediary agencies, who get in turn also funding from the donors to forward it to chosen local partners. Here, these intermediaries are also accountable to the donors.

and outsiders respectively[3]. Here, these terms insiders and outsiders are also seen as part of a socio-political construction, but especially as subsequent realities where they have different levels of involvement and knowledge, and different positions in media development projects. The next chapter will show how these differences can lead to a challenging relationship and corporation based on power asymmetries and mistrust.

A challenging relationship between insiders and outsiders

Local and external actors perceive working together quite differently (Ashman, 2001). It is mostly the "Southern" NGOs (SNGOs) who feel less powerful to influence the relations and projects with "Northern" NGOs (NNGOs) (Elbers & Arts, 2011). Here, the appropriateness of media development projects is at stake when outsiders' perspectives are determining the work and focus of local actors on-site. In fact, this external determination necessitates discussions of trust issues, power imbalances, and possible postcolonial structures. The following examples show subsequent practical consequences for media development actors and their relationships.

Different objectives and values can create difficulties for the project implementation itself. These difficulties can emerge when outsiders and insiders do not work together on an eye level. Mistrust can be one consequence of this unequal constellation. A study on "How important is trust in media development partnerships and what is it important for?" gives some informative insights here (Drefs, 2021)[4]. It is based on 7 interviews and an online survey of 54 local actors of "target organizations" from all over the world to analyse the role of trust in dealing with problems they have. If there is no trust and no open communication space, strategies of local actors to handle problematic conditions with externals could end – just to give two examples – as either "avoiding" or "portraying" referring to Elbers and Arts (2011) and their study on "southern NGOs' strategic responses to donor constraints" (p. 724ff.; p. 728f.). Avoiding is explained by one of the interviewees of the study as silencing their own voice:

> They're treating us like we are on the receiving end. And they are like the upper hand and everything. [...] So, this is why I have decided [to stop working with them], but I haven't told them because it's not good to say to someone, like on their face, that I cannot go with you. But, silently and politely, I have to say something like: I can't do this, like further activities this year. We are so busy. (Interview conducted by Drefs 2021)

Portraying on the other hand is described by an interviewee as not telling everything to the foreign organization, which leads to miscommunication and hiding:

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[3] For a short overview on the discussion of being an outsider or insider in ethnographic research see Aguilar 1981. In media development practice insiders and outsiders are confronted with similar challenges, but there is no space to further discuss the comparison of media development practitioners and ethnographic researchers.

[4] Presented in a panel on "Enquiries about Trust in media (assistance)" at the conference of *Forum für Medien und Entwicklung* (FoME)/*Forum Media and Development* in 2021.

> The problem is that organizations like mine cannot just, you know, tell the donor everything that we're going through, because they will think that you are incapable of delivering well. You know, we get stuck in this vicious circle of miscommunication and different expectations. (Interview conducted by Drefs 2021)

Here, both strategic responses to an untrusting relationship could lead to opacity where local actors fake results or interest, or even leave projects (Drefs, 2021). Yet miscommunication and different expectations can also affect actors from funding organizations directly. A 6-years funded agricultural project in West and Eastern Africa underlines this point and can serve as an example (Spurk, 2021)[5]. It turned out only at a very late stage that related planned research activities were unknowingly not conducted by the local partners:

> Only towards the end of the project we Western researchers understood that a part of the research topics was not perceived as relevant to them, they even knew before the project that some of the technologies will not work with farmers. [...] In my view, the overall lesson from this is one critical question: Even, if we may know "our" partners, do they really have a chance to say "no" to our proposals, to lose funding, and develop something they see a need for. I think this is very difficult. Partners may see "our" proposals as the only chance to gain funding in the near future. And do we give them room of manoeuvre to develop their own ideas? (Spurk, 2021)

These questions of freedom to determine projects are important to discuss in the media development sector. Institutionalized imbalances of donating and receiving countries and their different expectations can lead to a lack of trust. This lack in turn makes project cooperation more difficult for both sides. Even if at the end of September 2015, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (SDGs) was adopted at the *United Nations General Assembly* (UNGA)[6] with the plan to dissolve the division into donor and recipient countries, the question remains: Is this also noticeable in practice and how are power asymmetries concretely dissolved? The following chapter will present some illustrative experiences from South-Asian media development practitioners on-site. It will provide insights into the current realities of their work with external actors and the challenges that they are confronted with.

Practical challenges for local actors on-site

> I mean, even for our present project, in the beginning, when we were doing so much back and forth, just trying to get the project proposal approved. And everything we suggested, there were so many questions back like 'Why this much? For what? Why?' Why so many questions that you're getting? And I understand, they have to be accountable. [...] But when we are doing the proposal and all that, it took us six or seven months just to finalize the pitch. [...] I don't know, there's something that I personally sensed that wasn't comfortable. It is like the way some of the senior people interacted with some from our team when we had online discussions, the way, you know, they interacted. [...] Just disregarding what people

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[5] This experience was shared at the same panel on "Enquiries about Trust in media (assistance)" presented at the FoME conference in 2021 in which Ines Drefs presented her preliminary results of here study "How important is trust in media development partnerships and what is it important for?"
[6] https://sdgs.un.org/goals (17 March 2022)

have to say, what was expressed. They were like 'We know, we know. Yah, yah, yah.' And in the end, after switching back and forth, there's really no change in the proposal. Of course, some activities changed, but it was more about just correcting the language, you know, the language. Nothing substantive. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

This experience was shared by a media practitioner from Nepal in a leading position while talking about the last project they got funding for. It shows the challenges of unequal power distribution in decision making and defining media development projects. It also shows a lack of recognition of the insider's knowledge and needs. Another example is of an environmental journalist, whom I met during my research stay in India in 2020. He had attended an international journalism training in Germany on renewable energy in the 2010s. He was invited to learn what Germany had achieved so far in this field and how to transfer this knowledge to India. Here, he had a different perspective on improvement possibilities in India:

> What may work for Germany does not work somewhere else, because the dynamics are different. For example, the population in Germany corresponds to one Indian state. There is no comparison and what works in Germany will maybe not work for us. But the course was open to discussion and there was space for dissent. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2020 as part of her PhD)

The quality and relevance of journalism trainings and corresponding media development projects are thus dependent on the life context and inside knowledge of local actors. Nevertheless, they are not always the starting point of externally designed projects. A leading media development worker from India whom I also met in 2020 told me about a project they did in cooperation with the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP) on digital radios. Here, the Indian project partners had a different perspective on which technology is relevant to work with in India.

> Digital radios were very expensive at that time. We said we can do a pilot, but we think that model won't work. We thought that the government radio had the widest reach and would technology-wise be better to work with. The biggest reach had *All-India Radio,* for us technology-wise that was better. It was more accessible, more open, more relevant for us. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2020 as part of her PhD)

As this example shows, sometimes there could be a wrong focus on media technology or trends which can be inappropriate for recipient countries. Another illustrative example here is the "mobile revolution" of the early 2000s, which even though is considered a worldwide phenomenon, was different for the African continent: "For example, between 2000 and 2004, mobile phone ownership grew faster in Africa – the poorest continent in the world – than anywhere else on earth" (Vokes, 2018, p. 3). However, the first media development initiatives there focused on computers because donors or funding organizations from outside of Africa did not trust the African countries with the advanced use of mobile phones:

> For example, as late as 2001, I personally heard a senior official from a major development agency publicly state that his organization didn't support initiatives aimed at promoting mobile phone use in Uganda, because its policy-makers were of the view that a country like

Uganda '[wasn't] ready for mobile phones yet'. His comments may have been made with reference to a then widely held view within some development organizations that countries like Uganda needed first develop their woefully inadequate fixed-line phone systems before they could even start to think about mobile phones [...]. (Vokes, 2018, p. 4)

Such a misfocus which does not address the use of technology on-site became also visible in my observation of a journalism training in Europe between 2018 and 2021[7]. Here, the participants from sub-Saharan and North Africa, the Middle East and South-Asia learned how to shoot a movie using an iPad without having the devices at their respective newsrooms or radio stations. In this case, it seemed that it was not analysed in advance, or somehow not of interest whether journalists have tablets available in their home editorial offices.

Presenting these examples, I want to discuss possible reasons for this one-sided directionality. This includes going back to the history of media development. As already mentioned, media development projects and journalism support initially followed modernization theory, which assumes western-style media would lead to democratization and development and thus "modernize" recipient countries (Scott, 2014, p. 33). Thus, projects were mainly designed to follow the western-style model without integrating the needs and requirements of local actors. Today, participation and empowerment of the target groups are defined as guiding principles by practitioners and researchers (Manyozo, 2012; Waisbord 2008). Accordingly, MDW should support a local change from outside, not dictate it. Nevertheless, even today the various outside donors and funders could convey and impose their values emerged from western-determined and country-specific ideas of democracy, media development and journalism. The *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID) for example conveys American press philosophy and policies as well as business sustainability (for more details on NGOs from the US and their influential power and political character see Miller, 2009). *Sweden's government agency for development cooperation* (SIDA), on the other hand, puts more emphasis on public service media (on USAID and SIDA see Noske-Turner, 2017, pp. 8ff.).

> The rationale behind media assistance varies from donor to donor, and in many ways, the donor countries' own domestic philosophies and policies are perceptible in their media assistance policies, [...] The American press philosophy prioritizes a clear separation between media and government. This emphasis is evident in the many USAID-funded media assistance interventions that include business and advertising assistance to enable an independent source of revenue in the belief that this is the only viable option for an independent media free of interference from government. (Noske-Turner, 2017, p.8)

Even if non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide most of the journalism trainings (Schiffrin, 2010, p. 406; Miller, 2009 pp. 13ff.), they often convey their nation-specific ideas in the same way as respective government agencies do, for example through their understanding of journalism and respective training approaches.

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[7] I am giving this long period of time for data protection reasons.

> Every lecturer who comes from industrialized, pluralistic states with financial support from organizations in those same countries brings with them journalistic values that are majority consensus in those countries; indeed, they are virtually requested and sent to represent these values and convictions in journalism trainings on the ground. (Thomaß, 2012, p. 397, translated by Keßler)

These values are discussed as a "western" understanding of journalistic roles and are claimed to be universal from that one side (Higgins, 2014; Miller, 2009, pp. 18–26). For journalism support "universal values" are thus questioned "as the North just tried to impose particular professional standards that reflected its own ideology of truth" (Lugo-Ocando, 2020, p. 5).

> Media assistance foreign aid has been provided by the West during the last half-century to nations without the same political-cultural traditions and institutions. Western donors say this promotes democracy. But it is equally true that media assistance seeks to universalize some very specific media forms and practices that arose out of quite particular historical conditions in North America and Western Europe. This is most evident in the case of journalism, and training in Western journalism continues to be at the heart of media assistance. (Miller, 2009, p. 16)

This means that funding organizations and media training providers need to be aware of their approach to MDW which likely differs from insiders' values and practices. Such an awareness of and the sensitivity for different perceptions is especially relevant for actors on-site. Often, they are bound by the specifications and requirements of foreign donors and funding agencies and contracting organizations, which may be challenging as this may contravene demands on site.

This article tries to show that MDW could be based less on the idea of cooperation, but rather be perceived as a dominance of foreign funding countries and their politics (Miller, 2009; Nguyen, 2016). Taking this view, the donor organisations' perceived dominance in controlling the entire process and meeting their requirements seem to be more important than establishing relationships built on trust with the actors on site, and openness to adjust projects and funds to local needs on a more ad hoc basis. Based on a literature review and two case studies in India and Ghana, Elbers, Knippenberg and Schulpen (2014) explain why the approach to control often wins over the approach of trust; and what this means for development cooperation. According to them, the approach to control is based on the phenomenon of "development managerialism" where "[e]ffectiveness, efficiency and transparency became key principles" (p.1). Here, trust is replaced by indicators that can be controlled and measured to guarantee effectiveness and efficiency and justify funding decisions. At this point, it needs to be mentioned that donors and other funding organizations themselves have to be accountable to their central auditing authorities in their respective home countries. Thus, the focus on controlling the process at the expense of neglecting empowerment and autonomy of the recipients maybe beyond their control or intention.

> The managerial logic emphasizes the risks that too much faith in the goodwill or capabilities of the partner can bring about, as local organizations may engage in erroneous or fraudulent activities. Strict accountability measures are therefore considered necessary to ensure transparency and the proper use of funds. Contracts clarify and formalize agreements, provide clear prescriptions of conduct and outline sanctions and incentives to ensure compliance […]. (p. 6)

On the other hand, the relationship of trust and equality between "Northern NGOs" (NNGOs) and "Southern NGOs" (SNGOs) as a defining principle comes from the "social transformation approach":

> Within this so-called social transformation approach, NNGOs saw themselves as catalysts for social change in the South and emphasized the importance of empowerment strategies and the need to support organizations linked to democratic movements. […] Values such as trust, equality and respect emerged as the defining principles of the relationships between NNGOs and their Southern allies […]. (p. 1)

Overall, the consequence of development managerialism is that it erodes the autonomy of the organizations and their local ownership (Elbers & Arts, 2011, pp. 719-723). A lack of trust in local actors could result in questioning them and not including their perspectives.

An experience in this regard was made by a media practitioner in a leading position from an organization in Pakistan where they are working with communal tribes. Here, confronted with the logic of managerialism, the organization was struggling with a lot of bureaucratic work and with quantitative measurement of outcomes. Moreover, they didn't have the possibility to measure and evaluate the foreign organization themselves. Furthermore, their knowledge was not considered equal:

> For example, I'm working with international media organizations. So usually, they send me so many forms to fill in, to do my assessment. But I don't have any such practices. Furthermore, I don't have such a mechanism that I can also talk about the cooperation. It could be done by a third party, that they get feedback from both sides and then present it to a donor. […] There's also a lack of knowledge sharing. Usually, there are not so many opportunities to share knowledge with each other to strengthen the capacity of each other. The international media assistance organizations are interested in quantity and less in quality. So usually, they say we have to train 100 people, but they don't think of the impact. They just complete, just want to show the figures, we trained so and so many people, but not to see the quality, how much impact this activity had on the beneficiaries. So, the number could be limited, but there should be follow-ups. There should be mentoring afterward, especially if you're training journalists. Quantity is not important, quality is. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

Here, another practical challenge becomes visible in discussions on evaluation and impact measurement of media development projects (e.g. Abott, 2019) – in the following named as "media assistance":

> […] the overtones from the donor countries' own experiences and philosophical positioning of media are never far from the surface. It is important to maintain awareness of these differences, especially in moving forward with analysis of media assistance evaluation, since

media assistance objectives and values are by no means uniform across the globe. (Noske-Turner, 2017, p. 9)

Different media development objectives come from different life and work contexts. Thus, there can be different perspectives on how to do the evaluation itself (which is also discussed among practitioners and researchers, e.g., Noske-Turner, 2017). A media practitioner from Nepal shared their experience of a current project on online harassment against women that was funded by a US-American donor. The evaluation and monitoring by the donor-organization were partly done through demanded checklists of different deliverables, such as numbers of workshops and attendees. The perspective of the Nepali practitioner is different from just fulfilling deliverables and they suggested that there are other ways to measure change which can take more time.

> As a practitioner, and as a Nepali or local I understand in many ways that this is culture, this is not something that's going to change overnight. [...] How do you bring that experience and sharing in the sense that you submit something, but that this is not something on a checklist that you need to do in one month. [...] You have the project or to work on a certain issue, and then you have certain deliverables that you have to deliver [...]. We're so focused on just fulfilling the deliverables that actually, is there change actually happening then? Have we got that time? Or that platform to actually see that change has taken place without it just being something that's on my list? (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

From the practitioner's perspective, discussions after the workshops and trainings are an important aspect to look at as intangible outputs. Here, it is about triggering a conversation amongst the participants which was not included in the monitoring and evaluation. As the shared experiences show, evaluations need to consider the complexity of local contexts. Here, an essential factor is the participation of local actors. A corresponding approach considers the extent to which projects were consistent with the cultural values of the community, whether the message to be communicated was developed by local actors in the community, and how it was understood by them (Servaes, 2016). Unfortunately, local actors are often not involved in the design of evaluation.

Summarizing, the managerial logic and outsiders' determination of MDW could bring several adverse consequences "including the invalidation of participatory approaches, reduced cultural sensitivity, weakened ties with the grassroots level and a dilution of core values" (Elbers & Arts, 2011, p. 714). This turns "Southern" NGOs "into mere implementers of donor policy" (p. 15). One challenging example here was shared by the practitioner from Pakistan. In this, the implementation of European standards of gender equality was seen as inappropriate for societies, like Pakistan, where the development of gender rights is at another stage and needs to be measured differently. Forced indicators from outside can thus restrict the freedom of actors on-site.

> It's a good idea to include gender. But sometimes it is difficult in a society where you're working with a disproportion of women compared to men. Usually, they expect 50-50 contributions from men and women in the project. This is not possible for societies like Afghanistan, or for tribal areas, like the Pashtun community of Pakistan. Because women have limited opportunity, and if maybe 10 to 15%, or maybe 20 to 30% are involved that is more than enough. [...] Some of the donors try to influence the editorial agenda. I think it's not good for free and independent journalism and it should be avoided. They should work with experienced people; they should work with trusted people. And they should let them decide what is good for the community that they are working with, not impose something because otherwise, they will lose credibility. There is like, interference or interventions from outside decision making, so it will not have a good impact on the community. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

In addition to the application of managerialism logic, the lack of letting local actors participate is also explained to have an institutional nature. Accordingly, donors and funders are also restricted to enable participation:

> Institutional imperatives are responsible for why essential participatory ideas, namely local knowledge and decision-making, are rarely at the forefront of development initiatives. A system of bureaucratic procedures that rewards institutional efficiency weakens community empowerment and reduces participation to publicity copy. (Waisbord, 2008, p. 509)

These restrictions come for example from bureaucratic interests, where "[p]articipation was viewed as a too time-consuming approach that required intensive use of human resources" (p. 511). Another reason given is that organizations are not free enough to follow participatory approaches as they are also funded and dependent on their donors. However, there is also a view that sees "Northern" NGOs still as powerful enough to create a change (Ashman, 2001) within this institutional framework, even if changing the institutional system is not as easy and not just only in the hands of single actors:

> [A]chieving participatory goals implies a radical shift in the dominant mindset. [...] While I share the scepticism about the prospects of massive changes, I believe that gradual yet significant innovations are possible within institutional constraints. (Waisbord, 2008, p. 518).

In addition, local actors are also gaining more and more power in some cases. They are developing their own strategies to (en)counter outsiders' dominance and determination. Even if not every organization might feel that powerful, the following examples give a stimulating insight into how they can push back outsider's constraints. In the next chapter, I will first focus on these strategies from local actor's followed by possible strategies and recommendations for external actors.

"Pushing back" – Strategies against outsiders' constraints

The negative consequences of inequality and mistrust are only one side of the coin. Another one is the strategies of actors on-site to counter outsiders' constraints. One of the strategies is pushing back, as the Nepali media development practitioner

describes it. That means that actors on-site do not have to accept everything that donors and funders are suggesting. The on-site actors also must be very clear and say what is not possible from their perspective. Here, one opportunity for locals is to get their own standing in the field.

> I think maybe it's slowly changing, as even you have locals, who are specialists, who are professionals in the field and slowly taking up roles. They have more say in the matter or can push back. It wasn't like that. I mean before, development was basically set by the donor, what they wanted. There was very little pushback, but I think that is slowly changing. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

Similar strategies of pushing back are also developed by the media development practitioner from Pakistan, who feels confident to make his points and also the need to keep his organization safe in a context of conflict and violence. In this case, for example, the donor's branding in their project was problematic because the Taliban are active in Pakistan and view NATO-member states as enemies. When an organization receives official funding from these countries – in this case, from Central Europe – they may become targets of these militant groups (on problematic branding see also Wilkens, 2018).

> I try to convince donors and I have convinced so many organizations in our field. I'm discussing all these things and that I'm not alone in this partnership. But there are other local organizations who are not really that convincing. So usually, they have to bow to the international organization's demands. So, in my case, I have to resist, I have to defend my point of view. Like in the case of disclaimer and branding. We were working with a foundation from Europe on a weekly radio show on COVID-19. They said you should write with the content on the website that it is supported by our foundation. I told them, that's very risky. [...] Let us focus on the purpose to empower people with reliable information in this stage. And then they came to me, okay, okay, if you are not comfortable with it, you can drop it. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

Another strategy to deal with donor constraints is to value reached outcomes differently. One example is that gender equality in Pakistan cannot be accomplished in the same way as in Europe as already indicated in the paragraph above on evaluating projects. The assessment of having reached and included women at all – in circumstances where female participation is very low and considered by some as going against local traditions – gets far better if it is based on local standards and adapted to local possibilities – not international ones.

> So, the local context, when they ask like the proportion of women, I give them the background of the area, try to make them understand that women have very limited access to public places, professions, and even the illiteracy is so high among women. And the culture is very rigid to allow them to go out of their homes. The majority are men. So, if we achieve something small, I think it should be considered something big in this context. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

Looking at the different strategies of media development practitioners on-site, it seems that they are not always that powerless to encounter foreign constraints (Elbers & Arts, 2011). But, even if pushback strategies are developed, they demand from

both sides energy and effort that could be channelled into other activities. Moreover, they are not available for everyone:

> […] most of the available strategies require the presence of either alternative sources of funding, strong performance or personal contact with a degree of trust. When these are not present, SNGOs may have limited choice, and resort to manipulating the perceptions of donors. (Elbers & Arts, 2011, p. 729)

A good relationship is needed to avoid manipulation, mistrust, and inequality, and to create an open space for joint learning and understanding. Here, actively listening to local actors could be a strategy that funding organizations can pursue.

> I think an international media assistance organization has to listen to local partners. So, they feel that they are equal partners, and they feel empowered. So, if you are not listened to, it means you're ignored. And the decision-making is something like imposed on you. So, I think listening to local partners is very important. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

Overall, a better and mutual understanding of each other can only strengthen cooperation and be beneficial for donors and other funders and recipients. "[T]he development of trust between the parties, cooperative interpersonal relationships, and behaviours like active communication, mutual influence, and joint learning" (Ashman, 2001, p. 77) support an effective partnership. "Partnerships were considered effective to the extent that their formally stated goals had been achieved and that the partners expressed satisfaction with the achievements and the relationship" (p.77). To reach this cooperation and satisfaction, a study based on a comparative analysis of four cases of cooperation between US-American and African organizations developed the concept of "collaborative accountability" which is based on mutual understanding (Ashman, 2001). It combines two different, actually conflicting principles: collaboration and accountability.

> At a minimum, the principle of collaborative accountability would mean that each partner recognizes the resources contributed by others and that each has legitimate needs to account for their use in the partnership. Financial resources and technical expertise from Northern donors are only some of the resources necessary for successful development results. Southern NGOs may bring their share of financial and technical resources. They also bring essential resources such as knowledge of the national development environment, relationships with communities and other national stakeholders, and identities as national actors positioned for long-term sustainability. Communities themselves also contribute their own resources to development initiatives. (Ashman, 2001, p. 88)

From this articles' perspective, a good partnership starts with the acknowledgment of challenges instead of treating them as taboos or unsolvable. It is also about the consideration of emotions and stress for foreigners or outsiders entering new and different contexts (Malachowski, 2015). The first step is the awareness of possible difficulties that result from different perspectives and communicating them openly. Whereas choosing control over trust can restrict the autonomy and ownership of local organizations. Furthermore, it could lead to the acceptance of inequality and inappropriateness. External actors stand at a crossroad here "and the choices they

make will have key consequences for their future relevance and identity" (Elbers et al., 2014, p. 11).

Another step is to compensate for one-sided directionality and domination with participatory approaches. Representatives of this school of thought demand that the recipient's needs and their own relevancy should guide and inform projects (Thomaß, 2012, p. 403; Manyozo, 2012, pp. 152–195; Nelson, 2019; Higgins, 2014). This perspective could mean "thus moving along the continuum toward becoming more of an 'insider'" (Malachowski, 2015, p. 11). Here, we can learn from ethnography and "cross-cultural" research as media development actors enter different foreign contexts, too. Building a close and trusted relationship could look like this then:

> Over time, workers became less guarded around me and they started to share more and more of their personal stories. I had a genuine interest in learning about their job duties, their roles, and perspectives on the workplace. They also asked me many questions about academia and the research process. I became aware of many of the workers' personal and work-related struggles, perceptions, frustrations, and emotions. (Malachowski, 2015, p. 11)

Here, genuine interest and awareness of people's work context are the keys. They create an open communication space on an eye-level that is based on trust. The allowed and created closeness can also be demanding and is therefore not easy (pp. 23ff.). But everyday experiences such as emotions, fears, and goals can be reflected upon to understand interactions and related problems. These experiences could be collected in protocols and analysed later or could be discussed in supervision groups (p. 33).

Another step is to "decolonize" media development work by considering different languages and traditions. Again, we can learn from qualitative research. Relevant aspects of decolonization and addressing local contexts are: (1) working with bilingual data, (2) considering "non-Western" cultural traditions, (3) enabling multiple perspectives, and (4) giving accessibility to locals (González y González & Lincoln, 2006). (1) Working bilingually may require MDW to use translations and reflect meanings "that are not parallel across languages and cultures", such as gender equality, freedom of expression or sustainability (González y González & Lincoln, 2006, p. 8). (2) Consideration of "non-Western" cultural traditions may imply a critical reflection of the language of communication, particularly when only English is required or spoken. This "can leave us with misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and misleading information" (p. 15). (3) Having multiple perspectives means developing projects "shaped by the needs and questions of local peoples, as well as carried out under their direction" (p. 21). This includes active listening. (4) Finally, accessibility means making evaluations and other working documents available in the local language and including co-authors from the ground.

Outlook: Aspects of a good relationship of trust and equality

In the work between local and external actors, the orientation to the outside way of working can create imbalances between external and local staff. For example, this can become visible when external staff are in leadership positions and thus more influential (Nguyen, 2016). Thus, "cooperation" is linked to power aspects, especially when financial support is often used as leverage from foreign organizations. Overall, the specifications of development from external actors can be accompanied by (even if unintended) a devaluation of the "to be developed" side. Here, the distinction between "developed" and "developing" can thus turn out as a guiding principle for media development actors (Nguyen, 2016, pp. 212ff.). Ultimately, the ignorance of local communication practices denies differences, and therefore, in order to be appropriate, one must begin with the local context (one example of the local specifics of social and political communication in Ghana, see Tietaah, et al. 2018, p. 93).

Aside from local differences in project implementation and evaluation, aspects of equality and trust play an important role in a good partnership and fair cooperation. If local actors feel understood and valued, they are more likely to communicate openly about their problems, allowing them to be addressed.

In addition to self-determination that needs to be strengthened, the self-confidence of receiving organizations also plays a major role. Here, I want to conclude this article with an important and succinct statement made by the practitioner from Pakistan. This statement puts the relationship between the funding and the local contribution on a different level. According to his view, the value of media development projects lies not in the funding, but in the actual work on-site:

> I think there should be some sensitization of local partners. That you say, look, your contribution is so valuable to the project, it is not just about money. It's about contribution. So, your contributions are more valuable or equal to the money they are providing. But usually, they don't. They like to undermine their role. [...] [L]ocal partners should understand what their value is. They shouldn't be having a feeling of inferiority. Because they are so much important, without their presence the international system can't do it. (Interview conducted by Keßler 2022)

Abbreviations

CIMA	Center for International Media Assistance
FoME	Forum für Medien und Entwicklung (FoME)/Forum Media and Development
MDW	Media development work
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NNGOs	Northern Non-governmental organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Sweden's government agency for development cooperation
SNGOs	Southern Non-governmental organizations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development

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