**Essay:**
# Results-Oriented Evaluations: Their Uses, Their Limits and How They are Driving Implementers' Coping Strategies

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**Abstract:** While the use of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) by media development implementers is well documented, organizations' coping strategies to adapt to new environments in media and development still remain a relatively unexplored area. The article aims at showing how the theoretical lessons learnt by the industry have been put into practice and how a successful change can be driven within an organization using outside experts.

A results-oriented culture of performance and service has been enforced since the 1990s in the EU. Evaluation systems have been a powerful catalyst in driving the transition from media support to media development and in making the latter more independent from broadcasters and donors. In recent years, changes in media assistance procedures and aims have profoundly modified the traditional landscape. This article will not question these changes, their origin and motivations. It will focus on implementers' coping strategies to adapt (or not) to these new procedures and aims and how results-oriented evaluations can drive the shift from outputs to outcomes in a changing media development sector.

Can capitalizing on experience be considered a learning process that prepares for change and improves the design and implementation of projects? To what extent can it help to empower the operator as an organization? Referring to various concrete case studies from British, French and German media assistance, the article will focus on virtuous change – the circumstances that encourage structures, as well as donors who fund them, to better define and operationalize their strategies.

**Keywords:** M&E, Evaluation, Media Development, Media Support, Guidance of Change, Accountability, Management, M4D, Strategy

## Introduction

The aim of this essay is to demonstrate the lessons learned within the media development sector and to show how this theoretical knowledge has been put into practice by Europe's main operators. Previous studies have so far concentrated on

major donor perspectives and challenges within monitoring and evaluation, blind spots in donor activities and to what extent donors incorporate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) into their funding decisions. The use of M&E by media development implementers is well documented but the organizations' coping strategies to adapt to new environments in both media and development still remain a relatively unexplored area. The issue involves management just as much as it does government strategy and international support: What do we mean by change? What aspects make up the shared assessment and what aspects cause controversy? And beyond these observations, how do you drive successful change within an organization using outside experts?

First conceived in the United States during the 1970s, Public Policy Evaluation was a spin-off from New Public Management, and has since been practised in Europe through the European Commission. In the 1990s, it became a compulsory element for all projects receiving European funding.

However, a results-oriented culture or at least a greater orientation towards a culture of performance and service, has been enforced to varying extents throughout the different EU member states (Lamarzelle 2008), with the UK and Scandinavian countries being the first to incorporate it into their government reforms.

In a communication from 2000, the Commission defines Evaluation as being a "judgement of interventions according to their results, impacts and needs they aim to satisfy"[1]. More recently[2], it is described as being part of a system as a whole, as "Smart Regulation", which explicitly aims at eliminating "unnecessary costs and [identifying] areas for performance improvement […] across all EU legislation" in order to finally "improve conditions for European citizens and businesses and contribute to the EU's global role".

The system implied by "smart regulation" offers a double advantage for the media development sector: on the one hand, in terms of strategic management, it sets performance as a priority and makes operators accountable to donors (and to tax-payers) and on the other hand, in terms of implementation, it promotes the outsourcing of public activity to competing service providers.

In France for example, *Canal France International* is the preferred operator of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development for media assistance and receives roughly 12 million euros per year to implement a three-year government contract. Bodies that receive state funding must abide by a certain number of conditions: in the Netherlands, Free Press Unlimited receives a five-year investment from the Dutch Foreign Affairs ministry. This credit line, MFS-II, covers the period of 2011-2015. But the recipient is required to derive a minimum of 25% of its income from its own fundraising.

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[1] Communication "Focus on Results: Strengthening Evaluation of Community Activities", SEC (2000) 1051.

[2] A second communication has been released in 2007: "Responding to Strategic Needs: Reinforcing the use of Evaluation", SEC (2007) 0213 and a third one in 2013: "Strengthening the foundations of Smart Regulation – improving evaluation", COM (2013) 686.

The development aid sector assimilated this results-oriented culture very early on. Its principles were incorporated into the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as early as 1991 (OECD 2010). At the time, OECD key standards stated that "an important purpose of evaluation is to bring to the attention of policy-makers constraints on developmental aid success resulting from policy shortcomings or rigidities both on the donor and recipient side, inadequate co-ordination, and the effectiveness of other practices, such as procurement". The evaluation criteria of the DAC soon provided a common set of guidelines for the entire sector:

- Relevance: "The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor."
- Effectiveness: "A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives."
- Efficiency: "Efficiency measures the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. It is an economic term which is used to assess the extent to which aid uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results."
- Impact: "The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity on the local social, economic, environmental and other development indicators."
- Sustainability: "Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable."[3]

The way evaluation has recently spread throughout the development sector suggests that if these learning processes can be summarised and consolidated then the trend towards greater emphasis on evaluation can have a positive effect on the sector, pushing it towards continuous improvement and, in the best case scenario, greater professionalization.

Yet, this virtuous approach is not easy to put into practice nor does it have consensus: some people choose to carry out evaluation out of peer pressure, without expecting much from it, or sometimes people use its recommendations as a convenient smokescreen to maintain the status quo.
The culture of accountability also represents a major policy shift for a relatively young industry – most companies specialised in media assistance were set up in the 1990s or early 2000s – which for a long time has focused predominantly on the volume of assistance rather than on results.

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[3] The term "sustainability" has a double meaning in French, and refers to sustainability and viability, which underscores the weight of intercultural dialogue in the appropriation of concepts and also in how they are used.

There is little academic research[4] to explain the reasons for this transformation. Here we will focus only on some of the most relevant milestones, using empirical evidence. As it is frequently referred to in French organizational sociology, we will use the "Five Stages of Grief" model by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969). This theoretical framework sequences change such as impending grief or catastrophic loss, from denial to anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. We must make it clear here that these five steps are only used as a heuristic tool to assess coping strategies and not at all as a way to resolve the controversy of their use in the social sphere – which is beyond the scope of this study.

As used in social psychology[5] (Duck 2002; Malarewicz 2011) and suggested by Kübler-Ross herself[6], this framework will help to illustrate a system's capacity for reform, whether this change is initiated from within or by external impulses. Operators today place a big emphasis on "empowerment": they promote it in a know-how transfer strategy to their recipients to make them self-sufficient. But to what extent are they actually able to empower themselves as operators?


## 1. Denial: Clinging on to a by-gone model

Faced with impending loss, one feels fear, anger, depression and disillusionment. In the media world, the digital revolution has been the main type of trauma these past few years. Anyone who has assisted the media in trying to control and/or manage this new culture has seen the extent of resistance from the "analog" environment.

Today, within some media organizations, whether they are "pure play" like *Pro Publica* or traditional outlets like *The New York Times*, applications allow editors to track the impact of articles, by using data collected online to identify how a story grabs a reader's attention, and whether it produces a quantifiable change. It thus seems that media impact can be (at least partially) measured.

According to journalist Derek Thomson, it is vital that digital news organizations track which articles are being read to teach news-makers what their audience is interested in – and also to teach the audience themselves what they are interested in: "The analytic age of journalism has its detractors, but with regard to serving our audience, it gets us closer than ever to that highest purpose of journalism: learning the ugly truth" (Thomson 2014).

New profiles combining several skills have emerged, like Brian Abelson, author of a study on the correlation between the promotion of online articles in *The New York Times* and their visibility (Abelson 2013), who refers to himself on his blog as "Statistician, Journalist, Hacker."

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[4] See also the attempts made by Ellen Hume and the Knight Foundation in Media Missionaries of 2004, in a North American Perspective, http://bit.ly/1qGsPAz.
[5] See Miguel Membrado's "learning curve".
[6] See *Death Is of Vital Importance*, where she explains her model "applies to any significant change as well".

In an upcoming study, Anya Schiffrin (forthcoming) traces a parallel between the use of statistics in the media world and those in the media development world. She examines the attempt of media impact trackers

> "to trace the ripple effect of news reporting, how to use quantitative data as well as qualitative data, what new tools should be developed, and whether it's possible to reach broad agreement as to what kind of impact is desirable and what the role of media outlets should be."

Among US news-makers and organizations involved in deciding on a set of best practices and standard tools are Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Tow Center at Columbia Unversity's Graduate School of Journalism, Brian Abelson at *The New York Times*, the World Bank, the Knight Foundation, Pew Research Center, Annenberg School of Communications, the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard and the MIT Civic Media Center/Berkman Center's Media Cloud.

Schiffrin quotes Micha Byruk, from DataKind, a New York-based nonprofit organization that helps mission-driven organizations understand data:

> "The position of grant officers in foundations is going to be a lot more data-centric because of the prevalence of data. Grant officers will need to have much more of a grasp of statistics and also an understanding of data management."

This gap between the new and old world is found within organizations whose primary aim is to develop the media. Many of the least digitally literate proved they were incapable of generating new ideas, encouraging innovation and stimulating public debate.

Founded in 1986, the Panos network began entrusting studies on Scandinavian development programs to journalists of their recipient countries. Its founder, Jon Tinker described it as "voices of the South examine the problems of the South".
In the late 1980s, it pioneered the first major conference on the social and economic consequences of HIV on development. Panos then published the first in a series of renowned booklets on the effects of stigmatization (Deane, Hanefeld & Scalway 2003). Thirty years later however, the network was forced to end its global campaign against AIDS, the Global AIDS Program (Le Breton 2012). As assessed by different external evaluators, this was due to a failure to adapt to competition from organizations capable of mobilizing mass communication and advocacy campaigns, thanks to social networks, mobiles and new technology (Glover & Leroy 2013).

But it is not just the digital divide that has profoundly affected Panos but also the way it sees itself as an operator. A former head of Panos London who asked to remain anonymous curtly summarizes:

> "Whether you want it or not, your relationship with donors can no longer be based on funding requests but on contents. It's the only way to have a program-based approach in a

hostile environment."[7]

It is this program-based approach – with all the implications noted above – that represents the main turning point within the sector in the 2000s.
As Anne Nelson sums up,

> "a lot of media development funding has been based on the concept of a free press in a democracy that has been rooted in Western newspaper culture in the 19th and 20th century. This model has been disrupted by the double tsunami of new media technology and economic shifts" (Susman-Peña 2012).

When applied through the lens of organizational strategy, this stage of denial corresponds to the phase of misunderstanding. A risky phase if ever there was one, since it requires a level of awareness in order to bounce back, put an end to inefficiency and reject failure.

## 2. Anger: Moving from media support to media development

The second phase of the bereavement process is characterized by a feeling of anger over the loss, which sparks soul-searching. Some media development work that was carried out in Palestine about 20 years ago by European donors, notably the French, can be taken as a symbolic case in point. As a result of the Oslo Accords in the mid-1990s, the Palestinian Authority was in a position to build its own state and looked to the international community for assistance. And one of its main priorities, even before currency, education or water projects, was the creation of a broadcasting organization *ex nihilo*.[8]

The € 25 million initial investment was split between France, Germany, Denmark, the European Union and Unesco, but it was the French public broadcaster, *France Télévisions*, who was first in line to provide Yasser Arafat, the first president of the Palestinian National Authority, with the equipment necessary to set up his studios. The former director of *France 2*, Pascal Josèphe, had already drawn up a provisional program schedule. And on July 2nd 1994, the *Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation* was established. Its studios were a gift of huge geopolitical importance but they did not even last ten years: on the 21st February 2002, Israeli tanks invaded the channel's two-storey building, and burnt its two radio stations, TV studio and all its audio-visual archives, to ashes. The damage, which nevertheless did not kill *PBC*, cost roughly 3 million euros[9].

It was not the first time equipment donated as part of development assistance has been destroyed. But if we ignore the political aspect[10], the symbolic value was, this time, hugely important, because it questioned the very effectiveness of assistance. In 1999, French aid had been suspended: the Foreign Ministry complained that the

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[7] Interview with the author, May 2013.
[8] The agreement emphasized the importance of TV's role in stability and a comprehensive peace.
[9] Between 2001-2002, *Le Monde diplomatique* evaluated the total damage caused by Israeli attacks to EU-funded development projects at € 17.3 million, http://bit.ly/1z6Rr89.
[10] The link between the attack and PBC's coverage of news remains unclear.

*PBC* relied too heavily on Arafat's cabinet without establishing proper instruments such as internal rules, a board of directors or a single broadcasting law.

The episode illustrates in any case the turning point that is underway – still relative, complex and contradictory at this stage – which reflects a shift towards more structural investment choices: soon we will move from a policy of media support (where modernization is seen as an end in itself) to media development, where we will look for ways of facilitating an inclusive public debate and economic development.

The lessons learned from this incident will have repercussions that will be felt for years to come. It is not merely a question of needing to be more prudent or clairvoyant – two qualities difficult to conjure up in such conditions – but rather a question of applying a skills-transfer mindset to technology-transfer projects so that the success (or failure) of a project is measured according to the final benefits for the recipients and a theory of change. For Iginio Gagliardone,

> "academics and M&E experts lamented the lack of clarity among donors and implementers about the specific changes they hoped to achieve through a media intervention. There is a tendency to assume that the use of the media can promote professionalism or diffuse tensions, but these processes are often too broad to be adequately measured. In order to improve evaluation, it is important to have theories explaining in greater detail why certain activities are undertaken and to reach which goals" (Gagliardone 2010).

What the incident in Palestine also reveals is the importance of setting up a monitoring and evaluation mechanism that can measure not only the effects of the project but also the external risks attached to it: all the political, economic and social factors... which may hinder the desired outcome and whose early identification allows us to imagine the appropriate corrective measures. This risk matrix is often incorporated in media development projects despite the fact that there are examples like the German or French ministries of foreign affairs that continue to support media projects with no such risk matrices to rely on.

The lesson was learnt a few years later, in the Serbia of Slobodan Milošević, when France donated a clandestine printing press to local newspapers. The project cost nearly $4 million and ran a high risk of being seized by legal authorities. The machine, measuring 30 meters long and weighing 730 tons was purchased abroad, then shipped to Serbia on 45 trucks, and installed at a suitable site while remaining relatively easy to access by various different media outlets.

Risk identification and solutions to reduce them, meant focus was shifted onto the project's recipients: it was essential to find the most relevant local partners[11] and team members to ensure smooth operation guaranteeing fairness. Finally, implementation took more than three years[12]: Slobodan Milošević had already left office and his regime was overthrown when the printing press was inaugurated in

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[11] Three daily and nine weekly newspapers and magazines.
[12] The project was launched after the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, publisher of the *Dnevni Telegraf* daily and the *Evropljanin* magazine, on Easter Sunday, April 11, 1999.

September 2003.

For Corinne Matras, head of journalism at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2000 to 2006 and now a free-lance consultant, promoting an evaluation culture has been a gradual process:

> "At the start of 2000, Evaluation was used on only a few major multi-year projects. It was conducted generally internally, without a specific directive or real background of project design. We could see that some equipment delivered was inadequate, with parts "missing" or simply too big but that was all part of the "risks". It's mainly budget restraints that have pushed organizations into seeking impact assessment. The evaluative approach rebalances the flow of information from recipients in the South towards the North, whereas the dominant model still has the North instructing the South. Despite strong institutional resistance, European procedures have gradually become the norm."

In France, the requirement of assessment first affected associations and NGOs which received matching funds from the state to set up projects mainly funded by the European Commission. State-owned organizations at the time were not really encouraged to learn from this experience, whereas NGOs got off to a flying start.
In terms of "Corporate Change", this led to a revival of inertia, which sometimes postponed behaviour-change requirements and eventually shifted change towards an urgent – even emergency – requirement.

## 3. Bargaining: (Slowly) Opening up to competition

The shift from media support to media development has been accompanied by a greater consideration for the project-based approach, with a greater focus on the outcomes of the project rather than the outputs. As Shanthi Kalathil puts it,

> "output-based reporting is primarily used to satisfy donor requirements for quantifiable ways to describe how money was allocated. The next level of evaluation is the outcome level. An outcome is a higher level of result than mere output; it might attempt to describe the overall result of a training program on the professional capacity of journalists in the region" (Kalathil 2010).

Programmes by BBC Media Action, which are funded by the Global Grant of the British Government's Department for International Development (DfID), are thus subject to annual reviews which assess on the one hand a "detailed output scoring" and on the other hand "results and value for money". The grades are divided into five subgroups, with A++ constituting the top end of the scale ("outputs substantially exceeded expectation" and C referring to the bottom end of the scale ("outputs substantially did not meet expectation"). One essential detail is that the results are discussed and agreed with senior staff and management at both the implementer and donor levels.

Verifying the outcomes however is slightly trickier. In its annual Global Grant reviews, BBC Media Action has to assess the "uptake of evidence and analysis on media and communications by key development partners resulting from [its]

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activities"[13]. An outcome score is calculated out of surveys and interviews by an external agency with senior policy and development actors. Among collected data are the "use of BBC Media Action research by the policy community", the "use of BBC Media Action research by practitioners" or the "usefulness of BBC Media Action research":

> "Answering these types of questions may require survey research work (a budget for which must be built in to the program) or an independent assessment team to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the project. The assessment team, or whoever is doing the evaluation, might gather information on a number of different indicators to determine program impact. Sometimes proxy indicators are used if it is impossible to gather the data needed. For instance, counting the number of defamation cases lodged by the government against journalists from year to year could help paint a picture of the enabling environment." (Kalathil 2010)

From the donor's point of view, consideration of outcomes focuses attention on the methodology of different operators to attain objectives, and hence focuses attention on the best-adapted research tools. This therefore creates a supply policy, expressed through competition between operators to answer calls for proposals, and where promises must be explained and substantiated. The degree of openness to competition – sometimes very relative in France or Germany for example – is the bargaining stage in the process of mourning: by pretending to ignore that a new model has arrived, stakeholders concoct small deals to try and negotiate the least painful changes whilst trying to maintain the current system where a domestic privileged player is seen as the least threatening status quo.

This temptation to go for trade-offs is not very common in the media development sector, due to the low number of media development actors. Nevertheless, one can find traces in the longstanding practice of in-kind exchange of training sessions in return for new frequencies allocated to international broadcasters. Far from being project-based, this form of incentive had little chance of fostering professionalization.

However, this bargaining trend has caught on among some operators' staff as well, who have put up resistance to the development assistance model, as will be described later on.

More broadly, if public development aid in Europe is stalling, it is definitely not the case in the media development sphere, even if no combined data is yet available. As the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development report showed (Concord 2013), many Concord members noted that, in recent years, their government's commitment to the Paris and Accra principles[14] such as country ownership had weakened and only seven EU member states have a full strategy in

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[13] Indicator 4 of the programme's log-frame.

[14] At the 2005 Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, it was recognized that assistance should be producing better impacts. The Paris Declaration is formulated around five principles: Ownership, Alignment, Harmonization, Managing for Results and Mutual Accountability. In 2008, the Accra Agenda for Action was endorsed, calling for greater and more inclusive partnerships.

place for implementing the Busan commitments[15]. In 2012, aid from the EU-27 countries represented only 0.39% of the EU's GNI, bringing us back to the lowest level since 2007.

**Figure 1: For most European implementers, room for growth resides beyond funding from their main donor**
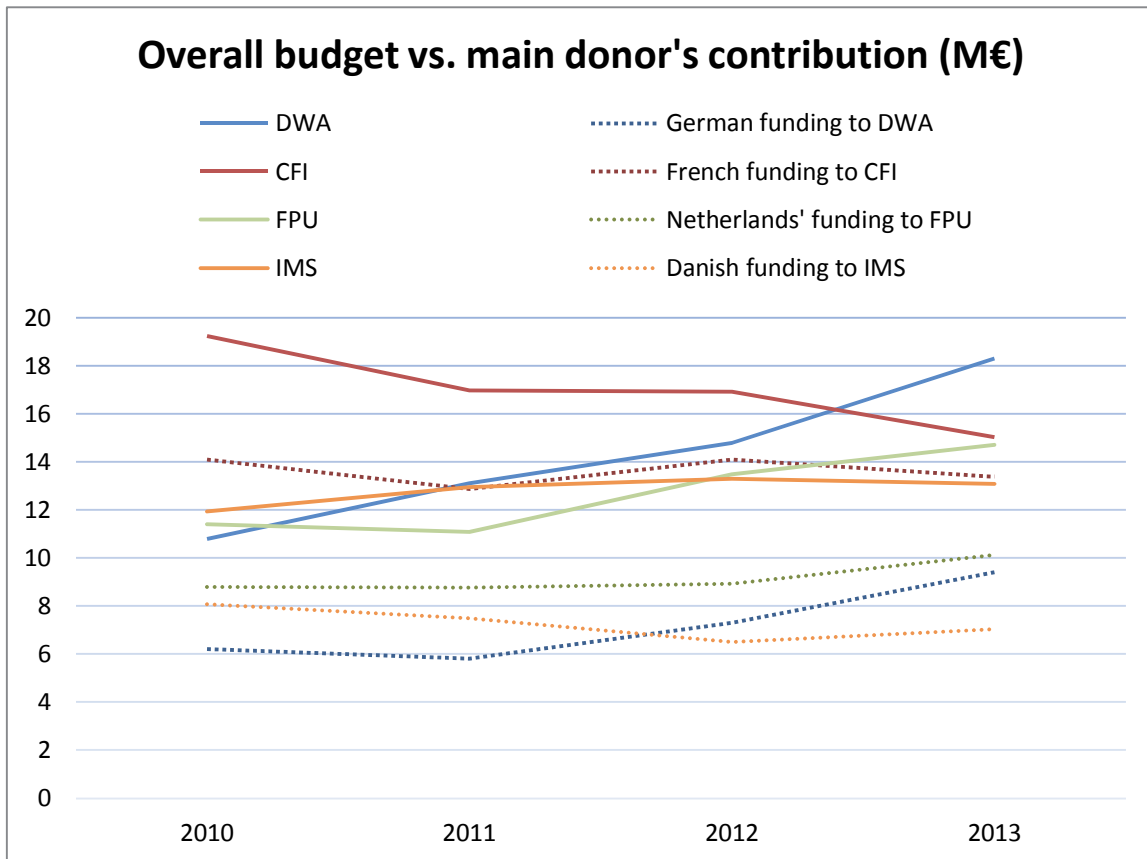


Main donor's contributions (dotted lines) do not mean all national funding to the implementer (the continuous lines in the same colour) but only their main source. Sources: DW Akademie, Canal France International, Free Press Unlimited, IMS.


The study of operators' annual budgets totaling between 10 and 20 million euros (figure 1) reflects the increased competition that took place during the early 2010s and the volatile market: those that were developing rapidly (*Deutsche Welle Akademie* and *Free Press Unlimited* particularly) went to find new sources of funding elsewhere, thus reducing their dependence vis-à-vis their main donors, whose commitment stalled or fell.

With regards to Germany, the increase in assistance from BMZ, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, at the end of the period is misleading because in March 2013 the Ministry became the preferred channel for federal funds, while at the start of the period, a multitude of donors and agencies were favored. However, the *Deutsche Welle Akademie*, saw its budget increase by 70% in three years thanks to European projects. The Danish IMS remained steady

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[15] The 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation insists on the inclusion of new actors to "strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability in the face of adversity".

at the end of the period while the French copied the trend of reducing state funding.

With the exception of *BBC Media Action*, which grew enormously when it was awarded a "Global Grant" from DfID, weaning off from the main donor appears to be the key to growth, and this has happened regardless of the global volume of activity: larger structures are not the most dependent (*BBC Media Action* relies on DfID for 40%, *DW Akademie* on the German federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development for 51%), nor are the smaller ones the most independent (*IMS*: 54%, *FPU*: 69% and *CFI*: 89%).

At national level, the presence of a competitor to the main operator creates healthy competition. This is the case for the German organization *Media in Cooperation and Transition* (MICT), a non-profit which specializes in the Middle East and North Africa or for *France Médias Monde* (*RFI* Planète Radio and Académie FMM) and prominent jounalism-schools in France, to quote just a few examples. When this is not the case, competition takes place at the European level. In Denmark, for example, competitive bidding for public funds has led some departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to give priority to *BBC Media Action* over the Danish operator, *IMS*, for geographic-specific interventions.

Even in France, renowned for being one of the most reluctant countries along with Germany to open up the sector, several of its credit lines have gone to international operators like the Swiss *Fondation Hirondelle* or even the US-based *Search for Common Ground*, which received public funds in 2010, at the expense of the French operators. The overall amount of French foreign assistance funding allocated to non-state actors and state broadcasters for media development activities is not made public but it can be estimated at more than €5 million annually in the last five years.

Competition is growing. It is clear that the changes impacting European media development operators are based primarily on this external factor and on reducing their dependence on their main donors. Operators emphasize a growing consensus towards a single project culture and a desire for professionalism in order to stimulate their own development. Those operators that have the flexibility and the capacity to adapt to the new climate are the ones that will be the most successful.

## 4. Depression: Soft convergence

The phase of depression can be seen as a moment of release: if future developments seem irreversible, why fight them? Although they have not yet accepted the situation, the main players have prepared for it. This consent is not really desired but it is not a constraint either.

In the media development sector, this step also corresponds to a new tendency for healthy competition which sets benchmark policies and a common model for intervention.

The changes, whether they are imposed or chosen, organizational or technological, are primarily decided by management. Sometimes managers adopt the forms and codes of the industrial sector, particularly the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Adjust) model or the Deming wheel. In Germany, *Deutsche Welle Akademie* has enjoyed an international certification for quality management in line with ISO 9001, since summer 2010.

In France, *Canal France International* called on a firm specialized in "corporate change" in 2012, SCA Consult. For the firm's consultant, Fabrice Plançon,

> "change management is a project. Or a component of a project. And on that basis, should be carried out as a project. [...] What are the steps, what are the thresholds and what are the objectives of each stage, how do you get to the next level and how is it integrated into the overall project" (Buchy 2013).

Stanford University is currently conducting research on the evolution of the non-profit sector, and metrics and evaluation within it. Rationalizing public aid allows us to analyse communication at the interface of three social spheres: associations, science & management. The Center for Social Innovation explains on its site:

> "Our goal is to document the sources and types of non-profit evaluation, and explain how the proliferation of evaluation is reshaping organizational behaviour and its broader social impacts in the United States and internationally."[16]

The first results show that the organizations

> "engaged in activities which involve competition or coordination with organizations of a different legal form – specifically evaluation, networking and consulting – use more interlanguage" (Oelberger et al. 2012),

which can be described as the smallest common denominator that facilitates the communication across the three spheres: associations, science and management.

With regards to European media development, a greater investment in human resources within structures has undoubtedly strengthened the professionalization of the sector. It has allowed teams to improve their knowledge, skills and awareness of constantly-evolving features of an ill-defined sector.

This collective consciousness, to borrow the term from social psychology, is even more crucial given that middle management has various backgrounds: more academic and journalistic in Germany, rather more associative and journalistic in Britain, and more diplomatic in France.

This intense change management is often endured as a painful experience within bodies where media development has been learnt on the job. Groups or individuals can try and resist its readjustments by withdrawing, fighting, criticizing or even at times sabotaging the operation.

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[16] See http://stanford.io/1mBTyve, as seen on June 27th, 2014.

Resilience is tested, as explained in an academic study of *Canal France International*:

> "Ability to learn, adapt to changing national and international contexts, endurance capacity and initiative, ability to mobilize and work… these intrinsic forces have allowed the company to withstand major political upheavals and remain in an increasingly competitive sector." (Buchy 2013: 59)

The development of benchmarks and the generalization of an EU framework defining calls for proposals have over-ridden national specificities. The model that emerges is designed to be more flexible and more responsive to geopolitical uncertainties, as shown in the distribution of its geographical share by BBC Media Action from 2010 to 2013. Changes in volume and proportion from one year to the next reflect the influence of the operator's decisions and its capacity for responsiveness: Africa climbed from 18% to 28% of BBC Media Action's overseas operations in just three years. After the uprisings in North Africa, non-African and non-Asian activities rose 9 points in 2012 but they descended by 14 points a year later, when BBC Media Action received its new Global Grant from DfID. However, further investigation still remains to be conducted to convey a detailed and granular analysis on the links between donor grants and implementer's agendas.

The consolidation of the sector did the rest: in spring 2011, Free Press Unlimited was established from a merger between Free Voice, Press Now and the International Projects department of Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC). Three years later in France, Gret gave up its media shares and *Panos* Paris significantly reduced its activities. The traditional players were joining forces whilst others were disappearing, and this paved the way for newcomers whose main niche was advocacy. This phenomenon led to the emergence of new membership bodies and consultants alongside NGOs working in the international development sector, responsible for advocacy, networking or monitoring and evaluation, to "make the development sector work better" as was promised by one among them. The main challenge of the sector is, however, its ability to learn from past evaluations:

> "Monitoring and evaluation of media support interventions has historically been considered weak in this sector, but the sector has become increasingly professional in recent years and impact assessment methodologies have become increasingly sophisticated and effective. However, new evidence suggests that donors overall have not sufficiently used findings from evaluations to inform their strategies for support to the media." (BBC World Service Trust 2011)

This is the essence of learning.

## 5. Acceptance: Learning, a strategic tool for development

The final stage of grieving is acceptance, which presents two options: "performance" which consists in continuing with readjustments to reach a new

objective, and "demise" which is a laissez-faire approach in the face of death. The reality of the loss is better accepted, better understood. In the cycle of change, acceptance is divided into two parts: the first phase is "assimilation", which then paves the way for "adoption".

Change management is based on three verbs: choose, decide, realize. It highlights the practical contribution of the people involved in the creation of the programmes. This participatory dimension has the effect of redistributing roles within the organization, fostering a horizontal structure unlike the old top-down model, and thus encouraging a greater delegation of responsibilities.

In Germany, under the leadership of the division "governance, democracy, rule of law, freedom of speech and of the press" of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Deutsche Welle Akademie has redefined its methodological objectives and developed a "development studies" department within its organization.

It is this department that supplies the organization with its choice of priorities for intervention, choosing among twenty-five priority countries. The different indexes about the state of the media are taken into account but also the potential for cooperation with a local partner as well as the probability of a project being successfully implemented, using a confidential methodology.

The implementation of more ambitious development projects, which are not limited to the transfer of expertise, has led most major stakeholders to reduce specific programs to less than half a dozen and the number of priority countries to less than thirty[17].

In Denmark every three years, evaluation doubles as a "capacity assessment" of the company under evaluation, resulting in recommendations and a response to the stakeholders. The last one in 2012, was mainly focused on indicators and on the system of monitoring and evaluation, which led IMS to produce a "Comprehensive Results-based Management Framework" and to hire a knowledge management/M&E expert reporting directly to the CEO.

The growth of the "Research and Learning" group by BBC Media Action from the late 2000s onwards was gradually replicated throughout the whole media development industry. Evaluation was no longer perceived as an imposed contractual obligation but as an end in itself, a part of a genuine results-based management and accountability framework. This new culture of evaluation was further strengthened by research on the catalytic effect of media on development – or "the Role of Mass Media in Economic Development" (Djankov, Islam & McLeish 2002; Roy 2011)[18] to use the even more explicit term of a report by the World Bank which became a landmark.

Documentation of the impact of media projects remains to this day the blind spot

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[17] Only France had a "potential" of 92 countries in the same period of time.
[18] The World Development Report 2002, "Building Institutions for Markets" (rep. no. 22825), devoted a chapter to the role of the media in development.

of quality initiatives in the sector. The largest quantitative study to date is currently being conducted in Burkina Faso: A 60-second advertisement is being broadcast for 30 months, 10 times a day on seven radio stations in order to reduce under-five mortality. Development Media International (DMI) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine are running this five-year cluster-randomised controlled trial. Mid-term results[19] appear to demonstrate that mass media can cause behaviour change but the results raise more questions than answers. Full results with an endline mortality survey of 100,000 children are expected by late-2015.

Yet, despite all this, the learning process has not been fully realized for one main reason: the lack of a critical analysis regarding the indicators that measure how well operators meet their targets.

Paradoxically, even though we are witnessing a very rich – and fruitful – competitor analysis, what the industry produces in terms of M&E reports are rarely made available to a wide public. The growing use of e-governance, however, has helped to publicize more and more documents, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world and in Scandinavia where most reviews are available online and methodologies can thus be discussed on a scientific basis.

But if debates exist to a certain extent, not all the lessons of past experiments have been learnt. A 2010 study by the Catholic Media Council (Cameco) on German media development highlighted, for instance, that "German Media Development Cooperation appears to be inadequate at strengthening a supportive legal and regulatory environment for the media" and it was "also not strong in supporting the economic sustainability of media in developing and transitional countries" (Dietz 2010).

The study also revealed that questionnaire based quantitative methods still prevail in evaluation practice due to "the lack of readily available impact-oriented methods and approaches in media development cooperation" (Ibid.). Two sessions by *Forum Medien und Entwicklung* (Media and Development), a network of media assistance actors from the German-speaking countries, moreover, selected "Measuring Change" as their main theme in 2007 and 2009 (Jannusch 2007).

This concern with progress can still be seen in today's literature on the subject as Tara Susman-Peña explains :

> "Trying to identify blind spots in media development means that certain critically important but already well-considered 'lessons learned' will be emphasized less, for example: donors' weak coordination on media interventions, the sustainability of media outlets as businesses, the over-abundance of ineffective 'parachute' journalism training, and the importance of strengthening the enabling environment for media. Even though many of these lessons have clearly not sunk in, a broad, high quality discussion of these topics already exists" (Susman-Peña 2012).

In one of its latest communications on the subject, the European Commission was

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[19] "Burkina Faso randomised controlled trial: Midline Results' executive summary", Development Media International, London 2014, http://bit.ly/V0ZTG8.

forced to remind people of evaluation's inherent critical role:

> "Some evaluations don't focus enough on the problems and difficulties encountered – which, in a way, are more important than promoting what is working. The main focus of an evaluation should be a critical drive to improve performance, which means looking both for the bad practices and the good, providing robust and objective evidence to feed decisions as to whether EU action should continue as-is, be changed or even stop."[20]

Operators and donors continue to fear what they think are the negative effects of evaluation, despite various attempts to establish dialogue. Andy Mosher concludes:

> "The success of some new initiatives, however, depends in large measure on the willingness of media assistance organizations to share information about M&E. The past 20 years offer little evidence of sharing among groups that have the same goals and methods but often compete for the same grants." (Mosher 2009)

"Coopetition" – the neologism that describes a cooperative competition or a competitive cooperation – remains a key feature of the sector.
The second obstacle to a truly dynamic use for evaluation reports is a misunderstanding of some of the basic indicators themselves. For Jonathan Stray,

> "metrics are powerful tools for insight and decision-making. But they are not ends in themselves because they will never exactly represent what is important. That's why the first step in choosing metrics is to articulate what you want to measure, regardless of whether or not there's an easy way to measure it. Choosing metrics poorly, or misunderstanding their limitations, can make things worse. Metrics are just proxies for our real goals — sometimes quite poor proxies." (Stray 2012)

Defined objectives without baseline studies, focus groups conducted on non-constant measures (i.e. reading groups subjected to a range of different titles for example), 'most significant changes' which have been identified by the experts and do not come from the field, or statistics falling in the margin of error… There are many examples of severe biases that call into question the scientific validity of results (see Glover et al. 2012).
Change management fails above all because of this methodological bias. For Eric Glover (2012), evaluator and consultant in strategy and change,

> "very often evaluation only reveals what the stakeholders already know and do not want to hear. Figures from monitoring systems only create the illusion of objectification and as few evaluators are worried about measure theory, they quickly end up talking in a vacuum without any point."

Many experts therefore call for an assessment which, although based on a rigorous methodology and diligent judgments, would assert individual responsibility or, even more daringly, subjectivity, on the part of the assessor. The important thing is not to generate more hard data which could open the way for criticism based on

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[20] "Strengthening the foundations of Smart Regulation – improving evaluation", COM (2013) 686.

the tyranny of evaluation. It is a question of choosing meaningful indicators. For Glover (2012),

> "in the standard SMART (Specific-Measurable-Assignable-Relevant-Time-bound[21]), people focus more on the R or on the T, whereas they should also pay attention to A: an indicator should be the product of dialogue between stakeholders so that everyone knows what is going to be measured and why, which may require intercultural mediation, to be sure everything is well shared: what is for example, a "good" journalist? Does everyone agree on the criteria that need to be established to recognize a "good" journalist?"

This factor has moreover become so important that some authors (see Dwyer & Hopwood 2010) nowadays refer to SMARTTA indicators, which stands for Trackable and Agreed.

The change that recipients consider the most significant or the "success stories" are qualitative indicators that assume a degree of subjectivity. Donors enjoy them: the emotional connection – just like the duration of the working relationship with the implementer or the importance of the donor's positive perception – sometimes creates a chain of compassion, which is enough in itself to renew donor support without the need for a study on performance and impact.

Not all evaluations are fruitful and following up recommendations is an essential stage before they can be put in place. But although a survey's findings may be shared by all the stakeholders, the approval of recommendations which lead to actual adjustments often remains the prerogative of top management only.

Although it is common in the corporate world, the practice of relying on external consultants to make recommendations operational remains rare in the field of media development. Few operators have been able to manage what Canadians call "project lookouts" who work alongside project managers, in a non-hierarchical relationship, to validate monitoring tools, identify critical points and recommend readjustments.

## Conclusion

Consolidating the sector is a fledgling operation. It would be highly optimistic to think that all operators have completed each stage of the "5 stage grief" model. However, the evaluation system has been a powerful catalyst in driving the transition from media support to media development and in making the latter more independent from broadcasters and donors. Professionalization is informed by a model which ideally inverts the traditional hierarchical structure: The evaluative judgment is meant to be informed by evidence from the field and the performance of a project is judged only according to the final recipients and a theory of change.

Operators will become more empowered if they build upon development research: not the quantity of activity, but the quality of outputs, outcomes and the impact of

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[21] Nevertheless the latter three criteria have various alternative definitions.

the action, which implies reflection and a documented choice of performance indicators.

Finally, the approach can be considered virtuous if and only if the lessons learned, relevant and substantiated, whether positive or negative, encourage the structures as well as the donors who fund them, to define their strategy as well as the operationalization of their actions. As Martin Scott summarizes:

> "if media development interventions are to be made as effective as possible, it is important to fully understand the many choices that need to be made, as well as the implications of each decision" (Scott 2014).

To put it another way, this also stresses the need for humanizing data.

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