Media Literacy: Citizen Journalists

By Susan D. Moeller

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This report is the second in a series of three on the status of U.S. and international understanding of and funding for media literacy.

CIMA Center for International Media Assistance

NED National Endowment for Democracy
Supporting freedom around the world

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

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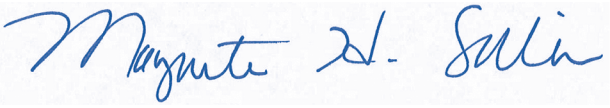
Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) commissioned this study of media literacy programs for citizen journalists as part of a three-part series looking at media literacy trends around the world. The purpose of this report is to examine projects focused on training and educating citizen journalists about the importance of media to a democracy while giving them essential journalistic skills. The other reports in this series—*Media Literacy: Understanding the News* and *Media Literacy: Empowering Youth Worldwide*—are available for download at http://cima.ned.org/reports.

CIMA is grateful to Susan Moeller, an expert on media literacy with many years of experience in this field, for her research and insights on this topic. Any opinions or views expressed within this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent CIMA or NED.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.



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Executive Summary

Citizen journalists may turn out to be the 21st century's most potent force for creating, supporting, and building open and democratic societies. In environments where poor infrastructure, minimal access to technology, and small-scale economies impede the creation or sustainability of mainstream independent media, and in countries where repressive governments limit the ability of professional journalists to operate freely, citizen journalists are filling the gaps. Yet citizen journalists often have no formal journalism training nor—perhaps more critically—any training in the essential roles independent media play in ensuring accountable and transparent government.

This report investigates how the U.S. government, international institutions, and private foundations are trying to teach this new cohort of semi-journalists to be media literate.

Hitherto, the bulk of funding for media literacy education has been directed at two populations: children and youth (the focus of the third report in this series) and the general adult public (the focus of the first). Only recently have U.S. and international donors working on media development and communication for development projects begun to identify media literacy training as a priority for other communities—particularly journalists and policy makers. Citizen journalists are in particular need of such training. They are on the front lines of the digital media transformation of the news business, but their knowledge of journalism standards and values as well as of the rights and responsibilities of the news media is usually minimal.

This report outlines the key arguments for funding media literacy training for citizen journalists.

In places where economic and political challenges make it problematic for traditional media to operate, citizen journalism allows a community not only to take control of—and responsibility for—the media coverage of citizens' hometowns but also to learn about and get engaged with the issues and events that matter to them. Funding media literacy programs for citizen journalists serves to:

- **Educate about standards, ethics, and the role of media:** The programs can give citizen journalists not just training in journalism skills, but also can help them learn best practices in standards and ethics. They can learn how to understand the needs and demands of their audiences; manage and evaluate information; and understand the roles independent media play in ensuring accountable and transparent governments.

- **Educate about technology and responsible interactivity:** That training can educate citizen journalists about how to use new technologies. Because the technologies that citizen journalists use are typically interactive, media literacy projects can not only train them to use their power responsibly, but also can educate the community about what ethical standards should be expected from news and information providers. Media literacy

training of citizen journalists can be one way to curtail community radio and blogs from becoming conduits for hate speech in conflict-prone communities.

- **Create appetites for accurate and fair news:** The training can help bloggers and others learn how to be credible information and news providers. Setting and adhering to standards can help educate a sometimes unsophisticated public to press for trustworthy, reliable, and fair information from news outlets.

- **Encourage local and global networks:** The programs can encourage citizen journalists to create networks within and outside their own regions, as well as to bring outside information into communities and expand the ways that outsiders can learn about closed or restricted environments.

- **Create alternative voices to traditional media:** Both geographically based and distance-learning modules can foster the creation of new cadres of citizen journalists by giving members of the public who already own the technological tools the skills and the confidence to let their voices be heard.

- **Train bloggers to become enterprise and investigative reporters:** In countries where the government exercises control over mainstream media, bloggers can provide not only alternative voices but also enterprise and investigative reporting not possible in the regular press.

Government agencies, private foundations, and international organizations should:

- **Direct more funding to trainings** of citizen journalists, especially in media literacy.

- **Find better ways to share best practices** from projects operating in repressive environments with program implementers working in transitional and crisis-ridden environments. Currently the majority of funding for citizen journalists is going to those in closed societies. Given the growing importance of citizen journalism in keeping critical communication channels open and populations accurately informed, training needs to be expanded to citizens in countries in transition and crisis.

Methodology

As is the case with the other reports in this series, this study is almost entirely narrative in nature: The information and data have been gathered from dozens of interviews, many internal documents, and multiple reports published by the organizations referenced. Some media development practitioners interviewed for this study requested anonymity in order to speak candidly, given internal organizational restrictions on the release of information on projects.

What is 'Citizen Journalism'?

Today, citizens are both consumers and producers of news. The 24/7 appetite for information is fed in part by cellphone photos, YouTube videos, and micro-messaging tweets of everyday citizens. Many citizens can afford and use the same tools as professional journalists. Yet, few have the training or are media literate enough to be fair and accurate purveyors of news.

The problem starts with the term "citizen journalism." Some take it to mean news and information not originating from a legacy or traditional media organization, such as a newspaper, radio, or television network. Others consider it to be an interactivity toolkit for news outlets of all kinds to "harness the power of an audience.[1] Still others understand the term to refer to journalism conducted by individuals with an activist agenda.

Media literacy and its correlating "citizen journalism" are inexact terms that do not have agreed-upon definitions.

How should it be understood?

"Citizen journalism" is not an exact term. More people than "citizens" of a given nation may be involved, and what occurs is not always considered "journalism." As a result, multiple terms attempt to describe the same phenomenon. "Citizen journalism" has become the most common, but other phrases in use include "community media," "participatory journalism," "civic journalism," and "user generated content." Additional terms, such as "new media," "digital journalism," "crowdsourcing," and "social networking" are sometimes used interchangeably with "citizen journalism," although they may refer primarily to the technology underlying the means of delivery.

The appeal of citizen journalism lies in its expansive "journalist" capacities as well as its potential participatory base of social capital: its melding of information flows, bonding and bridging of networks, and possibilities for collective action. As the Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government has noted, social capital brings "a wide variety of quite specific benefits … trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation." In short, social capital "creates value for the people who are connected" and for "bystanders as well"[4]— the kind of value that many find lacking in mainstream media outlets controlled by political or corporate elites.

But in development, a more apt definition for citizen journalism might be:

The act by an individual or group, on any media platform (print, radio, television, online, mobile phones, etc.) and using any technology (text, blogs, SMS messaging, photography, audio, podcasting, video, etc.) of reporting, analyzing or disseminating news and information.

The ideal of citizen journalism is to build more engaged and robust communities by providing accurate news and information they need while encouraging their participation in the system. Citizen journalists help their communities hear a plurality of independent voices and empower members of those communities to monitor, evaluate and contribute to political, economic, and social life.

What is 'Citizen Journalism'?

According to CitizenJournalismAfrica.org, a site jointly sponsored by a range of civil society organizations in Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe:

> "Citizen Journalism is community news and information shared online and/or in print. The content is generated by users and readers. It can be text/blogs, digital storytelling, images, audio file, podcasting, or video. Feedback and discussion on issues raised is received in the same way.
>
> "Citizen journalism [allows individuals to] write and or comment on issues they feel are left out of the mainstream media. Blogging has become a powerful and non-expensive tool for non-journalists to share their stories and views.
>
> "A number of news Web sites are encouraging people to comment on issues raised in their stories. Many people have chosen to use blogging as a way of expressing themselves. This also allows them to raise the issues without the fear of being 'cut short' by the editor. Some journalists have their own blog spots where they receive feedback on their articles. More and more civil society organisations are using this form of communication to talk to their communities. They also raise areas of concern and encourage participation."[2]

According to We Media, a Web site hosted by The Media Center at The American Press Institute, "participatory journalism"—its term for "citizen journalism"—means:

> "As new forms of participation have emerged through new technologies, many have struggled to name them. As a default, the name is usually borrowed from the enabling technology (i.e., weblogging, forums, and usenets).
>
> The term we use—participatory journalism—is meant to describe the content and the intent of online communication that often occurs in collaborative and social media. Here's the working definition that we have adopted: The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging, and relevant information that a democracy requires.
>
> "Participatory journalism is a bottom-up, emergent phenomenon in which there is little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic workflow dictating the decisions of a staff. Instead, it is the result of many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web's social network."[3]

Why Citizen Journalists Need Media Literacy Training

In communications, the 21st century has been defined to date by dramatic changes in how news and information are delivered. In the United States there have been widespread failures of the business models underlying traditional print journalism, seismic demographic shifts among news consumers, and growing concerns about the credibility of news as its form and delivery evolve.

Public and private U.S. donors have tried to be responsive to the changing media environment.

U.S. government funding for development is an integral part of any administration's overall foreign policy mission. In recent years, therefore, assistance for independent media has been understood to be a key part of American democracy programs reinvigorated by the global fight against terrorism. Across the developing world especially, both public and private donors have underwritten journalism skills training and work aimed at improving financial sustainability and legal enabling environments for news delivery. These have been viewed as important components of international development funding for such priorities as poverty alleviation, healthcare delivery, food relief, commodities management, election monitoring, and disaster assistance.

"Still, today the classic media development program, if it's not law or infrastructure, such as creating new TV or radio stations … tends to be journalism training," noted Bettina Peters, director of the Global Forum for Media Development.[5]

Relatively little media development funding has directly targeted journalists outside the traditional media landscape, in part because economies of scale to reach citizen journalists—for such tasks as skills and business-management training—are difficult to achieve. It is also in part because citizen journalists are not clustered in a geographic location—a "Fleet Street"—making it more difficult to gather them together for a traditional training workshop.

Some of the most dynamic media opportunities in the developing world, however, are in citizen journalism. In environments where poor infrastructure, limited access to technology and small-scale economies impede the creation or sustainability of mainstream independent media, the opportunities offered by citizen journalism beckon. Citizen journalism is not only growing exponentially, but outlets that use the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are often able to circumvent traditional economic, legal, and regulatory impediments to media independence and sustainability.

Traditional journalists need media literacy training

"How do we give [citizen] journalists the right skills, and how do we get the public to press for really trustworthy, reliable information around the world?" asks

Case Study: A Successful U.S. Case Serves as a Funding Model

The Deerfield, NH Forum: Citizen Journalism Fosters Involvement and Democracy

In places largely ignored by "traditional" media, citizen journalism allows residents not only to take control of—and responsibility for—the media coverage of their own hometowns but also to learn about and get engaged with the issues and events that matter to them.

That's what the citizen journalism outlet, The Forum, has come to mean to Deerfield, NH. Eric Newton, a vice president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, notes that the impetus for the news site began in 2005 when Maureen Mann, one of 4,000 residents in Deerfield, observed that "democracy in our town is in a bad way." Some local elected offices were going unfilled, and races for others were uncontested. With an initial grant of $17,000 over two years from the Knight Foundation via J-lab, then based at the University of Maryland, Mann created The Forum, which publishes stories written both in traditional journalistic style and via first-person accounts.

This approach to covering local news has encouraged new and diverse voices. Because writers are required to adhere to submission guidelines, the site maintains a level of credibility, and users gain an appreciation for traditional standards of journalism. "After a few years," Newton recalls, "the citizen journalism of The Forum was being tapped into by other news organizations." In 2008, the Web site saw on average more than 6,000 hits and 50,000 page views a month.

The citizen journalists at The Forum have succeeded on other levels as well. Not only are local residents running for offices, many races are contested. "'Democracy,'" observed Newton, "has restored itself."

Joyce Barnathan, president of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ).[6]

Five years ago, media development organizations saw their purview as limited to the traditional media sector. As Mark Whitehouse, director of media development at International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) noted, "Attention was focused on professionalizing the media, on sustaining journalism businesses, and on improving legal and regulatory environments." Training improves the quality and quantity of available news and information.[7]

New media has now joined the traditional training. There is a desperate need for "programs that we call Internet literacy for journalists," said Mark Koenig, senior media advisor at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—programs that train both traditional and citizen journalists to "go on the Internet, find sources of information, but also be skeptical about the credibility of the Internet sources."[8]

Such programs form part of an essential "media literacy approach to journalists themselves," as William Orme, formerly of

Case Study: Morocco

The Maghreb Citizen Journalism Workshop:
Teaching Bloggers and their Audiences the Importance of Trust

Bloggers can be essential independent voices, especially in regions of the world where traditional media are often limited by government censorship.

Increasingly the development community is looking to help bloggers reach larger audiences and adhere to professional journalism ethics and standards.

In 2008, with funding from the State Department, IREX led a Maghreb Citizen Journalism Workshop in Morocco, which provided bloggers with training to make them more effective citizen journalists.

Workshop topics included emerging technologies for citizen journalists and how bloggers working in repressive environments can protect themselves. The sessions, led by international and local trainers, also included practical skills, how to do investigative journalism, and how to use, but not abuse, the power of citizen journalism.

Besides training bloggers, a goal was to build networks of citizen journalists. "We wanted to link bloggers in very repressive environments, such as Tunisia, where often blogs are the best source of information, to bloggers in less repressive environments, such as Morocco," Whitehouse said.

A report[9] on the project published by IREX, which administers the project's sponsor, the Middle East and North Africa Media Development Initiatives Alliance (MENA MEDIA) program, emphasizes that "independent media offering professional and informative news are rare in the region," despite the growing presence of Arabic-language satellite television programming. As television programming is often heavily influenced by governments and elite sponsors, local issues that affect citizens' lives do not receive adequate or balanced coverage. "Independent media promises to counteract this situation…and [provide] factual information to citizens in the region," according to IREX.

the United Nations Development Program, has said. Taking as an example a Democratic Republic of the Congo journalist who is respected and hard-working, he said: "Let's assume your ethics are right, but you've been bombarded with whatever you've been listening to on the radio. How do you sort all this out in some kind of intelligent professional way, in a way that will help inform you and your news organization about standards and content?"[10]

"In transitional political environments, media literacy training can help sensitize reporters and editors to the need for helping their audiences better understand

how the news is gathered, how the news is presented, and whether or not their own news organizations check themselves for their bias and reporting and how they can be held accountable by their audiences," said George Papagiannis, a program specialist with UNESCO's Division of Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace.[11]

Media literacy training helps both traditional and citizen journalists understand not only how to use technologies but engage with their audiences. Papagiannis, in his previous role as an Internews vice president, organized a radio station on the Chad-Sudan border for Darfur refugees. "[Those] journalists go out often; they interview people. People hear their voice; they express themselves; they help to shape the stories the journalists are working on. Those voices go back into the stories that are broadcast and that journalist-interviewee relationship is complete. And when the reporters go back out in the field, they get feedback from the people who say: 'Gee, I really liked that story,' or 'Gee… I think you missed the point on that story.' That's in effect an important kind of media literacy training," Papagiannis said.

That is especially true in an era of leapfrogging technologies, where a society may see the proliferation of mobile phones before the development of a landline network. "Technology is empowering people and just like any tool, how are you going to use it and to what end? What benefit is it going to have? Those are media literacy questions," he added.

Citizen journalists need media literacy training

Citizen journalists have an even greater need than traditional journalists for media literacy. The new media platforms mean that not only the audience and traditional journalists need to be educated about what media can and should do. Citizen journalists need the same education.

Traditional and citizen journalists need to know how to manage the technology, understand the needs and demands of their audiences, and sort through the cacophony of information coming at them. Yet citizen journalists often have no formal journalistic training, nor do they typically have training in the essential roles independent media play in ensuring accountable and transparent government.

Previously, if journalism values were not learned in schools and universities, they were inculcated in newsrooms. Citizen journalists have not typically had that kind of teaching. Increasingly media development implementers are reaching out to both working journalists and aspiring journalists.

UNESCO, for example, collaborated with the Thomson Foundation and Commonwealth Broadcasting Association on a handbook that not only tells citizen journalists "where and how to get the information one needs, but also how to evaluate and verify the information gathered."

ICFJ has created an online blogger's guide that focuses on helping citizen journalists improve the quality of the information that they're putting online. "We've done online courses on how to create news Web sites," for example, Barnathan said. "And we work with them to get them the tools that they need to do a responsible job of putting information up online."[12]

Case Study: Kenya

Citizens Mapping the News

Citizens often lead the way in starting their own projects to gather information that they consider important, without specific training in journalism. The violence that followed the late December 2007 elections in Kenya prompted a group of Kenyan citizen journalists to launch the Ushahidi Web site to track what was happening in the country. The local population desperately needed to know what parts of cities and surrounding areas were safe for travel, but police accounts and traditional media did not appear to be reporting all that was happening in a timely manner.

Ushahidi is a "mash-up"—a joining together of two or more technologies: in this case Google maps and text messaging. Locals can use e-mail, the Web site, or their mobile phones to send messages to the site reporting a murder, a rape, a protest march or various other notable events in their communities, and the site's mapping engine adds that incident to the map. Visitors to the site can then navigate through a detailed, street-by-street map to see where crimes have been committed, where there is unrest or, alternately, where humanitarian aid is being delivered.

Volunteers work on an open-source engine to expand the Kenyan tools worldwide for anyone to map reports of crises, such as violence, or non-violence using mobile phones, e-mail, or the Web. The developers, representing Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, the Netherlands, and the United States, say the engine is built "on the premise that gathering crisis information from the general public provides new insights into events happening in near real-time."

Allowing citizens to contribute information using mobile phones is especially important on a continent where people are about five times as likely to have a cellphone as an Internet connection. Not only does citizen reporting empower individuals to share their experiences for the benefit of others, but it can act as a check on reporting—or the lack thereof—of the traditional news media.[13]

Barnathan said the definitions of journalism and journalists are changing, "so the level and the type of training that we do is changing with it," Barnathan said. "The tools to produce information are now available to everybody. …What happens if they post pictures they haven't verified as the real thing? Do they understand the repercussions of that? What does it mean to check the facts and your quotes? It's one thing to put your opinion out there without having done all the checking that journalists traditionally do, but what about other news and information?"

Professional, community, and citizen journalists

Five years ago there were two groups of journalists—professional and community

journalists—that received the bulk of development attention. Today, citizen journalists, while still receiving a relatively smaller slice of the media development pie, are a growing focus for training. Distinctions among professional, community, and citizen journalists are increasingly being blurred as they overlap, allowing training to be delivered in similar ways to all three groups.

"Community media—which often refers to environments where there are many little radio stations in a rural area—are almost exclusively run by citizens who are not professional journalists," Peters of the GFMD said. There is a need for more media literacy training "because you're involving people who are not professionals in journalism. They need to get a better understanding of how journalism works," she said.

USAID's Koenig confirmed media literacy "on an extremely wide scale" is needed in community journalism. "If you're going into a rural community and you're helping that rural community reinforce or start up a new community radio station, you have to [teach] the people how to use the equipment, help them understand what is radio, what are the ethics of radio reporting," he said. "Because community radio is so interactive—people call in on their cellphones or just walk in—and because often illiterate populations are being introduced to their very first mass media, the teaching of media literacy/radio literacy is so intrinsic [in assistance to] community media."

New media are changing how citizens can connect to each other and to their governments and other institutions. "Citizens themselves have the tools to communicate, to become reporters-broadcasters-editorialists," IREX's Whitehouse said. The access to the new digital tools is tremendously empowering: Citizens can use them to produce their own news reports as well as to retrieve information they can act upon in ways that they think will improve their lives.

But the challenge is that "we can't just be teaching them simply about state of the art radio technology that existed before mobile technology. We have to pursue two tracks at once," he said. Take the example of an IREX project in Kosovo with local Serb radio stations: "How do we help them engage with their communities and start to think about how do they use mobile technology? How can they integrate SMS messaging into their radio station? … And what is the benefit to the citizen—and what is the citizen doing with that? That's all media literacy training," Whitehouse said.

"People are coordinated by mobile phones as never before," noted Troy Etulain, a senior civil society expert at USAID. "What we care about in our office is actual democratic change, actual democratic engagement in societies. Why do we focus on mobile phones? Because more than half the globe has access to mobile phones … and in two years, there will be one billion more, say 60 percent of the world will be reachable by mobile phones. … Citizen media [via mobile phones] create new connections and new layers of social connections."[14]

In Zimbabwe, Etulain said, the Southern African Development Community regional organization got the government to agree to post polling results outside each polling

Case Study: Malaysia

Malaysiakini.com: Using Journalists, Bloggers, and Citizens to Teach Tolerance

Malaysia is a diverse nation, a meeting point of various ethnicities, religions, and languages. This diversity can create unique challenges for both citizens and journalists. The issue for journalists may not be a lack of coverage of government, but, as was demonstrated in parliamentary elections in 2008, finding a way to use the media to temper anger and promote tolerance and respect.

The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) hopes to do just that by working with Malaysiakini.com to train up to 150 bloggers, citizen journalists, and professional journalists to improve understanding of various issues such as news dissemination about human rights and religious and ethnic issues, in order to "fill a void in Malaysian journalism at a significant time in the country's history," said Patrick Butler, a vice president of ICFJ.[15]

Malaysiakini.com is Malaysia's most popular Web site, offering news and other content in Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English. ICFJ's program hopes to bolster the site, which already receives more than 1.6 million unique visitors each month, by testing a new wireless protocol that would increase the reach of wireless connectivity as well as peer-to-peer distribution, allowing users to send video and audio content directly to one another via the Internet and cellular phones.

ICFJ's project offers practical training to journalists and bloggers in three locations, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Sarawak, focused on reporting skills and production of video news content on human rights and issues of ethnic and religious tolerance. Participants to date have produced 135 online videos that have attracted 500,000 viewers. ICFJ is also offering fellowships at Malaysiakini for the most qualified trainees.

The program, funded by the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, has a budget of $558,000. Its work will continue after the end of ICFJ's 18-month involvement, through the creation of a network of citizen journalists who will continue to work with Malaysiakini and a newly created section of the Web site devoted to citizen videos. Premesh Chandran, Malaysiakini's CEO, has said that the site can continue support for fellows, through talks, forums, and further training in independent reporting.

The project is expected to have an impact beyond Malaysia, as ICFJ and Malaysiakini plan to share the pilot test results with other development, media, and civil society groups via ICFJ's International Journalists' Network (IJNet), a portal for journalists and the media development community.

station. "What advocates did in Zimbabwe was go around with their mobile phones and take photos of all the elections results and they SMSed them into Harare. They counted those results faster than the government did. And because they had proof of the local results, the government wasn't able to falsify the elections, and communities were able to say who had won all these local elections."

It is these kinds of experiences that are weaving "citizen media into countries' democratic fabric," noted James Deane, head of policy development at the BBC World Service Trust. As a consequence, consideration of citizen media is "impinging on mainstream political analysis within donor agencies."[16]

Those in media development need to consider how to build the relationship between citizen journalists and their audiences, especially in programs targeted at teaching citizen journalists investigative skills. These must "explicitly anticipate" media literacy issues, USAID's Koenig noted, "because what you're trying to do is enhance the Fourth Estate function of the media. A lot of times when you think of investigative journalists, [the training is geared towards having them] root out corruption in government." The audience appreciating the results will make those investigations powerful. "If the journalists are doing a good job and people are aware of that, the government officials presumably are more careful about engaging in corruption or are at least reducing their corrupt activities," Koenig said.

Finding citizen journalists to support

In many parts of the world, citizen journalism is an avocation or a hobby not a formal profession. How do trainers identify citizen journalists?

There is no difficulty tracking citizen journalists and bloggers one by one online. But finding them in sufficient numbers to constitute a critical mass for training is a problem.

Two approaches have emerged:

1. **Funders and implementers are letting citizen journalists choose how to approach trainings.** Implementers are holding both face-to-face sessions and distance-learning classes, offering online guides and other downloadable training materials that allow journalists and would-be journalists to be taught in regional locations or to teach themselves in their home environments. Especially when there are security or privacy concerns, online delivery of training can be the only way to reach interested populations—for example, if the targeted groups are working outside the strictures of the state or if those who want to become citizen journalists or bloggers are women and unable to travel outside their homes.

2. **Citizen journalists are being created.** ICFJ struggled with a common problem: African policy makers would not address issues of poverty "unless they surface

Case Study: Africa

Cellphones Enhance Newsgathering in Africa

Sometimes the most innovative use of both technology and techniques for newsgathering occurs in regions of the world that are seemingly the most resource-poor. Consider Africa: "They're using crowdsourcing and citizen journalism in ways we haven't even thought about here [in the United States]—because we don't have to," said Patrick Butler, a vice president of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ).

Despite low access to computer technology and an average Internet penetration of 5.6 percent at the end of 2008, Africa has more than 300 million mobile phones—about one phone for every three people. Cellphones and call minutes are relatively inexpensive, compared with the cost of Internet connections, which for many in Africa can be prohibitive.

ICFJ also posts Knight International Journalism Fellows in four African countries—Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, and Tanzania—to support the training and mentoring of journalists from the capitals. The fellows are funded by a special grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation of about $134,000.

Media literacy lessons are integral to the project at all levels. ICFJ's training is prioritizing the importance of accurate, independent information gathering and the responsibility that citizens can take to help meet economic development and good governance goals. The one-year project will fund in-depth reporting trips for the fellows outside the capitals, in part to establish mobile-phone-based networks of citizen-journalist stringers to report on such critical development concerns as whether seeds promised by the government have arrived; whether a water safety program is working; or whether drought conditions need to be addressed.

The Knight fellows will also assist urban-based correspondents in recruiting the citizen stringers who will be selected from among community leaders—ensuring that the citizen journalists have the enthusiasm and integrity to contribute. The program aims to foster responsible and reliable reporting from citizens who understand the value of checking their facts and using multiple sources.

In the past, it has been both too expensive and too time-consuming for urban-based radio and print news outlets to get such questions answered from remote locations. But mobile telephony and the cultivation of citizen journalists mean that news outlets will be better able to monitor development needs and the ways in which they are being met by governments and NGOs. To be as cost-effective as possible, the program will seek partnerships with organizations that already have networks of cellphone-enabled citizens, such as the Grameen Foundation in rural Uganda.

in the mass media, and they're on everybody's agenda. So how do we get these issues … covered better?" Barnathan asked. ICFJ's helped create citizen journalists in the countryside. "We're actually now going to work with people in the countryside to be purveyors of information to the mass media and the city. We're identifying people to work with us to be eyes and ears—purveyors of certain types of factual information that they can send as journalists [through] cellphone technology to the city." Because those citizen reporters may not be professional, part of the training is to explain reliability, fact-checking, and learning the standards and values of professional journalists, she said.

The greatest needs are in repressive environments

The donor community is struggling to understand how best to fund media development in transitional environments—countries with gradations of repressive governments—where traditional media dominate and new technology is not widespread.

Currently media development programs that specifically target citizen journalists most often focus on those who work within closed or repressive environments or who have been exiled from such locations. "The projects that are happening in digital media with professional journalists and directly with citizen media are often happening in the countries with the [strongest] repression of traditional media," said one implementer. "But we don't read about them because there are security issues from local partners—people have agreements with their funders not to publicize [the projects]."

A close survey of the field supports what another implementer has observed: "The only places where traditional media development people are working with participatory citizen media are the places where there's either literally nobody else to work with or where even the people they traditionally work with have been forced by events to switch to Internet delivery"—or a media outlet such as SW Radio in Zimbabwe, which, because of government repression, turned to delivering news headlines via text messages on cellphones.

In closed or repressive societies, donors are quietly supporting distance-learning classes for journalists interested in business reporting, which is often one of the few journalistic spaces open in such environments. Within such societies, funders also are carefully supporting training efforts specifically aimed at bloggers and citizen journalists who are serving as alternative voices to government-controlled media.

As one implementer noted, such bloggers and citizen journalists "understand the limitations of what the official press can do, and then they put themselves often times at risk for publishing things that other people won't publish. There's an awareness by them of what news is out there and why it's deficient because often times that's why they're in the game." But some of those alternative journalists are coming to understand that "it helps to have really fact-checked and balanced

Case Study: Russia

Creating Citizen Journalists from Bloggers

When governments exercise control over mainstream media, bloggers can represent a real outlet for free speech and enterprise reporting. In Russia, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) is working with the Glasnost Defense Foundation (GDF) of Moscow to develop the abilities of Russian bloggers, improving their professional skills and expanding a strong citizen media presence in the country.

Earlier this year in Moscow, Yekaterinburg, and Vladivostok, three 14-week workshops each gave 12 participants reporting and writing training and technical assistance in creating blogs and Web sites. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor provided approximately $230,000 to support ICFJ's training of the three dozen citizen journalists.

The program in Russia was designed to recruit participants from among existing bloggers as well as to identify and train newcomers. The program hopes to create a more robust community of citizen journalists "to create local community forums for news, eyewitness accounts, audio and video of breaking events or public meetings, and as a place for free and open discussion among citizens."[17]

information"—that makes "them stronger in their ability to survive and weather a lot of storms." That is where the external funders and implementers can add value: working with local partners to train the journalists on the ground not just in journalism skills and technical know-how, but on media literacy issues.

Media literacy projects targeted at citizen journalists are often a way to support some open space for information in controlled environments and a way to support freedom of expression in countries where there is no way to train journalists who work within the restrictions of the state or party apparatus. It is harder for repressive governments to shut down bloggers or groups communicating on Internet social networking sites than for them to close down a newspaper office or a television station. "Because of the comparative safety of some of the citizen media tools," Etulain said, citizen journalists "can do a lot to talk about issues which a newspaper could never cover, for instance. The physical characteristics of a Web site or an SMS distribution news platform—run by citizen journalists—can do a lot to combat corruption through exposure."

Media literacy training also helps citizen journalists understand the need to be responsible communicators. "It's not like they post an article and things change on the ground," he said, but the citizen journalists become a critical "part of the process of letting the public know that this is the situation. Then the public has something to act on."

Teaching what makes news credible is an essential component of training independent

Case Study: Zimbabwe

Freedom Fone Links Citizens with Critical Information

When government censorship limits access to even the most basic information, sometimes the simplest of technologies can make all the difference. Digital media can give citizens a basic right of access to information.

Freedom Fone, an initiative launched by Bev Clark, co-founder of Kubatana.net, allows users in Zimbabwe to call in to a pre-recorded service to get news and information and to ask questions. By dialing specific numbers after prompts, users can navigate to content produced by independent radio stations and to reports created only for the service. Users can also contribute questions, content, and feedback by leaving voice messages via an Interactive Voice Response menu.[18]

"We hope to impact the community in terms of news and information by bringing authentic community voices directly to mobile phones," Clark said. Clark received a grant of $876,000 from the Knight Foundation after winning its Knight News Challenge with her Freedom Fone proposal.

The service targets Harare, Zimbabwe where Kubatana.net is based, and where government suppression of news and information is the norm. On its Web site, Kubatana.net describes its mission as "harnessing the democratic potential of e-mail and the Internet in Zimbabwe." In many ways, the Freedom Fone project mimics the ideals behind the Kubatana network: "Being involved lessens one's feeling of despair while helping us to keep inspired." Freedom Fone is, in effect, a powerful digital media literacy tool: at once empowering citizens with the news and information that they need to make critical decisions and giving them an appreciation for the integrity and authority of free, independent, and responsible media.

and award-winning journalists. In 2007, ICFJ spotlighted the work of one intrepid blogger by awarding him one of its Knight International Journalism Awards. "Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas was phenomenal," Barnathan recalled. "He was providing independent information that nobody else dared touch, and he was setting the agenda for a lot of issues on police brutality and other things [that the public could only learn of via] his blog."

ICFJ's relationship with Abbas did not end there. "He said 'Give me more skills,' [so] we are trying to provide those." Bloggers are aware "that certain tools have a certain credibility and legitimacy," she said. "That doesn't mean they can't be shut down, but at least when people go to the site [they realize] it's not partisan hackery."

The challenges of working with citizen journalists in repressive environments

Funders and implementers talk about five key concerns in delivering skills and media

Case Study: Democratic Republic of the Congo

An Award-winning Site with a Surprisingly Low Budget

Beginning in 2005, Cédric Kalonji, a journalist at Radio Okapi in Kinshasa, DRC, decided to moonlight as a blogger. "My desire to share experiences of my daily life was driven by a deep need to express myself freely," said Kalonji. "Thanks to my blog, I had the opportunity to develop a media of my own, and to talk about subjects that matter to me, without being censored … which is a luxury that people in most Africans countries don't have."

In 2007, Kalonji won Deutsche Welle's prestigious BOB award for the world's best Francophone blog, and he took a scholarship to the Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille (Journalism College of Lille). Through the "Ba Leki" (Little Brothers/Sisters) project, Kalonji now oversees eight young Congolese journalists who report for www.congoblog.net and receive a monthly stipend through a $15,000/year budget underwritten by Lille, the British Department for International Development, and the Foundation for International Cooperation. In a country where freedom of opinion and freedom of the press are suppressed, these eight citizen journalists use nom-de-plumes to report on what they see in the streets.

"Blogs in Africa can build a bridge between Africa and other continents, and hence enable the information from the field to be disseminated," Kalonji said. "Blogs give a voice to the voiceless." Kalonji is bringing journalism skills and the media literacy lessons he learned back to the DRC, setting the next generation on a path that will help make citizen journalism in the DRC more credible and more powerful.

literacy training to journalists, citizen journalists, and bloggers in the most closed societies:

1. **Political vulnerabilities**
   Training citizen journalists is not for the faint of heart. Reaching citizen journalists demands significant strategic thinking.

2. **Difficulties in coordinating activities among groups of funders and implementers**
   Because those who are working in closed societies and repressive environments do not talk about their projects, there's rarely significant sharing of information. As a result, coordination of funding and training activities can be severely hampered.

3. **Inability to extrapolate across situations**
   The effective interventions that have used mobile phones, the Internet, or another combination of new media tools are often particular to specific situations and therefore hard to replicate in other environments. A State Department official cautions against extrapolating across even single regions. What is applicable and successful in one country may not work even in the country next door.

4. **Risks that working with citizen journalists will expose those individuals to danger**
   "It's a dangerous business out there," observed one implementer. "I think a lot of these people are aware of the deficiencies in the mass media. They feel they have something to say that other people are not saying." Sometimes the consequences are assassination, kidnapping, prison, or exile.

5. **Danger that working to expand independent news will cause an authoritarian government to close off avenues of information**
   "Sometimes the most effective interventions are their own worst enemy," Etulain said. "We come up with a new idea or a new tool and then we have a government which has figured out how to thwart that. We have to understand that governments are using these tools, too. … Governments share information. They share tools of repression."

Recommendations

Citizen journalists constitute a new generation of participants in today's information society—but a generation not schooled in journalism. In addition to skills, they need media literacy training. They need to be taught to practice the highest journalism standards and values; to understand the roles and the responsibilities of media in civil society; and to recognize how they can best contribute to a fair, open, and pluralistic exchange of news and information.

This report seconds the recommendations for more effective implementation of media literacy programs in the first report in this series, *Media Literacy: Understanding the News*, and adds the following recommendations.

Recommendations for media development projects aimed at citizen journalists:

- **Increase funding to allow implementers to train citizen journalists, especially in media literacy.**

  The existing media development community of funders and implementers grew up in another era. Its impetus was to support—and at times to even create—quality local media that would in turn take on the role of educating their communities to value a free, fair, and open society.

  Today, funders and traditional media development organizations are still struggling to work within local environments, but they now have the additional challenge of assisting media outlets to understand how digital technology has changed news.

  Information can now come from distant places as well as from those next door. More than skills and management training of journalists in mainstream news outlets is needed. The media development sector must train a different cohort of news providers, who have become part of the information web, in the standards and values of the profession that the earlier generation of journalists learned in the classroom or newsrooms.

  Media development implementers, said Persephone Miel, author and the series editor of the Berkman Center's "Media Re:Public," are committed to "serving the mass public, but they don't have a way to work with the mass public, which is also part of why they're so slow on the uptake with participatory media. They just don't have the capacity for working with participatory media."

- **Expand the media literacy training of citizen journalists and share best practices.**

  Donors already are funding training projects aimed at citizen journalists working in countries mired in war, in post-conflict nations, in regions struggling with the aftermath of

natural and man-made disasters. The reasons to teach those journalists media literacy is well understood by implementers. It is self-evident that in those situations both the citizen journalists and their multiple audiences need to learn to value the dissemination of fair and accurate information by as diverse a set of voices as possible—and need to embrace a responsible role for themselves.

The best practices of media literacy training in closed societies need to be shared with those in other, less dire environments. Citizen journalists working in countries contiguous to those in crises; citizen journalists working in countries making some measured progress towards creating more civil societies; and citizen journalists working in countries with a working government but a high rate of violent, organized crime, all need media literacy training as well.

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