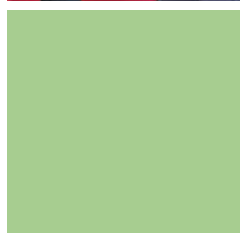
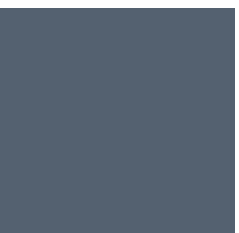


Media in Latin America: A Path Forward

BY DON PODESTA

January 2016





ABOUT CIMA

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world. The center provides information, builds networks, conducts research, and highlights the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies. 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.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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Contents

Introduction... 1
A New Approach... 2
The Search for a Strategy... 7

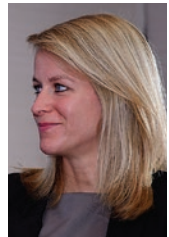
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Don Podesta is the manager and editor at the Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy. Previously he was an assistant managing editor at the Washington Post, where he also served as the paper's news editor and deputy foreign editor. From 1992 to 1994, he was the Post's correspondent in South America, based in Buenos Aires. Before joining the Post, he worked as an editor or reporter for the Washington Star, the Minneapolis Star, the Miami Herald and the Arizona Republic. Podesta holds a master's degree in international affairs from American University's School of International Service and a bachelor's degree in journalism from Arizona State University. He is the author of three other CIMA reports, Soft Censorship: How Governments Around the Globe Use Money to Manipulate the Media (2009); Business Journalism Thrives—Even Under Repressive Regimes (2014); and Watchdogs Under Watch: Media in the Age of Cyber Surveillance (2015).



AUTHOR'S NOTE

CIMA is grateful for the collaboration of Laura Schneider, project manager at Deutsche Welle Akademie, in the preparation of this briefing paper.



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Introduction

Media the world over face a depressing litany of problems. In just about every region, journalists and media outlets encounter some combination of physical attacks and killings, imprisonment, and censorship. Concentration of media ownership and capture of the media by politicians and their allies are growing, and pluralism and diversity of voices in the media are declining in many places.

Media development and freedom of expression organizations have been trying to tackle these problems for more than two decades. Yet, with each passing year, the picture for news media, as painted by the leading indexes of global press freedom, mostly fails to improve or only grows dimmer.

In an effort to help break out of this spiral, the Center for International Media Assistance and Deutsche Welle Akademie, the media development arm of the German international broadcaster, have proposed a series of regional consultations around the world with media stakeholders on the ground to diagnose the underlying causes of this situation and to seek better approaches for solving these problems — or at least ameliorating them.

With the participation of 10 partner organizations, this process was launched in Latin America in November 2015, with a conference in Bogota, Colombia, which brought together more than 130 civil society and media watchdog NGOs, broadcast regulators, academics, media industry representatives, officials from government ministries, and others in the media and development sectors. The two days of discussion and a follow-up meeting pointed the way to some real possibilities for improvement.

“It was historic... It is the first time all sides of this debate have been at one table.”

— GUILLERMO MASTRINI,
National University of Quilmes



The opening session of the conference on media in Latin America. From left, CIMA Senior Director Mark Nelson, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression Edison Lanza, Aleida Calleja of Observcom, Jaime Abello Banfi of the Gabriel Garcia Márquez Foundation for New Iberoamerican Journalism, Beatriz Quiñones of ANTV, Guilherme Canela of UNESCO, and Petra Berner of Deutsche Welle Akademie.

A New Approach

The organizing principle of this series of conferences is consultation—listening to what people on the ground and from a variety of sectors have to say about the problems for media in each region of the world, and investigating what can be learned in one place that might be applicable in another to improve the media environment.

The partners seek to use this process to develop a clear set of goals and priorities and new ways to address them. The ultimate aim is to help build and support country-level movements for reform of the media sector and to improve conditions for news media. The hope is that through these consultations political actors, regulators, civil society, journalists, and media owners can help create the political will required to make this happen and that international donors will recognize the importance of putting media support higher on their development agendas.

We began with Latin America because it offers some examples of successful efforts to reform media laws and represents the broad spectrum of challenges facing media globally. As Silvio Waisbord, professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University, put it, “Latin America is a laboratory for media reform.”

About the Conference

The meeting was organized in partnership with the German media development organization Deutsche Welle Akademie, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, UNESCO, and the Uruguayan-based media monitor, Observacom. It received financial and logistical support from the Swedish and French governments, the television broadcast regulatory agency in Colombia (ANTV), the Latin American Development Bank, the Global Forum for Media Development, and the Gabriel Garcia Marquez Foundation for New Iberoamerican Journalism.

CIMA’s interest in helping to organize the conference was in learning from stakeholders in the region what the problems for media are and how the international donor community can help. In that regard, the meeting — titled “Free and Independent Media in Plural and Diverse Media Systems — presented a unique opportunity.

“It was historic,” said Guillermo Mastrini, a respected Argentine media academic, at the concluding session. “It is the first time all sides of this debate have been at one table.”

Edison Lanza, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission’s Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression and leading organizer of the conference tweeted: “A dream come true. All the



Edison Lanza

actors in media, civil society, journalists and regulators... discussing #mediosplurales in the hemisphere.” (*Un sueño cumplido. Todos los actores de medios, soc. Civil, periodistas y reguladores... Discutiendo sobre #mediosplurales en hemisferio.*)

On Twitter, the conference registered a reach of nearly 20 million people.

Challenges to the Media Environment in Latin America

1

CONCENTRATION

- Problem in both private and public realms
- Lack of plurality and diversity in media space
- Less competition
- Homogeneous discourse
- Lack of transparency in ownership

2

REGULATION

- Censorship
- Lack of independence of public media
- Lack of autonomy and independence of regulators

3

SUSTAINABILITY

- Flight of advertising from traditional news media outlets to Internet
- Competition with global digital media
- Lack of local commercial media advertising markets
- Attacks on the press

After two days of meetings, participants discussed and prioritized more than a dozen challenges to the media environment in Latin America and grouped them under three main headings, which stood out as relevant to all countries of the region: **concentration of ownership, regulation, and sustainability.**

Media Concentration

The participants indicated that they are deeply worried about the continuing concentration of media control not only by authoritarian governments in places such as Ecuador, Venezuela, and Cuba, but the increasingly rapid monopolization of the media by powerful private sector players almost everywhere else. Concentration of media ownership leads to a stifling of voices and lack of diversity of coverage. And when the media owners are in league with business and political elites it can serve to disenfranchise citizens and help entrench those elites in power — the opposite of the watchdog role that media is supposed to play in a democratic society.

This topic generated a good deal of frank discussion and revealed some differences of opinion about whether state or private concentration of the media is worse, but all agreed that it is Problem No.1 for media in Latin America, where media ownership is arguably the most concentrated in the world.



“Latin America is a laboratory for media reform.”

— SILVIO WAISBORD,
George Washington
University

“It’s such a powerful concentration that the media are more powerful than the government.”

— ALEIDA CALLEJA,
Observacom

Guillermo Mastrini, professor of cultural industries at the National University of Quilmes in Argentina, said that concentration of private media is not the equivalent of state-owned media. “The problem in Latin America is private media concentration,” he said. “Private media has gotten so powerful because they have been enabled by and are allies of the state.”

Not universally so, countered Ricardo Trotti, executive director of the Inter-American Press Association, which represents newspaper publishers. “Concentration per se is not necessarily bad,” he said, pointing out that media need to be strong enough economically to operate in the marketplace and have the resources to stand up to government and “empower the citizens.” Pointing to authoritarian regimes in the region that control the press, he said, “You can’t obviate the problem of state media concentration... you get the sense that [some think] privately owned media was bad, is bad, and always will be bad.”

“It’s a question of emphasis,” argued communications professor Aleida Calleja from Mexico, representing the Latin American media monitoring NGO Observacom.. “It’s such a powerful concentration that the media are more powerful than the government.” She said media ownership structures in Mexico have become interwoven into critical sectors of the economy, such as mining and banking, giving them more sway than just the traditional “power of the press.”

Cesar Ricaurte of the Ecuadoran press watchdog organization Fundamedios suggested that the term of art should be “undue concentration” and added that the real problem in Latin America is weak institutions in general.

“It is not useful to talk about an ideal law for preventing concentration,” said Gustavo Gomez, director of Observacom. “We already have it. We need laws and policies to reverse the concentration that already exists.”





Silvio Waisbord of George Washington University, left, and David Lovaton, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru.



Toby Mendel, Center for Law and Democracy, Canada; Oscar Reyes, CNTV, Chile; and Juan Andrés Lerena of the International Association of Broadcasting.

REGULATION

The participants also felt that they needed more sophisticated regulatory systems to preserve diversity, pluralism, and a level playing field for new investors, particularly in broadcast media. Among the problems that effective and transparent media regulation could address is, in fact, concentration of ownership — by fostering more competition in the market and by limiting the number of media properties that can be owned by a single party.

That by itself, however, would not necessarily lead to more diversity and plurality of voices. Several participants made the point that competition and less concentration do not necessarily yield more diversity if media outlets chase the same audiences with the same type of content.

“The market does not pay for diversity,” Mastrini said. “It pays for homogeneity.” There was consensus that it takes public policies to create the conditions for more plurality of voices.

Edison Lanza, special rapporteur for freedom of expression at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, emphasized that regulatory agencies must be independent of political or economic pressures. That requires strong institutions with leadership committed to operating transparently and for the public benefit — and that, in turn, takes political will.

SUSTAINABILITY

Ensuring sustainability not only means the economic health and viability of news media properties, but also new investment in digital and mobile delivery of news and information and maintaining an open and competitive marketplace that allows new entrants to gain a foothold. As in many other parts of the world these have been in short supply in recent years.

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*One area that has been a bright spot for media in Latin America has been the rise of investigative news sites such as **La Silla Vacía** and **Animal Político** in Mexico. These organizations and others like them are producing quality journalism in the public interest at a fraction of the costs incurred by traditional media houses.*

International news media and social media are swallowing up as much as 20 percent of local advertising markets in the region and much of the additional spectrum opened up by the conversion to digital broadcasting is going to broadband Internet service providers.

“We are super worried about the topic of sustainability of the media,” said Guilherme Canela of UNESCO, arguing that a policy document is needed to make the case that in the absence of reliable data, a pilot project must be launched to test indicators of media sustainability.

Juanita León, director of the Colombian news portal *La Silla Vacía*, said media are facing the loss of value of their brands, mirrored by journalists’ loss of value of their bylines. “Voice has less value than data,” she said, adding that it is merely a matter of time “before all advertising goes to Google.”

One area that has been a bright spot for media in Latin America has been the rise of investigative news sites such as *La Silla Vacía* and *Animal Político* in Mexico. These organizations and others like them are producing quality journalism in the public interest at a fraction of the costs incurred by traditional media houses. Omar Rincón, a well-known Colombian journalist who teaches at the University of the Andes, said, “If it were up to me, I would stop training journalists and put all my budget into independent investigative journalism.”

On the other hand, in some countries investigative journalism — and even regular beat reporting — is a dangerous business. In 2015, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that 16 journalists were killed in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, and there were many physical attacks and threats against journalists in several other countries of the region. Such threats to journalists also have a direct negative effect on the ability of independent media to carry out their function and thus pose a challenge to their viability.



From left, Francisca Skoknic, CIPER, Chile; Erick Torrico, UNIR Foundation, Bolivia; Argemiro Cortés, Ministry of Culture, Colombia; Guilherme Canela, UNESCO; and Laura Schneider, DW Akademie.

The Search for a Strategy

The good news in Latin America is that there is an unprecedented process of mobilization of citizens in the sphere of media reform, according to George Washington's Waisbord. The bad news is that civil society is not united in this process. There are a variety of demands from civil society groups and no common vision of what course of action to take, which leads to false starts and uneven progress. Civil society has complex relationship with governments, which can either shut out or disregard demands from citizens or can coopt civil society organizations. In different countries the relations between civil society and the government are polarized, making it difficult to set common goals and even to get groups with different points of view to sit in the same room together.

But there have been successes, and these occur when coalitions are formed and are able to garner support from elites or to seize political opportunities, as happened in Uruguay with the reform of media laws following a change of government in 2004. There are also efforts underway that deserve the support of the international community, such as the work on media concentration in the Americas that the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression under Edison Lanza is doing.

It is important that international debates about media be multi-stakeholder affairs. Addressing problem areas such as concentration of ownership, sustainability of media, and the lack of independence of media regulators requires that all parties — the private sector, the public sector, and civil society — have a seat at the table. But the process has to be driven by domestic actors on the ground.

Forums such as the Bogota meeting can also be used to foster coalitions among members of civil society, legislatures, and the media to build public demand for a healthy environment for media. And they can promote South-South collaboration and learning.

The success of the conference became evident a month later, when a coalition of a dozen leading media watchdog organizations and NGOs that participated — including Observacom, Article 19, and others from several Latin American countries — issued a declaration calling on Latin America's governments to take concrete steps to guarantee freedom of expression and plurality of voices in the media. The declaration called for governments to combat "monopolies, oligopolies, and undue

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Beatriz Quiñones of Colombia’s ANTV answers a reporter’s question during the conference.



Guilherme Canela of UNESCO and Petra Berner of DW Akademie.

The declaration argues that the process of digitalization of radio and television should “not result in a consolidation or amplification of concentration but [rather present] an opportunity for greater pluralism and diversity in our countries.”

concentration” of the media. It also called for establishing international standards for freedom of expression and public policies that will allow governments to “democratize and reverse the media systems already concentrated.” The declaration argues that the process of digitalization of radio and television should “not result in a consolidation or amplification of concentration but [rather present] an opportunity for greater pluralism and diversity in our countries.”

Going forward, CIMA’s and Deutsche Welle Akademie’s strategy is to take the findings from these regional consultations to the international donor community, such as the OECD and private foundations, as well as to the UN discussions of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. Global-level discussions about support for media can be informed by a clear articulation of what the media in each region need. This in turn can go a long way toward getting those needs and demands on the international donors’ agendas and provide guidelines for action. They can also help make the case for more and better indicators for media development and for more research, both of which are sorely needed.

The hope is that donors will use these findings to shape their agendas so as to reflect what the media stakeholders at the country and regional level actually say they need in the way of support, rather than impose top-down media development assistance.

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