Donor Support for Media Development: The Demand for Accountability

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This paper is a summary of a desk-review of donor policies, experiences and evaluations in the realm of media support, which studied 30 of the major aid donors. It attempts to draw together the major lessons learned in terms of media support from a donor perspective. By 'media development' is meant support to the media and information sector in a developing country for the sake of building a responsible and independent fourth estate. The ultimate aim, for most donors, is to enable citizens to hold governments to account and to demand responsibility from elected officials and civil servants, as well as from private service providers. By 'donors' is meant bilateral government funding, multilaterals, and private foundations.

Western donor support for media development has been growing in recent years. In 2004 it was estimated to be about $1 billion annually (Becker and Vlad, 2005) and has probably increased since. The USA is the biggest bilateral funder of media initiatives world-wide - estimated at $50m annually in 2004, and growing (Hume 2004). The European Commission is the largest single source at the European level, while the World Bank is the biggest multi-lateral donor, estimated by Becker and Vlad (2005) to have given $190m in 2005 to this sector. Meanwhile the private foundations, especially the Open Society Initiative (OSI) and some of the American foundations like Knight and Ford are heavily committed to and focused on media and information for democratisation.

1. Media Development: What works?

This section enumerates the activities, programmes and strategies that have worked well, in the past, in terms of supporting good governance through media and information. Experience shows that a holistic approach to media development is necessary. As a minimum this means working on three fronts at once: firstly, building a regulatory and legal framework; secondly, supporting infrastructure and capital equipment; thirdly, giving training and building capacity. These are the first three strategies dealt with below.

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[1] The author is a freelance consultant in development communications. This paper is partly based on an unpublished research paper commissioned by the Effective States Team of Department for International Development (DFID) in March 2007 entitled 'Media and Information for Accountability: What are Other Donors Doing, What Works and What are the Gaps?' DFID does not necessarily subscribe to any views or opinions expressed herein.

Building regulatory and legal frameworks

Burkina Faso is an example of a relatively impartial regulatory body in Africa. Benin and South Africa also have structures that allow for relatively free and diverse media sectors, they protect the rights of journalists and also set clear journalistic standards and responsibilities. The Panos Institute (an international media NGO) has helped to strengthen some of these bodies in Africa, for example, by channelling funding from the British to the Congolese media regulator, Haute Autorité des Médias (HAM) in the Democractic Republic of Congo (DRC). This support paid off during the 2006 elections in the DRC, because the regulator was able to shut down or fine the worst inflammatory and hate media.

The basic elements of law that require support for a better legal environment are as follows:
- revising existing laws (defamation and libel laws are often used and abused by repressive governments to persecute journalists seen as overly critical)
- training lawyers, judges and legislators in media law
- providing legal defence funds for journalists
- assisting advocates for media freedom
- providing training in international laws and standards (Howard, 2003)

Providing Alternative News and Information

Setting up good-quality media outlets by providing capital equipment, or enabling fledgling outlets to extend their reach, has worked well in some cases, especially in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. The American aid body, USAID, for example, poured an estimated $40 million into Serbia from the mid - 1990s to 2000. Western Europe and Canada made complementary efforts. The cumulative force of these projects, such as Radio B92, helped the Serbs topple President Slobodan Milosevic in September 2000 (Hume 2004). This kind of initiative is especially necessary in situations where there are no alternatives to biased, state-run or otherwise partisan media. It is especially important in fragile states and crisis situations.

Box 1: Democratic Republic of Congo
In 2001 the UK's DFID made the decision to fund a United Nations radio station in the D R Congo as the peace talks were about to take place. Radio Okapi, was born out of an alliance between Fondation Hirondelle and the UN mission. Hirondelle provided the content and kept an independent editorial line, while the UN ensured security and a satellite-based transmission system that soon covered the best part of the DRC. Five years later, Radio Okapi is widely credited for having helped unify the country, smoothed the political transition, and contributed substantially to free and fair elections: in a recent study[2], almost 36% of voters said that Radio Okapi had prompted them to vote. Okapi has an estimated 25 million listeners and 27 local partner radio stations. Okapi is now funded by UK, Canada, France, Sweden and Switzerland.

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[2] Immar Research and Consultancy, 2006, *Etude Médias en RDC* Fondation Hirondelle: Lausanne.

Training

Training has been the focus for most donors – providing resources for training journalists in basic skills such as newsgathering, reporting and editing; also, providing for capacity building within organisations in terms of human resources, administration, sound financial management and business management systems. On example of media management training is SAIMED's (Southern Africa Institute for Media Entrepreneurship Development) schemes for entry-level media managers on financial management, business management, sales and marketing.

Capacity-building in-situ often works best: for example, in Afghanistan, Internews (an international NGO supporting independent journalism) had some success with temporarily funding an advertising or business position within community radio stations, in order to encourage self-sufficiency (Soloway and Siddigue 2005). Training in good business practice and commercial know-how has also worked well in USAID's Indonesia programme (see Kalathil and Kumar 2005) and in various news outlets to which the Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF) - a non-profit investment fund providing low-cost financing to independent news media in emerging democracies - has loaned capital and given business training.

Training in-house/in-situ involves targeted advice for the specific broadcast station or newspaper, and gives media outlets the chance to work through problems as a team, and upgrade their equipment or software as appropriate, rather than plucking out one or two individuals for seminars in the capital city. A positive example is Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida's) experience in Vietnam, where the Swedish National Radio (SR) has been working together with the state radio in Vietnam to set up live broadcasts for the first time in its history. With live interviews, politicians and the authorities in general are now being held to account because they have to answer direct questions on-air and cannot hide behind prepared statements and long pre-recorded speeches[3].

Local training should be prioritised over sending trainees to European or US colleges, since foreign institutions place trainees in contexts that are far from the reality of their situation at home. 'Parachute professors' should also be avoided, whereby international trainers are brought-in to countries for one-off courses.

But experience shows that training alone will not create independent journalists, and independent journalism cannot function effectively for long in an otherwise anti-democratic society. Lessons have been learned about simply offering training as a solution to low standards of journalism. Often journalists are poorly skilled and motivated, not because of lack of training but because of poor management which results in low wages and high turnover of staff. Political pressures and the prevalence of 'brown envelope journalism' (where journalists routinely seek payments from those they protect or portray positively) will result in bias, self-censorship and sensationalism. At its worst it

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[3] Pers. Comm. Pia Hallonsten, Programme Officer, Division of Culture and Media, Sida.

will result in hate-journalism, as evidenced in places like the African Great Lakes and Bosnia. In such cases, it is better to concentrate on empowering journalists unions and home-grown press associations to establish basic pay scales and working conditions for journalists.

Building-in sustainability

Experience all over the world, but especially in the Balkans (see Hume 2004), shows that investments in media outlets can be wasted if inappropriate levels of funding, training and equipment are pumped into the media, only for them to fail when donor funding ends. Sustainability is therefore a constant challenge in the media world.

But it should not be overrated. Media development is different from other development sectors. Sometimes, a media outlet is needed temporarily to address a problem, particularly in post-conflict or crisis situations. After it has done its job, there may be no need artificially to sustain it. This was the case in Rwanda, where BBC radio set up a 'Lifeline Service' shortly after the 1994 genocide, funded exclusively by the UK government. At the time it was the only source of balanced, impartial news and information in Kinyarwanda. It consistently received high audience figures. After five years of operations it was deemed no longer necessary, and was phased back into the BBC World Service.

Furthermore, in the West, it can be forgotten that the public service broadcasting is paid for by taxes or licence fees, and that without these, bodies like the BBC would be unsustainable. Therefore it is over-optimistic to expect good quality public-service journalism to sustain itself in developing countries without some sort of core support, whether from international grants, from the private sector or from a mix of public and private sponsorship.

In a recent study of sustainability in small and medium radio stations in Africa, Developing Radio Partners (a US based NGO) found that it was only the stations in South Africa that had any real financial security, due to their support from the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), which is a quasi-governmental media support agency – partly funded by international donors - set up by the South Africa government to help struggling small and community media.

Unfortunately, commercial funding is often incompatible with the public service ethic of serving minority interests, rural areas, educational ideals and considerations of balance and objectivity.   As a rule, one should be wary of the private sector as a catch-all 'solution' to the challenge of sustainability of the media, although in some cases it can work (see box below).

Box 2: Achieving Sustainability
Radio 68H in Indonesia was 'jump-started' by USAID, but is now becoming a self-sustaining private-sector radio network, after other support from the Dutch government and the Media Development Loan Fund. Radio 68H is regarded as Indonesia's premiere radio news network, reaching 20 million listeners across the

country, through a relay of 420 smaller radio stations (Kalathil and Kumar, 2005). Other examples of outlets that have sustained themselves commercially, after being started from scratch with donor funding, include Rustavi TV in Georgia, and Tolo TV and Killid Radio in Aghanistan; the latter is currently generating between $8 and $10k per year in advertising revenue[4].

African media outlets are facing a particular challenge with regard to increasing advertising revenues. A recent report from the BBC (BBC WST 2006) cites several successful examples, but it calls for African media organisations to share examples of good practice and successful initiatives in this respect. There is an overriding need for regular and robust market research and media monitoring, especially in high growth markets in order to attract and build an advertising culture. Fledging media houses need expertise in selling and attracting advertising, and this needs to be backed up by advertising research, based on financial estimates in order to make a persuasive case.

Supporting the human rights of journalists and rights-watching organisations

Human-rights monitoring organisations such as IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board), Article 19, Reporters Sans Frontières and others are widely funded by donors. International and local pressure (through alerts, the press and letter-writing) have provided lifelines for many imprisoned and otherwise mistreated journalists.

Box 3: DRC
DFID has been supporting Journalistes en Danger (JED) in Kinshasa over the past 3 years (again through Panos). This has involved core support such as salaries, and office-rents, and funds for publications. When necessary, it has also involved physical protection and even temporary evacuation after personal threats were received by the two co-directors from elements in the armed forces. JED has run trainings and produced posters for journalists about safety measures during elections (e.g. when reporting at political rallies: DON'T' wear a partisan T-shirt or colours that belong to any of the rival parties; DO wipe off all contact details of rival political parties from your mobile phone, etc.).

Support to New Technology

In an increasing number of areas, the Internet is proving useful for journalists, to access information and improve news and business operations. In Indonesia, for example, USAID found that of 50 stations equipped with internet access by Internews, 100 percent of them continued paying their own internet subscription after the grant ended (Kalathil & Kumar, 2005). African TV and radio is leap-frogging a whole generation of technology and taking

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[4] Personal communication, John West, Internews (23rd March 2007).

advantage of satellite broadcasting and digital recording. However, new technologies must be kept in perspective: in one UK programme which equipped 80 community radio stations in Africa, several station owners said their priorities were basic items like diesel generators, vehicles and even bicycles, not internet access (DFID, 2005).

Box 4: South Korea

The experience with the web-site OhMyNews in Korea has demonstrated the ability of distributed reporting networks to establish themselves as sustainable media brands and institutions[5]. Citizen journalism, using collaborative publishing systems, is a viable tool to address media market failures – i.e. where big media outlets have failed to cater for a diverse and plural audience and have 'dumbed down' so as to attract advertisers. Internews has found that TV and radio will cover social, political and economic issues if there is enough interest and energy created around them on the Net.

Tackling corruption and market distortions within the profession

Journalists and editors being bribed by politicians or other interested parties to give them favourable coverage is an unfortunate feature of the media scene in countries where there is a combination of low pay, low capacity and poor regulation. Clearly, even the best trained journalists cannot hold authorities or politicians to account if their editors depend on payments from these same politicians to keep their newspaper or radio afloat.

Box 5: Columbia

An example of support to self-regulation by the journalism profession itself, is Sweden's grant, through the Swedish Journalist Association, to a professional organisation of journalists in Columbia called CESO-FIP[6], which works for better transparency on how companies and political parties sponsor radio journalism, and how journalists are forced to accept this patronage in order to earn a decent living[7].

Furthermore, donors' willingness in some cases to core-fund training schemes has produced the widespread problem of trainees expecting to be paid allowances for attending trainings. This reduces the willingness of media organisations to invest in journalism training and has created expectations of lucrative payments among potential trainees – for example in Sri Lanka, Anderson (2006) says that daily allowances paid by media development projects to trainees are often in the range of one sixth to one third of the monthly salary of a junior journalist.

Supporting Regional or National institutes

Donors have had some positive experiences with supporting regional media support institutes that advocate for press freedom, such as the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) which has local chapters in most of the Southern

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[5] Mark Harvey, Internews, pers. comm. 2007
[6] *Centro de Solidaridad de la Federacion Internacional de Periodistas*
[7] Pia Hallonsten, Sida, pers. comm. 2007

African countries. MISA's activities include supervising new press laws, reacting when journalists are threatened, and organising trainings through the Southern African Media Training Trust). MISA receives support mainly from the Nordic donors through a basket fund which shares reports and monitoring and evaluation responsibilities.

Box 6: Panama

USAID has had a long history of support to CELAP (the Center for Latin American Journalism) in Panama. From 1988 to 1997, USAID provided nearly $14 million in funding for the Latin America Journalism Project (LAJP) to strengthen journalism in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama. Florida International University launched the project in Miami and then in 1996 ceded its operations to the indigenous CELAP in Panama. Some 6,800 journalists were trained during the decade. The project had a positive impact on the quality of Central American journalism, according to an assessment done in December 1998 by the Center for Democracy and Governance, USAID. The evaluation found that CELAP had a major impact on news writing, balance, depth, collecting, editing and technical production in Central America, but that the training had no impact on journalism salaries or media profitability (Hume, 2004).

Supporting Community Media and local processes

Most evaluations of media support emphasise the importance of indigenously driven processes and ownership. Community media – particularly radio – provide some of the best examples. There are many instances of community radios promoting direct accountability by politicians and service-providers at community level – for instance, the case of Malian mayors of poorly performing communes who have had their budgets reduced and who have been known to go into hiding when local radios publish the regional budgets, for fear of recriminations from their constituents[8].

Box 7: Nepal

The United Nations' Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Nepal invested relatively small amounts of money in community media over many years, but with high degrees of ownership by the community media movement itself. That investment was slow to demonstrate major results for several years, but within a decade had helped build a community media infrastructure that covered the majority of the country and helped to facilitate major peaceful democratic change. When the political crisis arrived and the King seized power, disbanded democratic institutions and muzzled the media, it was the community media that continued to inform people (singing the news), that informed them of their constitutional rights, that encouraged peaceful resistance and above all had a level of trust with the poorest that ensured that people protested non-violently. [9]

The constant problem for community radio is one of finance, but a promising solution is to involve diaspora communities. For example, a Malian

[8] Alpha Oumar Konaré, in GFMD (eds.) 2006.
[9] James Deane, Communication for Social Change (CFSC), pers. Comm.. 2007

community in Paris has been sustaining a small community radio station in Mali, Radio Kayes, for many years. More recently, Internews has set up a project called 'Radio Connect', with EC funds, to encourage Afghans in London, and Timorese in Lisbon, to contribute small monthly sums to community radios in their home countries; in return, diaspora members get free announcements on the radio and audio feeds of their stations via the Internet[10].

Community media is not just about radio, but also about bulletin boards, newsletters, wall-newspapers, booklets, participatory video and theatre. For example, community bulletin-boards in Aceh in the aftermath of the Tsunami provided practical information that explained what aid was available, how to apply for it, and what to do if beneficiaries were not satisfied. An independent assessment concluded that, when used properly and kept up to date, 'a simple bulletin board can do more to enhance transparency and accountability towards beneficiaries than any website. What is needed is institutional commitment rather than elaborate projects or huge cash injections' (Wall, 2006).

It is not just community radios that provide platforms for the voices of the poor. Larger country-wide and commercial radio and TV can also be effective in bringing the concerns of the poor majority to national attention.

Box 8: Malawi
In Malawi, the Development Broadcasting Unit (DBU) broadcasts 'village voice' recordings from a network of radio clubs around the country, which report (among other things) on local-level delays, corruption, malpractice, and mismanagement by service-providers, including international NGOs, local authorities and politicians. These problems are then broadcast on national radio, and the ministry, individual or organisation responsible is invited to reply on air in a context of a mediated dialogue with the community in question. The DBU claims that 70% of radio club problems are resolved satisfactorily after they have been aired nationally[11].

Participation is crucial to media being pro-poor, and new technologies like mobile phones have made this more possible. For example, live political debate programmes which combine politicians as studio guests with phone-ins from the public are enormously popular, especially in urban areas of Africa[12]. Anderson (2006) makes the point that in the case of Uganda, it is the power of local initiative in setting up creative commercial radios which drives democratizing processes – they do not require development finance, but basic political and media freedoms.

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[10] Mark Harvey, Internews, pers comm.
[11] The DBU Malawi is currently supported by the United Nations Development Programme, Oxfam and the Malawi national AIDS body – it received start-up funds from DFID in 1999.
[12] See Anderson 2006 for a short case-study of live public debate programmes on Ugandan commercial radio.

2. Media Development: How can it be done?

This section deals with practical ways of strengthening and working in the media sector, from a donor perspective.

Working out a Strategy

Experience shows that it is good practice to write a programme document or strategy for media support first, rather than launching a call for proposals and choosing the best ones. Although this approach is essentially rather top-down and can overlook innovative and creative ideas, it is fairer, more focused and is less likely to create competition and overlap between media grantees. However, in post-conflict and repressive regime situations, where the choice of partners is limited, it may be necessary to choose a partner rather than a strategy, invest in that organisation and build its capacity over time.

On a more theoretical level, it helps to be clear in strategy documents exactly *why* media is being supported in a certain country and at a certain juncture. Is it as an end in itself, i.e. to help create an independent press as an essential pillar of democracy? Or is it in order get across rights or civic education messages? In practice the two aims often overlap within a programme and can even be fulfilled by one partner. This can work, as long as it is remembered that the aim of supporting media as an end in itself requires a larger, longer-term commitment, and should not be abandoned mid-stream.

Another issue - something USAID has had to grapple with in Afghanistan – is one of keeping media development and public persuasion distinct. In Afghanistan, it was found that failure to make this distinction, and allowing too much overlap between USAID and 'psychological-operations' pursued by the Department of Defense, 'fed apprehension about the sincerity of U.S. intentions' (Soloway and Siddigue, 2005).

Finding implementing partners and 'right sizing' the support

A major hurdle to sustainability is over-sized support, where donors have come in with expensive equipment, facilities, high salaries and vehicles, only for the media organisation to collapse when donors pull out. But supporting media from local roots may involve smaller projects than many donors are used to, and consequently higher transaction costs than donors feel they can justify. Hence the need for implementing partners to be employed on a short-term basis to take on the detailed planning, monitoring and mentoring of a portfolio of small media outlets (Lange, 2005). This has been DFID's approach

in the D R Congo, and in Tanzania as well, in cooperation with other donors (see box below):

Box 9: Tanzania

A new initiative has just begun in Tanzania called the Media Fund, launched by Swiss Cooperation, and bringing together funding from several bilateral agencies, including DFID. Developed on the lines of the successful Tanzanian Foundation for Civil Society, the Media Fund aims to be large enough to build journalistic capacity nationwide, but small enough to make and oversee grants to individuals and small civil society organisations. It is planned that the Media Fund becomes an independent institution as soon as possible and is established as a non-profit company limited by guarantee[13].

Finding the right local partners is something of an 'art form', as one member of USAID put it (Hume 2002:11), and requires evaluating who will fight for professional standards that serve the public's interest, versus who will be corrupt and inept. In all cases there seems to be no substitute for thorough local knowledge.

Improving Donor Coordination and Staying for the Long-haul

Howard (2003:22) says 'media interventions have often lacked a clear coordination among donors to concentrate their assets where most effective.' He gives the example of post 1996 Bosnia where large amounts of funding was dispensed to numerous independent start-up media outlets which produced an artificial donor-dependent industry which was distrusted by local citizens as foreign – Western – interventions. But in Macedonia donor coordination was more effective (see box below):

Box 10: Macedonia

In Macedonia, the International Media Fund (IMF) was created in 1998 as the coordinated effort of seven international donors in response to the lessons learned in Bosnia about lack of donor coordination. It provides for coordinated assessments, expertise and grants to urgent media interventions. The IMF is not an exclusive channel for assistance, but an effort to have more impact by co-ordinating donor assistance in assessments, expertise and grants.

An assessment of USAID's media programmes in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s found that it was important to 'stay for the long haul'. 'If a project is worth backing, it should be given sufficient financial support to make it a long-term success, including if necessary, money to pay salaries.' (Hume 2004: 39) In another USAID internal dialogue in 2002 a USAID expert is reported to have said: 'We have to get real about this. If you go into a country with its economy in collapse, no advertising, to put in a plan for an exit strategy makes no sense. You have to admit that it is a ten year plus process to get this [media sector] on its feet' (Hume 2004:20)

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[13] Information obtained from DFID Governance Adviser, Tanzania, (Zabdiel Kimambo) March 2007.

More and Better Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, there seems to be a clear need for more evidence-gathering about what works, and documenting success-stories of where information and media have enhanced accountability.

Soloway and Saddigue (2005) make the point that OTI (USA) did not include funds for baseline studies to determine audience share for media outlets from the outset of their programme of media support in Afghanistan. This lack of a baseline made it almost impossible to assess - beyond the level of mere anecdote - whether or not the programme had been a success in terms of increasing audience share for the individual radio stations supported; or improving quality and quantity of news and information for the Afghan population. The need for baselines is a constantly recurring theme in the media development literature.

On a macro level, there are already several broad evaluation instruments available, including the Freedom House Freedom of Expression index, IREX Media Sustainability Index and UNESCO's Media Development Indicators. In USAID's experience, 'it is best to combine broad-based quantitative/ qualitative metrics with participant feedback and media monitoring to show improvement by trained participants, also specialised indices that track progress on several fronts at once' (S. Khalathil, pers. comm[14]).

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[14] Contacted through Julius Court, DFID, Feb 2007

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AMDI	African Media Development Initiatives (BBC)
BBC WST	BBC World Service Trust
CAR	Central African Republic
CATIA	Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa (DFID programme)
CBA	Commonwealth Broadcasting Association
CD	Compact Disk
CFSC	Communication for Social Change Consortium
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMC	Community Multi-media Centre
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DGCID	Directorate Gen. of International Cooperation & Development (France)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EC	European Commission
EIDHR	European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights
GFMD	Global Forum for Media Development
ICD	Information and Communication for Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFEX	International Freedom of Expression Exchange
IPDC	International Programme for Development of Communications (UN)
IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDLF	Media Development Loan Fund
MISA	Media Institute for Southern Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NSJ	Southern Africa Media Training Trust
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSI	Open Society Institute
OTI	Office of Transitional Initiatives (US)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise(s)
SW	Short Wave
UK	United Kingdom
UNDEF	UN Democracy Fund
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
USAID	United States AID programme
WBI	World Bank Institute

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