MEDIA ADVOCACY APPROACHES OF DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR JOURNALISM PRACTICE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT
Development agencies carry out a range of media advocacy activities intended to influence mainstream and alternative media to achieve specific outcomes in the area of social development. The primary goal is to ensure that social issues become objects of media discourse and public agenda. This study explores the conceptual context for, and media advocacy practices of development agencies. The study demonstrates that aid agencies frame issues for both mainstream and social media and parade an army of spokespersons and celebrities in their attempt at shaping public discourse and effecting social influence. They also implement thematic public information campaigns designed to ensure that their “message” on specific issues is heard and fed into the decision making process at various levels of governance. While these approaches have contributed to influencing media agendas, they have also resulted in competition for attention and corporate marketing. The paper draws extensively on UN media advocacy and public communication activities in Africa, noting possible challenges for journalism practices. The paper argues for a stronger emphasis on civic advocacy journalism to amplify the voice of ultimate beneficiaries in development discourse.

Key terms: media and development, advocacy journalism, public influence, media relations

Introduction
Media advocacy is part of the broader health promotion and development communication programme intended to shape media coverage and ultimately affect the public agenda. Although there is some level of confusion on its components, (Stead, Gerard and Eadie, 2002; UNFPA, 2001) it is generally recognised as a strategy to influence public debate by engaging with and putting pressure on the mass media to focus on specific social issues. Chapman (2004:1) situates media advocacy within the general framework of public health advocacy as the ‘strategic use of news media to advance a policy initiative, in the face of opposition’ while Wallack (1994) describes it as a strategy to use the
mass media ‘appropriately, aggressively and effectively’ to support the development of healthy public policies. In this respect, media advocacy is expected to help media organisations focus on identified social issues (what to cover) and shape their portrayal in the media (how issues are presented).

Overall, media advocacy uses journalism techniques to promote media support for health, development or social causes. Waibord (2009) posits that such deliberate partisanship has been historically integral to the evolution of the press, noting that journalism was largely ‘advocacy journalism’ and “a propaganda tool for political organisations, a platform for press entrepreneurs with political ambition, and a pathway for political activism for reporters” (372). While experts like McQuail (2000) subscribe to values of objective facticity and neutrality of attitude in journalism practice, others, such as Schudson & Anderson (2009) argue that professional objectivity is a struggle in journalism practice and that partisanship manifests in various aspects of news decisions. This study takes the position that journalism practice has moved beyond this historical characterisation and has gone through different philosophical and professional orientations. However, its evolutionary trait and inherent tendency for partisanship in tandem with the contemporary focus of advocacy for social justice and change.

By nature, media advocacy is a pre-planned and predetermined approach to ensure that media gatekeepers and other practitioners buy into issues being advocated. This is integral to the nature of advocacy. To Chapman (2001) advocacy is “unashamedly purposive” while to most development agencies (e.g. UNICEF, 2008; UNAIDS, 2005) advocacy is instrumental and utilitarian in nature. These agencies integrate strategic approaches to influence different actors, including the media, in broader advocacy programmes. In light of this, this paper has a dual purpose: first, to explore the conceptual imperative of media advocacy in development work, and two, to identify major media advocacy practices implemented by development agencies. From the analysis, the paper identifies the implications on journalism practice. It also points to the need for media organisations to hold aid agencies accountable for results despite their role as providers of public good.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical premise for media advocacy and most public communication interventions by aid agencies is mass media influence on society. This is within the family of theories known as mass media effects. For this study, three theories serve as the conceptual underpinning: agenda setting, news framing and gatekeeping. A related concept of issue-attention cycle is addressed as part of agenda setting. Nevertheless, it is noted that the scope of research on the three theories is voluminous and beyond the scope of this study, therefore only a snapshot of the theories is provided.

The study of agenda setting focusses on how some issues get to the top of public agenda and how certain policy decisions are given priority beyond others. McCombs & Shaw (1972) articulated the agenda setting hypothesis into a theory. Basically, agenda setting establishes that there is some correlation between media agenda and the public’s agenda in that the media determines what the society considers as important (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Kim & McCombs, 2004; Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; Kosicki, 1993). It is predicated on the notion that mass media channels are critical to shaping public debates and keeping issues on the public agenda. This is based on the underlying assumption that “the mass media have the ability to transfer salience on their news agenda to their public agenda.” (Griffin, 2012: 378). This implicit capacity allows them to attract attention while the salience devoted to issues by the media would determine the extent to which they become objects of public agenda and the actions they elicit. However, there is abundant evidence of limited causal relationship between media agenda and policy change. Thus, Cohen’s seminal proposition that the press may not be ‘successful in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in
telling what its readers want to think about” (1963:13) comes to mind. While the statement captures the complex nuances of agenda setting at the public level, it does not provide any significant insight on how the mass communication influences, drives or sets policy agenda. In addition, as Dearing & Rogers (1996:1) suggest, that agenda setting “is an on-going competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public and the policy elites”. This conclusion is important for our study which looks at how development agencies try to influence media agenda and public agenda, and ultimately, policy agenda.

A related concept to agenda-setting is ‘issue attention cycle’ which helps to examine what issues or objects are reported in the media. Downs (1972) postulates that issues go through a five-stage attention cycle which includes: the pre-problem stage, alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm, realising the cost of the significant progress, gradual decline and post problem stage. While Downs does not propose that all issues go through a definitive linear progression of five states, he posits that issues may recapture public interest once they have reached national prominence state. This is an important issue to consider because of the critical role of the news media in filtering issues, mobilising public enthusiasm for various policy options, and assisting in constructing social reality.

Besides, policy theorists (such as Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Zahariadis, 2007; Hudson & Lowe, 2004; Kingdon, 1995) have underscored, among others, the importance of linking issue attention to the policy subsystem, political process and the power of advocacy coalition. The role of the mass media is also a factor in the formation of public opinion and the dynamics of agenda building. However, the nature of such a relationship, especially the causal dimension, is still unclear. It is therefore argued that agenda setting is a complex process and several considerations (not just media attention) determine what gets or does not get on the agenda. This is particularly critical within the development domain, as the issues being dealt with most times do not get the kind of media attention that interest groups and policy entrepreneurs anticipate.

News framing theory focusses on how issues are constructed for the public through the pattern of presentation and the type of symbols used. Both agenda setting and news framing are connected to how issues are depicted in the media rather than with which issues or objects are more or less reported (Schaufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007). News framing deals with how symbols are used to evoke specific action from the audience. Some writers (such as Castell, 2009; Weaver, 2007) agree that framing is central to influencing media discourse and public processes, but as a theory of media effect, it has been criticised on a number of fronts, including theoretic vagueness, incomparable methods, fractured paradigm, scattered conceptualisation, weak definition and deficient operationalization (Weaver, 2007; Entman, 1993). Nevertheless, framing is relevant to how development agencies interact with the media through their advocacy and public communication activities. As will be demonstrated in the discussion on media advocacy practices by development agencies, issue framing is one of the main elements of their media advocacy activities.

Finally, the study examines the theory of gatekeeping which addresses the process of news operations from how journalists and other media professionals at various levels process the vast amount of information to what finally gets published or broadcast. Gatekeeping deals with the institutional, organisational and professional dimensions of media operation. Shoemaker et al. (2009) describe gatekeeping as the raft of actions involved in selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating or otherwise massaging information to become news. From a synthesis of various studies, different functionaries in the news management process (the owner, the editor, or the journalist) carry out different levels of gatekeeping function. In specific terms, gatekeepers are writers, correspondents, news people and editors and all those involved in the editorial or production process (Coleman et al., 2009) and the routine organisation of news management necessitates the need for advocates to influence them. While some writers have questioned the continued prominence and
relevance of gatekeeping and its twin theory of agenda setting, (Williams et al., 2004), this author posits that normative principles from various media theories are pivotal to shaping media advocacy practices of development agencies.

From the foregoing, it is evident that both mainstream and alternative media are critical to influencing social and public discussion. While the media may confer salience and importance on social issues, decision making and policy change is beyond the media and the attention they give. It is also argued that issues are not elevated to policy agendas solely because of rational deliberation and careful consideration of evidence, but through various variables such as power play, the role of allies, the interest of advocates and how issues are portrayed (Shifman, 2008; True, Jones, Baumgartner, 2007). Thus, the news channels are just one of the platforms of public agenda setting.

Based on this theoretical overview, this following section examines four major media advocacy practices of development agencies.

**Issue framing**

The example of how UNAIDS framed the HIV pandemic for national and international action helps to illustrate the approach. In the mid-1990s there was generally little interest in HIV. The disease was denied by various governments and there was considerable controversy on its origin. Against the backdrop of lack of interest and inadequate funding for its response, UNAIDS had to frame HIV for public acceptance. According to Pissani (2008) this involved ‘beating up’ the arguments to ‘inspire action’. Tactics adopted to make the case included ‘presenting a compelling picture of the devastation left behind,’ ‘inspiring people with the horrors that were in stock’, ‘getting more creative’ with information use, ‘playing with the numbers’ and translating ‘truth into something that government might care about’. Although UNAIDS did not ‘make up’ the story, it only ‘beat it up’ with ‘purple prose’ and ‘manipulative gymnastics of the Global Reports’ which resulted in ‘cooking up an epidemic’, that finally ‘hit the headlines’.

From Pissani’s insight, it would appear that UNAIDS had to frame HIV with strong images and much spinning to get the issue through the first three stages of the issue attention cycle. However, the organisation has continued to find new ways to sustain it on the agenda after HIV has received the desired level of attention.

This paper does not suggest that all aid agencies adopt such creative processes, especially information spinning in making their case, but it observes that to get some health and social issues to the media and public agenda, aid agencies tend to be selective in the information they present and the angle of the issue they project. They also use symbols that assist in evoking the kind of response expected as well as undertake different mobilisation activities to sustain the issue in the public and political attention (Shifman, 2009, 2007). Despite different arguments against “AIDS exceptionalism” from various sources (e.g. Epstein, 2007; England, 2007), the disease has received considerable attention and has been kept on the development agenda through global issue framing and positioning. According to Smith and Whiteside (2010), HIV/AIDS gained prominence through a nexus of factors including using “the language of securitization and globalisation.”

In the 30 years of the pandemic, UNAIDS has generated various reports, arguments and cases for keeping HIV on the agenda. It has been positioned and kept on the global, regional, national and community programme through diverse tactics, including political advocacy, communication and social mobilization, public/private partnership and networking, and multimedia communication comprising the production of good or best practices, case studies, investment cases, briefing notes, policy briefs, score cards, special events, progress reports, killer facts, infographics, trends analysis, flagship publications, and publication of Op-Eds. In addition to media and communication materials,
the AIDS fraternity has utilised various techniques of social and political influence including activism to mobilise supportive action from different stakeholders. Special high-level events with UN General Assembly and regional political and economic institutions have been organised or supported. Thus, a combination of issue framing, information politics, multimedia materials and accountability mechanisms have contributed to sustaining the HIV issue on the public agenda.

HIV has gone through various stages and different articulations (on the issue-attention cycle), but it is still largely on the global, national and local agenda in many countries. It has witnessed different emphasis and negative controversies, but it has been sustained on the global and national development agenda through appropriate issue framing and positioning. While it could also be argued that the nature of the global controversy around HIV necessitated the type and level of action it has received, evidence suggests that issue framing and positioning played a critical role (Shiffman, 2009).

The current campaign by UNAIDS, Countdown to Zero, is aimed, in part, to re-frame the face of the HIV. The strategic elements of the campaign include framing, which deals with building on past success, showing that elimination is possible globally and moving to the future. It also involves strategic advocacy which is geared toward promoting leadership for results, pushing for smart investments; and leveraging HIV treatment with maternal health. The campaign uses new evidence to promote the elimination of HIV infection in children by 2015 and keeping mothers alive. UNAIDS is also building strategic partnerships with the media, youth and other influential powerbrokers in re-framing HIV response within the new development architecture.

Media Mobilisation

Media engagement is important in addressing public information gaps on social issues and influencing development agenda. Our analysis shows that different development agencies deploy a variety of media relations tactics to promote their issues and attract media attention. Some of the media advocacy methods used by UNFPA illustrate the approach.

As the global agency for population activities, UNFPA has been implementing various media activities to ensure that population issues are understood and a supportive environment created for policy and social change. Five methods of media mobilisation deployed by the agency are:

- **Capacity building of media professionals:** The rationale for media capacity building is to ensure that media professionals are given in-depth knowledge of population issues to be able to report effectively and accurately. This is because it is generally believed that population and demographic issues are relatively difficult to understand for non-experts. Such capacity building sessions involve training programmes of different durations, orientation workshops, short term induction, fellowships, or integration of population reporting in the curriculum of communication and journalism institutions.

- **Sponsored field project visits:** Such visits are intended to provide firsthand information on various aspects of population issues. Due to financial constraints, many journalists do not have resources to undertake field trips to document or develop stories with appropriate human interest angles. Project visits take journalists to communities and various locations for human interest stories. It moves media professionals from merely reporting from press releases to reporting from real life experiences. Field trips also supplement the information received in capacity building sessions and provide practical field perspective on population projects and interventions.
- **Development and distribution of targeted information packages:** UNFPA supports the development of information packages including fact sheets, video, info-graphics, press kits, photo stories, multi-media productions, country kits, state of the world population report and other publications. This is expected to provide a constant stream of information for media professionals and make them informed advocates on the developments in population programmes. Information packages may be based on situation assessment and analysis, census data, and results from programme implementation. The goal is to enhance the understanding of media professionals and encourage them to cover the health and population beat which is otherwise non-attractive for journalists.

- **Establishment of media network for population and development:** Many UNFPA offices have supported the establishment of networks of population reporters and journalists. Such networks are designed to promote networking and stronger partnerships with local media. They are also intended to strengthen the capacity of journalists and their organizations, improve pro-population reporting on regular basis, raise levels and frequency of news stories and radio/TV programmes and foster institutional learning through knowledge sharing. Examples of countries that have supported the formation of such networks are Malawi, Kenya, The Gambia, Madagascar, Ethiopia and Zambia. While the network has increased media coverage of population issues in countries like Kenya, it has not been effective in other countries like Zambia. The challenges include funding for such networks, the mobility of media practitioners and lack of commitment from both partners.

- **Engagement with media gatekeepers:** Recognizing the critical role of media gate-keepers in the news management process, UNFPA undertakes targeted briefing and orientations sessions for senior editors, sub-editors, production management and chief executives of media organisations on topical population and development issues. This is intended to facilitate their buy-in to improving its coverage. Tactics of engaging them include study tours, consultative sessions, or briefing workshops. Some media gatekeepers have been sent on specialized courses in population studies and advanced training in journalism. Such efforts have assisted in influencing them to be more supportive of population and health topics in the face of competition from stories from more popular beats like economics, politics and sports.

- **Incentive/Award:** Many UNFPA country offices in Africa have organized annual awards for media professionals as a form of recognition in population reporting and to stimulate more media interest. Award categories included maternal health, gender-based violence, fistula, female genital mutilation and child health reporting. The need for awards has been identified as a form of motivation and incentive to sustain media interest in social and development issues. However, in view of the temporary nature of incentivisation to induce a behavior, the need for more intrinsic forms of motivation to reporting social issues needs to be found.

The various media mobilization approaches have enhanced the quantity and quality of media coverage of population and development issues in a number of countries, but the challenge has been sustainability of media attention at the regional level.
Deployment of celebrities

Celebrities have become major stakeholders in social advocacy for development. Celebrity advocacy involves leveraging the power of celebrities in promoting different development and public health issues. One of the aid agencies with considerable experience in celebrity advocacy is UNICEF. With over 50 years of experience in celebrity advocacy, the organization has at least 200 national, 10 regional, and 30 international goodwill ambassadors or spokespersons. Their army of celebrities includes:

Chess players, TV/film actors, and actress, singers, musicians, business women and men, TV journalists and writers, dancers, beauty queens, youth stars, former cricket players, former Judo champions, international professional football players, rally drivers, basketball stars, Olympic medalists, artists, children entertainers, models, intellectuals and child development experts, authors, tennis players, astronauts, explorers, cartoon characters, pianists, retired school teachers, gold medalists in gymnasts, composers, producers and performers, cross country cyclists, producers, football coaches, songwriters and pop artists, philanthropists, Royal Highnesses/Countess, standup comedians, fashion designers, conductors, athletes, TV hosts/hostess, puppeteers, dancers, philharmonic orchestra choirs, opera conductors, University professors, Gaelic sports players, palentogist/scientific popularisers, junior ambassadors, medical doctors, violinsts, cellists, grand sumo wrestlers, DJs, rugby legend, playwrights, Alpine skier, pop singing groups, race car drivers, world tennis champions, basketball players, couturier, handball players, former prime ministers, entrepreneurs, adventurers, environmentalists, former MPs and football teams. (UNICEF, 2009)

Celebrity influence is associated with what is generally referred to as star power, media appeal, public valorization, or sheer celebrity effect. Based on their following, networks, and constituency, celebrities are able to attract media and public attention and create a buzz around issues to influence public opinion. However, some critics question the strategic value of celebrities and other spokespersons beyond ‘photo opportunities’ for aid agencies. Nonetheless, UNICEF is convinced that celebrities have assisted in attracting media attention to children and women issues at the national, regional and global levels (2010).

Commemorations and thematic campaigns

Special events serve as platforms for advocacy and opportunities to position issues in national, regional and global media. As part of international development programming, the UN system has several special observances, ranging from the day of happiness to the day of trees. In 2013, the UN commemorated 102 observances, each one with a specific themean and activities by corresponding agencies and interest groups to engage with the media and the public. To influence the media for adequate coverage, some of the special events are integrated into the annual work plans of the media networks, while appropriate thematic materials are prepared beforehand and distributed to media organizations. In some cases, this is combined with the distribution of media advisory, press releases, briefing kit, or press alerts on the themes. Such activities help to maximize media mileage for commemoration of special events. Other media advocacy tactics carried out by aid agencies are pitching stories in high profile glitzy popular magazines; producing special broadcast programmes from mainstream media; commissioning infomercials and supplements on different issues; developing compelling stories on the impact of their results; writing or commissioning Op-Eds in a broad range of publications; participating in special reports and programmes to enhance the image of their executive leadership; and leveraging the reputation of other partners such as high-level political figures and research institutions. UN agencies also integrate thematic public campaigns into their media advocacy and other social communication activities to evoke positive response from the public.
An example of a thematic campaign is the “UNiTE to End Violence against Women” which runs from 2008-2015. The campaign is organised by 15 UN agencies and aimed to mobilise African governments in fulfilling their commitments to ending violence against women and girls. Specific media advocacy activities implemented for the campaign are: the climbing of Mt Kilimanjaro, the promotion of monthly “Orange Day” to draw attention to the issue in various countries, mobilisation of various partners to speak against violence on women, and production of media materials such as press releases and targeted broadcast programmes. Regular media briefs are sent to alert media people to stories about the campaign and gender based violence issues (UN Women, 2010).

Conceptually, campaigns are useful in galvanising public support on specific issues, but without derogating their value, they are generally short-term ed and their results episodic. Field experience in development programming has shown that development agencies tend to invest significant energy and resources in campaigns that are not sustained or sustainable. Thus, we argue for the adoption of a more ecological approach to addressing social norms grounded in a robust theory of change, rather than episodic media stunts and occasional public campaigns.

**Critical implications for journalism practice**

The media approaches examined above manifest numerous implications for broader journalism and communication practice in developing countries. However, a few of critical ones are outlined below.

First, media advocacy by aid agencies results in competition for media attention and promotion of institutional image. In an editorial, *The Lancet* (2010: 1) alludes to this phenomenon.

“Media coverage as an end in itself is too often the aim of their activities. Marketing and branding have a high profile. Perhaps worst of all, relief efforts in the field are sometimes competitive with little collaboration between agencies, including smaller, grass-roots charities that may have better networks in affected counties and so are well placed to immediately implement emergency relief.”

Although the commentary was made within the context of humanitarian response by aid agencies, it applies to various aspects of development agencies operation. This is because the aid environment is crowded, competitive and fragmentary (Easterly, 2002). The fragmentary nature of aid delivery reflects in the media and other public communication activities. Field experience has shown that as there are several aid projects, so there are multiple attempts to promote them. It is not uncommon to see the logos of various development agencies on the same project. It is also not uncommon to see various press releases of aid agencies with different statistics on the same issue. Consequently, there is fragmentation of information and sometimes contradictory information. Every agency wants its ‘noise’ around specific issues to be heard through the media and its flag waved.

To address the criticism of fragmentary approach to UN communication, efforts have been made for interagency communication. The UN Communication Group at the country level helps to promote coherence in advocacy and media engagement. While ‘communicating together’ has worked in some countries, it has not in others. *(United Nations Communication Group, 2009; United Nations Development Group, 2008)*. Many agencies still continue to carry out their branded communication campaigns and promoting their issues unilaterally. Thus, media professionals are constantly contending with the overbearing posture of some individual agencies or the combined actions of multilateral organisations in their news management process in some cases.
Second, many development agencies have integrated powerful PR outfits with their media advocacy intended to enhance their image and funding-raising activities. Through a variety of approaches, development agencies market their social products and influence public agenda with innovative stunts. In a rather caustic assessment of the phenomenon, Gunawardene (2007:1) writes: “In their ceaseless effort to keep their organisations in the media spotlight, spin doctors of development agencies are distorting news values and corrupting the media and turning issue- based communication products into logo delivery mechanisms.” While this author does not suggest that visibility is antithetical to development effectiveness as has been observed by other writers (see Vollmer, 2012), it is argued that unbridled focus on visibility, branding and marketing of the cartel of aid agencies has implication for professional journalism. The situation calls for more sophistication on the part of media professionals in dealing with development agencies, including how to handle the multitude of media products, press releases, reports briefing notes and programme advisory because of their orientation toward resource mobilisation, marketing and corporate branding.

Three, the public communication activities of development agencies result in too many one-off events, with aid agencies running different short-term campaigns on various issues. The resultant effect is competition for attention and lack of in-depth coverage of issues. Just as the multitude of programme and projects implemented by development agencies result in high transaction cost for national partners, the myriads of one-off events, commemorations, campaigns and celebrations result in similar transaction cost for media organisations. This is against the backdrop of dwindling resources for media organisations in keeping staff and managing news bureaus. In addition, many of the campaigns and events do not offer any new information which pass the ‘so what’ test of media gatekeepers. Rather, they tend to parade recycled information and serve as mere PR outlets for development agencies who are ‘restating’, ‘reaffirming’ ‘recommiting’ or ‘calling for actions’ which they had called for before.

Recommendations

From this analysis, three broad recommendations are made.

One, aid agencies need to move from information delivery to media professionals to more effective communication, which is a two-way process. They need to prioritise more issue-based communication instead of concentrating on branding and promoting their organisations. This requires providing opportunities for dynamic storytelling and citizenship engagement with the grassroots organisations. Their media advocacy should prioritise citizenship journalismmand social conversation with various partners is critical to shaping public opinions for social change. According to Waibord (2009) civic journalism is grounded in the process of political mobilisation and uses organised groups to influence the pattern of reporting in the media and ultimately shaping social conversation, public opinion, programmatic change and public policies. This view is integral to the human rights approach to development programming which prioritises the voice of affected populations and community groups in the development process(Urvin, 2010; Sen 2009; Chambers 2003).

The philosophy of human rights approach to development also underscores the power of rights holders in development programming. There are several experiences of how policies and programmes have been changed through the voice of the local people(Samuel, 2010; PANOS, 2003). Thus, stories of change in communities need to be unearthed and fed into both mainstream and social media. This is the rationale for more civic journalism which amplifies the use of community conversation and voice of the people in achieving systemic change, policy reform and social justice. It also contributes to the accountability of aid agencies to the ultimate beneficiaries, which is currently lacking (Easterly & Pfutze, 2008). Integral to this change is a shift from pushing their message to prioritising the voice of...
the people in their communication agenda. This requires balancing ‘communications about result’ with ‘communication for results’.

Two, media organisations need to exercise normative journalistic principle of investigative reporting in dealing with aid agencies, including questioning their results and holding them accountable for development effectiveness. They are also expected to sharpen their skill in understanding health and development issues which is generally perceived as deficient. To this end, the curricula of communication and public health institutions need to strengthen skills in science reporting, health communication and data journalism beyond the tokenistic inclusion in the curriculum. This requires a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach in ensuring that graduates of journalism and communication schools are grounded in these areas.

Three, more research is needed to explore several aspects of the interface between aid agencies and media professionals to generate new perspectives for a mutually beneficial relationship. This will enhance their respective roles in advancing development effectiveness. Specific questions that may be investigated are:

1. What is the perception of development agencies by media practitioners and how is this affecting the relationship in the area of news management and gatekeeping functions? This will help answer the question of the influence of development agencies on media organisations.
2. What is the impact of the multiplicity of aid agencies on journalism practice? Is this helping or harming the news management process and media content generation? This looks into the transaction cost of media organisations in their relationship with aid agencies.
3. How could the media agencies hold development agencies accountable? Based on the principles of media objectivity and public accountability of aid agencies, it is important for this issue to be further investigated in the spirit of development effectiveness.
4. How is the drive for visibility and image making and the type of frames used by development agencies influencing the content of information disseminated through the mass media?

Conclusions

Media advocacy by development agencies is predicated on the need to address ‘information gaps’ in the process of policy or political influence and promote specific development issues in the public domain. While development agencies are providers of public good, many of them are driven by a strong desire for corporate marketing and branding. Therefore, media organisations need to be more discerning in their relations with development organisations. Media practitioners need to be adequately equipped to hold development agencies accountable for the promised results of development and invest in investigative journalism around social and health issues rather than regurgitating press releases and reports churned out by development agencies.

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