

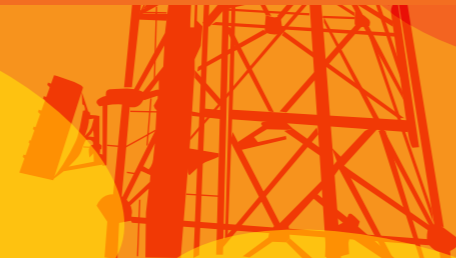


About the book

The study identifies and analyses two types of citizen journalism: *non-institutional* and *institutional*. Exploratory in nature, the study is underpinned by four specific objectives, namely to:

- Analyse the social context of the practice of citizen journalism in Africa;
- Assess the technological basis of citizen journalism, especially the processes by which new information and communication technologies (ICTs) shape, and become shaped by, human attempts at citizen journalism;
- Ascertain the level of uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media, as a way of establishing how citizen journalism becomes institutionalised in the process of adoption; and
- Evaluate the democratic value of citizen journalism, as a way of appreciating the possible transformative power of citizen journalists.

The overall aim of the study is to make sense of the democratic premium that initiators of various non-institutional and institutional citizen journalism projects place on the phenomenon. As such, this is an ethnographic study that seeks to tease out people's experiences of the practice of citizen journalism.



About the author

Prof. Fackson Banda is the SAB Ltd-UNESCO Chair of Media & Democracy in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. Winner of the 2008 MISA Press Freedom Award, he has published in the following areas: the political economy of communication; African political thought and African media; community communication policy; development communication and journalism; and new media policy and the African digital public sphere. An experienced broadcast journalist, he has also taught at the University of Zambia and worked as executive director of Panos Southern Africa.

CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

CITIZEN JOURNALISM & DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

An Exploratory Study

By Fackson Banda

CITIZEN JOURNALISM & DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

An Exploratory Study

By Fackson Banda



Published by
Highway Africa



School of Journalism & Media Studies
Rhodes University
Africa Media Matrix Building
Upper Prince Alfred Street

PO BOX 94
Grahamstown 6140
South Africa

Telephone: +27-46-603-7138
Facsimile: +27-46-603-7189

URL: <http://www.highwayafrica.com>

Cover design and layout: Shalen Gajadhar
Typeset in Cambria 10pt and Cheltenham BT 24/36pt

ISBN: 9780868104614

This work is licensed under the Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.5 South Africa. To view a copy of this license, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/za>.

This book was made possible through a grant from Open Society Foundation for South Africa.



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Methodology	3
Chapter Three: A Contextualisation of Citizen Journalism	7
The globalisation of democratisation	7
The deregulation of the media landscape	8
The overcommercialisation of state media	8
The communitarian agenda for the democratisation of journalistic communication	9
The rapid emergence and adoption of new ICTs	9
Chapter Four: A Conceptualisation of Citizen Journalism	19
Normative media theory	19
Mass media as institutions	20
Defining citizen journalism	25
<i>Types of citizen journalism</i>	28
<i>Citizen journalism, participation, and empowerment</i>	31
<i>Problems associated with citizen journalism</i>	34
<i>Citizen journalism: technologically or socially determined?</i>	35

Chapter Five: The Practice of Citizen Journalism in Africa	43
East Africa	43
The Maghreb	47
Southern Africa	53
West Africa	65
Chapter Six: General Discussion	73
Chapter Seven: Conclusion	77
References	79

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Internet usage statistics for Africa.....	12-13
Figure 1: Internet penetration in Africa – March 2009.....	15
Figure 2: Internet users in Africa – March 2009.....	15





Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people who undertook field research for this study report and for their critical reflections on the state of citizen journalism in their respective sub-regions:

- Rebecca Wanjiku, East Africa
- Laeed Zaghلامي, The Maghreb
- Malvern Mkudu, Southern Africa
- Kofi Mangesi, West Africa

Some additional reflections on citizen journalism were provided by Noma Rangana, especially with regard to the Hivos project on citizen journalism.

Also worthy of grateful mention is Levi Kabwato, who coordinated the research assistants referred to above. Finally, we are immensely thankful to the Open Society Foundation South Africa (OSF-SA) for their financial support. Without their generous support and patient understanding, the project would not have been successfully completed.

Fackson Banda, lead researcher and report author
Chris Kabwato, Highway Africa director and executive editor
Grahamstown, April, 2010



Chapter One:

Introduction

The general aim of this exploratory study was to analyse the nature of citizen journalism in Africa and its impact on the institutions and processes of democracy, including the media themselves. In particular, it aimed to assess how ICT projects – non-institutional and institutional – have shaped the practice of citizen journalism.

More specifically, the study sought to:

- Analyse the context of the practice of citizen journalism in Africa, taking into account the legal and constitutional, economic as well as social-organisational factors that drive its adoption and growth;
- Assess the technological basis of citizen journalism, including understanding how new information and communication technologies (ICTs) shape, and become shaped by, human attempts at citizen journalism;
- Ascertain the level of uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media, as a way of establishing how citizen journalism becomes institutionalised in the process of adoption. Also important here is the process of technological convergence and the extent to which it seems to condition the manner in which media houses adopt newer forms of online communication; and
- Evaluate the democratic value of citizen journalism, as a way of appreciating the extent to which the initiators of various kinds of citizen journalism projects perceive them as agents of democratic change or transformation.

Of particular concern in understanding the democratic value of citizen journalism are the enduring and common understandings that different respondents attach to the concept of democracy, and how these understandings become linked to the project of citizen journalism. For example, it was important to assess how respondents saw citizen journalism advancing the following aspects of democratic citizenship: (a) ownership of communication channels; (b) civic participation; (c) power to hold public officials to transparency and accountability; (d) access and accessibility (e.g. women do not have as much access to the internet as men); (e) deliberation or thoughtful debate among citizens; (f) decision-making or action by citizens (e.g. voting as a result of debate); and (g) interactivity.

The study is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the methodology of the study. The techniques used to collect data primarily included personal interviews, document review, and personal observations, with interpretation

facilitated by pre-determined and emerging themes.

Chapter 3 sets out the contextual framework within which citizen journalism occurs. Of particular relevance here are the implications for citizen journalism of the following processes: the globalisation of democratisation; the deregulation of the media landscape; the commercialisation of state media; the move towards privatisation; the communitarian agenda for the democratisation of journalistic communication; and the emergence of new communication and information technologies (ICTs).

Chapter 4 sets forth a conceptual framework for citizen journalism, outlining how normative media theory views shifts in institutional analysis. As such, the chapter analyses the institutional basis of journalism, and how citizen journalism emerges to transgress the institutionality of journalistic practice. Here, an attempt is made to define citizen journalism in terms of its types, participation, empowerment, and the place of technology in its enunciation and practice.

Chapter 5 presents case studies of the practice of citizen journalism in East Africa, the Maghreb, Southern Africa and West Africa, taking care to analyse its contextual moorings, technological basis, and democratic value.

Chapter 6 is a general discussion of the findings, namely the case studies, in view of the conceptual framework of citizen journalism. It draws out key trends in the nature and uptake of the phenomenon of citizen journalism.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by highlighting the need for more research into how citizen journalism can become more democratic and democratising, especially in an age when media institutions would seem keen on institutionalising the practice of citizen journalism.

Chapter Two:

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives spelt out above, data was collected by means of personal interviews with initiators of citizen journalism projects and other interested actors in different countries; analysis and review of documents on the subject matter; and authors' own observations of the key features of the citizen journalism movement across the African continent. A key aspect of the methodology was to use in-country research assistants to undertake the field study, conduct personal interviews, and critically reflect on how the phenomenon of citizen journalism was panning out in their respective countries and sub-regions. In particular, information was organised around the following themes:

The context of citizen journalism

This provided a broad description of a particular citizen journalism project, taking into account:

- The name of the project;
- Where it was located;
- Who initiated it;
- How it was managed;
- Whom it targeted;
- How it operated; and
- What the initiators' definition of citizen journalism was and why they considered the project to fit that definition.

It also provided the general contextual framework within which citizen journalism was practised. This part of the analysis served to give a detailed analysis of the contextual and other factors that influence the practice of citizen journalism both at the personal and institutional levels. Here, it was important for the research assistants to probe as hard as possible, so that the respondent spoke from their own lived experiences. Probing questions included:

- Progressive policy and regulatory frameworks (e.g. enabling laws, etc.)

- Ideological drive (e.g. Was it explicitly aimed at democracy-building?)
- Technological drive (Was the project driven by the presence of a particular technology?)
- Economic and financial aims (Was the citizen journalism project likely to earn anyone money in the long run?)
- Communicational objectives (To what extent did the project service the communication goals of an institution?)
- Donor funding (Was the project more amenable to [donor] funding)
- Ease of operation (Was the project easier to do – not as demanding as conventional journalism, for example?)
- Limited access to conventional media and journalism (Was it driven by an absence – by whatever measure – of conventional journalism or media?)
- Is there a 'business model' of citizen journalism that the project has adopted, if at all?

The technological basis of citizen journalism

This feature of the research sought to probe a lot more into the issue of the technology – including the relevant software – that powers citizen journalism. Questions asked included:

- Which technologies better serve citizen journalism and democracy? For example, does Twitter necessarily lead to robust debate and deliberation by citizens?
- What should be the technical and journalistic skills of citizen journalists, if at all?
- Is there a case for 'converged journalism' and multi-skilling of journalists in Africa?
- What is the role of free software and open source in supporting Africans to have a voice in cyberspace?
- Is mobile technology the future of journalism?

The uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media

This section of the study was meant to sample responses from especially media houses to understand how they saw themselves fitting into citizen journalism. The assumption here was that some media houses had launched their own citizen journalism projects, such as the iReport by CNN, in order to rope citizens into institutionalised forms of citizen journalism. Questions here included:

- How do conventional media view the notion of citizen journalism?
- How have they responded to the phenomenon of citizen journalism?
- What is the 'business model' of the citizen journalism project embarked upon by the media house, if any?
- If they have no such project in place, do they see themselves initiating one in the future?

Also relevant here were issues of the ethical basis of the practice of citizen journalism, in particular probing such questions as:

- What is your understanding of the concept of citizen journalism?
- How does it differ from conventional journalism?

- Was this notion of citizen journalism a paramount consideration in the initial design of the project?
- Is the concept a passing fad, occasioned largely by techno-hype? Or is it an enduring process of change? How do you know that?

The democratic value of citizen journalism

This section focused on the extent to which the initiators of the projects saw their project as an agent of democratic change or transformation. In particular, it attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

- How does the citizen journalism project under review serve citizens?
- Which 'citizens' are being served by the project? (e.g. children, youths, women, etc.), and why?
- Are there any quality control measures – both at personal and institutional levels – that exist to manage the citizen journalism project?
- Has there been any notable impact that the project has registered on the target and non-target citizens which is worth sharing with others? Here, it was important for the research assistants to seek monitoring and evaluation documentation to verify the claims to impact. Where such documentation did not exist, it was important for the research assistants to get as much anecdotal evidence as possible from the respondents.
- Have there been any ethical issues which the project has had to face? If so, explain. If not, why not?
- Does citizen journalism require any special skills at all? If so, explain. If not, explain.

Related to the democratic value of citizen journalism was the overall question about how its practice was underpinned by democratic principles. As such, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- What is your understanding of democracy?
- How has citizen journalism, if at all, become part of the democracy project? Here, the respondent could be challenged to think in terms of: (a) ownership of communication channels; (b) participation by ordinary citizens; (c) perceived power to hold public officials to account; (d) access and accessibility (e.g. women do not have as much access to the internet as men); (e) deliberation or thoughtful debate among citizens; (f) decision-making or action by citizens (e.g. voting as a result of debate); (g) interactivity; etc.
- What features of democracy are better served by citizen journalism, and which ones are not?



Chapter Three:

A Contextualisation of Citizen Journalism

The media and communications landscape has changed in ways that make it possible for envisioning a more engaged citizen participation in journalism. This possibility is discussed in terms of the following features: (i) globalisation of democratisation; (ii) deregulation of the media landscape; (iii) the overcommercialisation of state media; (iv) the communitarian agenda for the democratisation of journalistic communication; and (v) the rapid emergence and adoption of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The globalisation of democratisation

The 1990s saw the collapse of state socialism and the consolidation of capitalism worldwide, marked by a dramatic intensification of public awareness of democratisation. This is particularly evident in the way most African systems of government changed from authoritarian to liberal forms of democracy. This would seem to agree with those who place the media in Africa in what they call 'the two waves of democracy'. The 'first wave' refers to the colonial period. In other words, it sees the African-nationalist struggles for independence from colonial rule as an agenda for democratisation. This initial wave was effaced soon after independence, giving way to a 'second wave' of post-colonialism (Hyden & Okigbo 2002). Indeed, some scholars refer to this process as Africa's 'second liberation' to underscore the betrayed hopes surrounding the liberation from colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s (Diamond & Plattner 1999), and the renewed hope for a democratic renaissance or 'redemocratisation' on the African continent.

The globalisation of democracy has implications for citizen participation in journalistic work. These include the following:

- Traditional journalism can be questioned in terms of how it represents different sections of the population purely on the principle of democratic representativity.
- Conventional media and journalism must 'democratise' their occupational practices in order to encourage the participation of more and diverse opinions.
- The work practices of the media can be viewed in terms of their relationship to the wider societal processes and institutions of democratisation.

The deregulation of the media landscape

The 1990s saw the unfolding of the process of liberalisation from Cape to Cairo, with corresponding deregulatory policy and legislative changes. The discourse of liberalisation led many countries in Africa to promulgate liberal-economic media and information policies. The emergence of a multiplicity of privately owned commercial broadcast and print media channels during this period was attributable to this deregulatory wave, which stressed the pre-eminence of private capital over state capital.

The point to underscore is that there was a rekindling of African private media capital, largely as a consequence of the liberal-economic policies adopted across Africa, presenting further opportunities to grow media as businesses and to inject pluralism into the local media spaces. While this was more pronounced in some countries, it was less so in others.

The implications for citizen journalism could be summed up as follows:

- There is a plurality of media platforms, theoretically providing more opportunities for citizens to experiment with citizen-journalistic communication.
- There is so much competition for sources of information that the base of possible sources is likely to be diversified, suggesting that conventional journalism will rely on citizen journalists for some of its production. Arguably, this is likely to result in greater use of people hitherto marginalised from mainstream media.
- There is a greater opportunity for citizens to own their own media and counter the effects of years of reportorial neglect occasioned by an unhealthy concentration of media ownership.
- With new media outlets set up in far flung areas, such as community radio stations, the likelihood of achieving universal access to media by citizens is such that it could fuel interest in localised forms of journalism, including citizen journalism.

The overcommercialisation of state media

Along with this political and economic liberalisation was a tendency towards greater commercialisation of media, especially state-owned media. The competition ensuing from privatised media ownership entailed the need to survive. As a result, state-owned media systems, for example, are restructuring in response to the commercial imperative. Even the birth of community radio stations, while heralding the growth of a more pluralistic media environment, has had to face up to questions of financial sustainability.

This competitive environment will negatively impact on the ability by media houses to employ and retain experienced staff. There will be fewer financial resources for media organisations to experiment with more innovative content of a public-interest nature. In such a situation, citizen journalists may just provide a pool of readily available human resource from which such media houses could possibly hire their new generation of journalists. Indeed, one could argue that the conditions are ripe for a possible exploitation of labour, but the irony is that it is precisely the use of

citizen journalists that could further open up the media to greater citizen participation.

The commercialisation of state-owned media is, in part, a response to the privatisation of the media industry. In the wake of de-regulatory economic policies, a coterie of private financiers emerged to invest in media business. This resulted in the formation of hundreds of FM radio stations across the continent. These were to pose competition to the largely state-owned broadcast media. Associated with the tendency towards privatisation were seemingly irreconcilable consequences: the creation of more communicative spaces and the reliance by media producers on less serious political content and more entertainment fare. Although this was a general trend, we must be careful to note that there were, and still are, private and commercial FM stations that have embraced the kind of talk-radio genre which has created a political public sphere of sorts, where people phone in with comments on a range of political and social issues. It is here that opportunities for citizen journalism abound.

The communitarian agenda for the democratisation of journalistic communication

Communitarian forms of democratisation would emphasise the potential of journalism to build a sense of 'community' among citizens. Here, the logic is that such a form of journalistic communication would seek to privilege a deeper, more participatory form of democracy in which communities influence the news-media agenda. This would become a direct challenge to both the state and commercial media. As an aspect of plurality, it would entail greater communicative spaces for different activist groups. There is evidence, in the country case studies reviewed in this study, to show that different forms of citizen journalism are increasingly becoming the latest frontier for journalistic communication. But this does not mean it is a medium devoid of problems – there are numerous.

Some of the most important implications of communitarian forms of journalistic communication for the citizenry include:

- Greater access for citizens.
- More use of community voices in news stories.
- The possibility for citizens to own and operate media platforms.
- Greater community 'ownership' of the news story.
- Competition to the elitism of state and commercial media.
- Greater opportunity to experiment with more participatory approaches to journalistic production.

The rapid emergence and adoption of new ICTs

The advent of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has ushered in a new era of new media, signalling unbounded possibilities for citizen journalism. But we need to be careful in our approach to new media technologies as enablers of citizen journalism. Part of that approach involves a definition of technology itself. In other words, citizen journalism does not just happen within the confines of new media technologies – it can happen

even within the context of traditional and conventional media.

ICTs have come to be perceived as a catalyst in engendering democracy and development in Africa. According to Dzidonu (2000:16), within the context of Africa, ICTs can be classified as *traditional*, *conventional* and *modern*. 'Traditional' ICTs were rife in the pre-colonial period and the 'conventional' ICTs in the colonial period. However, according to Dzidonu, both these have been supplemented – but by no means superseded – by the 'modern' ICTs. Modern ICTs have come to dominate sub-Saharan African information and communication policies.

At the centre of the ICT debate – and the place of citizen journalism in it – is the problem of access, which needs to be underscored. Throughout this study, we indicate this problem if only to demonstrate the need for appropriate policies to address it. Nulens (1997) identifies three key sub-problems: (i) operational; (ii) contextual; and (iii) strategic. *Operational* problems have to do with the lack of technical efficiency of power-plants, the low quality of the African electricity network and the inaccessibility of transmission channels, such as satellites. *Contextual* problems refer to the apprehension that the transfer of Western technology only leads to economic and cultural dependency. In other words, technology is not neutral, and ICT policies must thus take into account the potential socio-cultural problems in the appropriation of technology. *Strategy* problems are largely due to some telecommunications transnational companies whose business interests may go against the national-developmental aspirations of African countries. Such companies tend to influence international policy-making institutions, such as the World Bank, on ICT matters (Nulens 1997:6).

Despite these problems, Africa is at the centre of the debate about how modern ICT, especially the internet, can enhance its development strategies in education, health, commerce, and other sectors. Many countries have concerned themselves with the development of a national ICT infrastructure, including aspects of regulation, universal service provision, technological convergence (the coalescence of hitherto discrete media forms and processes through digital technologies), mechanisms to fund universal service rollout, the structure of markets and competition, etc. (James 2001:159).

To some extent, these debates have been carried on within the framework of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)'s African Information Society Initiative (AISI). The AISI was launched in 1996 to: (i) bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world; (ii) create effective digital opportunities by Africans and their partners; and (iii) speed the continent's entry into the information and knowledge global economy (UNECA 2006). The AISI reflects a global move towards embracing ICT as the engine of economic growth in Africa, affording hitherto technologically backward societies an opportunity to leapfrog some stages of development to achieve an 'information society' or 'knowledge society'. Africa's participation in the United Nations (UN)'s World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was thus critical. The Summit was held in two phases, the first in Geneva in 2003 and the second in Tunis in 2005.

The formulation of ICT policy in most of Africa has generally proceeded along the liberal-deregulatory trajectory, inviting foreign direct investment into the ICT sector. Using the ICT Opportunity Index (ICT-OI), a model based

on the measurable notions of *Infodensity* and *Info-use*, it is evident that sub-Saharan Africa still lags behind in the development of ICT infrastructure and skills as well as in the increase in ICT uptake and intensity of use.

For example, 51 sub-Saharan African countries, which altogether accounted for about 14% of the global population in 2005, recorded a regional average ICT-OI value of just 55. This is well below the global average of 147.6 (Orbicom 2007: 1-6). African countries with a relatively high ICT-OI value include Mauritius (the only African country above the global average), Seychelles, South Africa and Tunisia, while countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Niger, the Central African Republic and Ethiopia are at the low end of the ICT-OI value, both within the African group and worldwide (Orbicom 2007: 1-6).

It is important to note that the penetration of mobile telecommunications has since the 1990s been generally higher than that of fixed telecommunications – a point that we shall make repeatedly in the light of the citizen journalism projects reviewed here. The growth of mobile networks averages four times that of wire-line networks. The penetration of cell phones, in particular, has surpassed the availability of fixed lines, with the exception of Libya, Comoros, Ethiopia and Eritrea. For countries like South Africa, Gabon, Seychelles and Tunisia, cell phones exceed fixed lines by a huge margin (Orbicom 2007: 19).

Most available evidence suggests that South Africa, Seychelles and Tunisia are leading this ICT revolution. It is important to mention, however, that intra-national disparities exist in access to and uptake of ICT. Such disparities manifest across race, class, sex and other demographic indicators.

AFRICA	Population (2008 Est.)	Internet Users Dec/2000	Internet Users Latest Data	Penetration (% Population)	User Growth (2000-2008)	% Users in Africa
Algeria	33,769,669	50,000	3,500,000	10.4 %	6,900 %	6.5 %
Angola	12,531,357	30,000	498,000	4.0 %	1,560.0 %	0.9 %
Benin	8,532,547	15,000	150,000	1.8 %	900.0 %	0.3 %
Botswana	1,952,048	15,000	100,000	5.1 %	566.7 %	0.2 %
Burkina Faso	15,264,735	10,000	80,000	0.5 %	700.0 %	0.1 %
Burundi	8,691,005	3,000	60,000	0.7 %	1,900.0 %	0.1 %
Cameroon	18,467,692	20,000	370,000	2.0 %	1,750.0 %	0.7 %
Cape Verde	426,998	8,000	37,000	8.7 %	362.5 %	0.1 %
Central African Rep.	4,444,330	1,500	13,000	0.3 %	766.7 %	0.0 %
Chad	10,111,337	1,000	60,000	0.6 %	5,900.0 %	0.1 %
Comoros	731,775	1,500	21,000	2.9 %	1,300.0 %	0.0 %
Congo	3,905,010	500	70,000	1.8 %	13,900.0 %	0.1 %
Congo, Dem. Rep.	66,514,506	500	230,400	0.3 %	45,980.0 %	0.4 %
Cote d'Ivoire	20,179,602	40,000	300,000	1.5 %	650.0 %	0.6 %
Djibouti	506,221	1,400	11,000	2.2 %	685.7 %	0.0 %
Egypt	81,713,517	450,000	10,532,400	12.9 %	2,240.5 %	19.4 %
Equatorial Guinea	616,459	500	8,000	1.3 %	1,500.0 %	0.0 %
Eritrea	5,502,026	5,000	120,000	2.2 %	2,300.0 %	0.2 %
Ethiopia	82,544,838	10,000	291,000	0.4 %	2,810.0 %	0.5 %
Gabon	1,485,832	15,000	82,000	5.5 %	446.7 %	0.2 %
Gambia	1,735,464	4,000	100,200	5.8 %	2,405.0 %	0.2 %
Ghana	23,382,848	30,000	880,000	3.8 %	2,833.3 %	1.6 %
Guinea	9,806,509	8,000	50,000	0.5 %	525.0 %	0.1 %
Guinea-Bissau	1,503,182	1,500	37,000	2.5 %	2,366.7 %	0.1 %
Kenya	37,953,838	200,000	3,000,000	7.9 %	1,400.0 %	5.5 %
Lesotho	2,128,180	4,000	70,000	3.3 %	1,650.0 %	0.1 %
Liberia	3,334,587	500	20,000	0.6 %	3,900.0 %	0.0 %
Libya	6,173,579	10,000	260,000	4.2 %	2,500.0 %	0.5 %

Madagascar	20,042,551	30,000	110,000	0.5 %	266.7 %	0.2 %
Malawi	13,931,831	15,000	139,500	1.0 %	830.0 %	0.3 %
Mali	12,324,029	18,800	100,000	0.8 %	431.9 %	0.2 %
Mauritania	3,054,933	5,000	30,000	1.0 %	500.0 %	0.1 %
Mauritius	1,274,189	87,000	340,000	26.7 %	290.8 %	0.6 %
Mayotte (FR)	216,306	---	---	---	---	0.0 %
Morocco	34,343,219	100,000	6,600,000	19.2 %	6,500.0 %	12.2 %
Mozambique	21,284,701	30,000	200,000	0.9 %	566.7 %	0.4 %
Namibia	2,088,669	30,000	101,000	4.8 %	236.7 %	0.2 %
Niger	14,752,080	5,000	40,000	0.3 %	700.0 %	0.1 %
Nigeria	146,255,306	200,000	10,000,000	6.8 %	4,900.0 %	18.5 %
Reunion (FR)	803,209	130,000	220,000	27.4 %	69.2 %	0.4 %
Rwanda	10,186,063	5,000	100,000	1.0 %	1,900.0 %	0.2 %
Saint Helena (UK)	7,601	n/a	1,000	13.2 %	n/a	0.0 %
Sao Tome & Principe	206,178	6,500	23,000	11.2 %	253.8 %	0.0 %
Senegal	13,343,424	40,000	820,000	6.1 %	1,950.0 %	1.5 %
Seychelles	86,595	6,000	32,000	37.0 %	433.3 %	0.1 %
Sierra Leone	6,294,774	5,000	13,000	0.2 %	160.0 %	0.0 %
Somalia	9,558,666	200	98,000	1.0 %	48,900.0 %	0.2 %
South Africa	48,782,755	2,400,000	4,590,000	9.4 %	91.3 %	8.5 %
Sudan	40,218,455	30,000	3,500,000	8.7 %	11,566.7 %	6.5 %
Swaziland	1,128,814	10,000	42,000	3.7 %	320.0 %	0.1 %
Tanzania	40,213,162	115,000	400,000	1.0 %	247.8 %	0.7 %
Togo	5,858,673	100,000	320,000	5.5 %	220.0 %	0.6 %
Tunisia	10,383,577	100,000	2,800,000	27.0 %	2,700.0 %	5.2 %
Uganda	31,367,972	40,000	750,000	2.4 %	1,775.0 %	1.4 %
Western Sahara	393,831	---	---	---	---	0.0 %
Zambia	11,669,534	20,000	500,000	4.3 %	2,400.0 %	0.9 %
Zimbabwe	11,350,111	50,000	1,351,000	11.9 %	2,602.0 %	2.5 %
TOTAL AFRICA	975,330,899	4,514,400	54,171,500	5.6 %	1,100.0 %	100.0 %

For such countries as Cameroun, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia, the significance of cell phones is evident when one considers the fact that they constitute the only feasible telecommunications option (Orbicom 2007: 19).

The importance of the foregoing discussion lies in the fact that ICTs have given rise to new ways of citizen interaction with the media. For example, phone-in programmes on both radio and television are now employing text messaging to get people's views on a range of topics. This is redefining the concepts of universal service and access in terms of new media technological opportunities for greater interaction between professional communicators and ordinary citizens. Newspapers are now readily available online, some of them complete with interactive facilities for their online readers. Although still on a limited scale, this is serving to 'democratise' media. Although this is an optimistic view of new media technology, it still leaves room for interrogating the types of content available on such new media platforms and the terms under which such content is consumed.

Efforts at developing and expanding ICT-enabled citizen journalism in Africa must thus be viewed in terms of the dynamics outlined above. Analysing the production and consumption of citizen journalism in Africa is thus complex, in part because of the fact that the technologies that make the production and consumption of citizen journalism possible are not widespread. In many ways, this is an issue of economics and politics. Many sub-Saharan African countries have other economic priorities, such as poverty reduction. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the adoption of ICT policy frameworks now includes how such countries see ICTs becoming an integral part of their poverty reduction strategies. An analysis of such policy documents indicates how such countries as Cameroun, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia position ICTs as part of their integrated development strategy. In many cases, such policy frameworks mirror both technological-determinist and social-shaping-of-technology assumptions, looking at technology as both a means and an end in itself. This perhaps indicates the more ideal way of looking at the role of technology in national development, as our discussion of the conceptual framework of citizen journalism and the place of technology in it will show.

The production and consumption of citizen journalism thus becomes both an input and output of technological innovation. However, as suggested in **Table 1** above, producing and consuming citizen journalism – most of it associated with internet penetration and usage – cannot be easily compared to the rest of the world, as **Figures 1** and **2** below demonstrate.

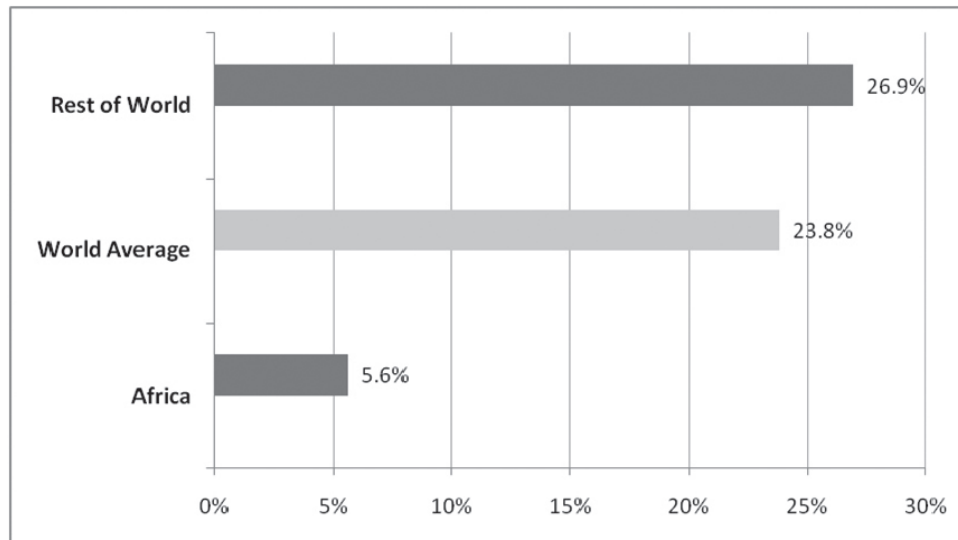


Figure 1: Internet penetration in Africa - March 2009 (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2009)

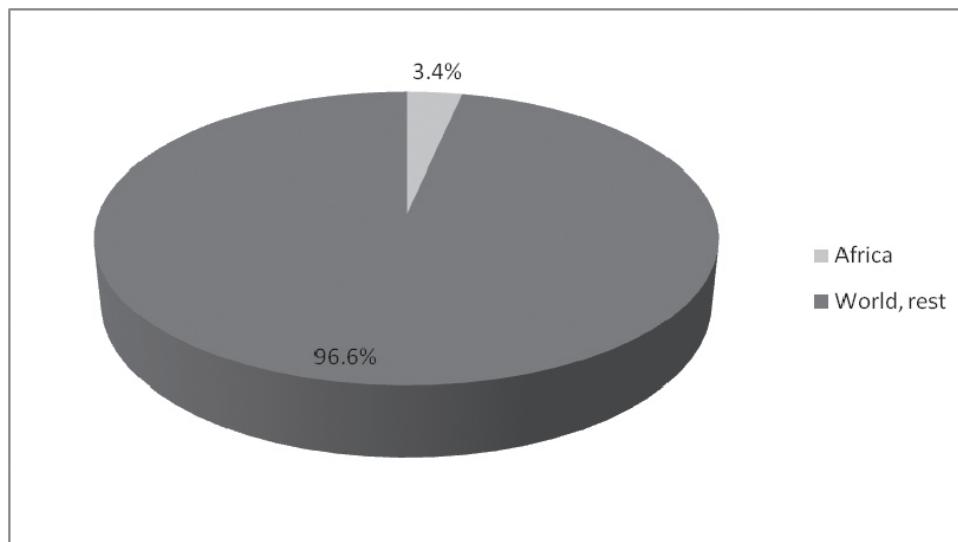


Figure 2: Internet users in Africa - March 2009 (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2009)

While internet penetration in Africa is 5.6 percent, internet use is only at 3.4 percent. On the other hand, internet usage for the rest of the world stands at 96.6 percent. If one were to disaggregate internet usage across gender, class, race, and other variables, one would conclude that the internet is still a largely elitist medium in Africa. As such, the practice of internet-based forms of citizen journalism, while clearly a novelty for many, is still a long way from becoming a 'mass' reality that can transform African societies.

Be that as it may, internet use has facilitated the development of a blogosphere that has made possible the practice of citizen journalism. There are anecdotes which demonstrate this phenomenon in different African countries. In fact, some manifestations of citizen journalism have become a money-earning venture for several citizen journalists, who now find it easier to lock into institutional media as 'freelance' journalists. In addition, it is possible for web-bloggers whose postings attract a significantly large number of hits to look for advertisers for their cyberspatial 'market'. But how sustainable such a citizen-journalistic venture can be in the long run is yet to be established.

Regardless of the low internet penetration levels, it is true that some new media technologies are developing at such a fast rate that there is a possibility of mass communication encapsulated in them. For example, cell phone use has outstripped fixed land-line use in most of Africa, suggesting that it is probably becoming an important part of Africa's communication culture. As we note in a subsequent section, there is a possibility of mobile technology becoming a seventh mass medium – the first six being print, sound recording, cinema, radio, television, and the internet. With the possibility of the use of the internet becoming a regular feature of mobile communication, the likelihood of the internet itself becoming a mass medium among Africans is very real indeed.

As Paul Budde Communication Pty Ltd (2009) observes:

Mobile phones represent around 90% of all telephone lines in Africa. The continent's mobile market is consistently growing at around 50 to 60% every year. Enormous further potential remains, with market penetration standing at little more than 20%. Due to Africa's poor fixed-line infrastructure, the mobile networks are beginning to play an increasing role in Internet service provision as well, following the launch of third-generation (3G) services in a number of markets – a welcome new revenue stream in an environment of low Average Revenue per User (ARPU) levels. Newly introduced converged licensing regimes have increased the competitive pressure in a number of key markets but also allow the mobile operators to branch out into new service segments.

Mobile telephony and the potential for citizen journalism in Africa

Could such an exponential rise in mobile telephony signal a potential interest and surge in citizen-journalistic communication? In theory, it could. Arguably, the widespread ownership and usage of mobile phones could provide citizen journalists with a ready-made audience for their journalistic outputs, but this does not say anything about the impact of those outputs. Nor does it guarantee any legitimacy.

The idea that mobile is becoming increasingly mass-pervasive has led Tomi T. Ahonen (2008) to refer to it as the

seventh of the mass media. He points out that although the internet radically impacted our lives in the 15 years of its existence, mobile is likely to have much more influence. As part of that mobile revolution, the iPhone – internet-based phone – represents a milestone as an all-purpose communication and community-building device.

Some anecdotes can be cited to explain the new power of mobile as a mass medium. These include:

- The successful use of mobile communications in organising political campaigns, as is evidenced by Barack Obama’s reliance on his BlackBerry to connect with the masses of his supporters.
- The unprecedented use in Iran of mobile communications to organise protests against what were seen by the opposition as fraudulent elections.

Although the success of Barack Obama’s electoral campaign can be attributed to other factors than his BlackBerry, it is clear that it facilitated access to the mass of actual and potential voters. While we cannot accurately predict the consequences of mobile communications as a citizen-journalism enabler, it is easy to see why it promises much by way of allowing for greater access to the vast populations in African countries. This can be made possible by the near-ubiquitous access to mobile communications. As Ahonen (2008) suggests, there has been phenomenal increase in the numbers of people who own mobile communication gadgetry. To cite some of his arguments:

- By October 2007, the population of the world was 6.6 billion while that of cell phones was 3.3 billion.
- While 90 percent of those who own a cell phone keep it at arm’s length, more than 60 percent take it to bed with them. It is also the last thing many such people look at before falling asleep and it acts as an alarm clock to wake them up.

But again, these statistics need to be taken with much care, when it comes to Africa. While it is true that mobile communication is developing at a faster rate than fixed telephony, it is not immediately clear how mobile-mediated citizen journalism can become a successful phenomenon. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, while Africa has benefited from the import of sophisticated mobile gadgetry, mobile service providers are not able to provide all the services that could potentially make mobile communications more amenable to citizen journalism. For example, in some countries, many such providers are not able as yet to provide services like Digital Video Broadcasting – Handheld (DVB-H) – a mobile TV format.

Secondly, even if such services were readily available, it is not possible for a majority of Africans to afford them. This would severely limit the extent to which such services could be consumed. As a corollary of this, more innovative citizen journalists would find it difficult to harness all the inbuilt technological features that such cell phones come with. This explains why SMS has become a key feature of Africa’s communication ecosystem – it is cheaper than making an actual call, for example. This is why it has been part of some of the strategies of media companies in Africa, such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)’s ‘Newsbreak’ subscription service – an example of news on demand. It is the SMS feature of mobile that citizen journalists can exploit to their advantage, but it has technical limitations of its own, including the fact that it cannot accommodate very large data sets.

Having analysed the general media and communication context within which citizen journalism occurs, it is now necessary to consider the more conceptual aspects of the phenomenon.

Chapter Four:

A Conceptualisation of Citizen Journalism

The general notion of citizen media – and therefore the specific one of citizen journalism – can be located in a multiplicity of critiques against conventional mass media and journalism. The very idea of ‘mass’ media has invited criticism by those who see the concept of ‘mass’ as designating a largely indistinct actual and potential audience or public for the media. As McQuail (1987) points out, the idea of the mass public can be variously conceptualised. It should be evident, even on casual evaluation, that the term ‘public’ can mean a number of different things in different contexts. It can refer to an aggregated mass, all, or some members of a society, an audience, or the citizenry (McQuail 1987: 29).

Normative media theory

McQuail reminds us that the institution of mass communication was initially conceived of in terms of a professional organisation whose messages were manufactured, common, and predictable. Mass communication was a commodity, having exchange and use value. It was unidirectional and defined by a sense of impersonality due to the role of the public communicator requiring a high degree of neutrality and detachment (McQuail 1987: 32).

McQuail goes further to remind us that mass media use can be located within a continuum that extends from a universal allocutive domination by powerful, centralised sources of messages towards smaller-scale, localised exchanges of information and ideas (McQuail 1987: 39). This localisation thus shows that smaller groups exist within the mass, where mass communication is absorbed into and shapes minority and localised cultures.

The conceptual difficulty associated with ‘fitting’ so many individuals of varied and diverse backgrounds and experiences and interests into *one* collective called the *public* gives rise to doubts about how conventional mass media can meet the felt needs of different segments of the citizenry. It is this dissatisfaction with the *institutional* basis of conventional media that has caused their proponents to question the role the mass media can play in the *body politic*. Because at the core of citizen media and therefore citizen journalism lies the idea of subverting the institutional solidification of mass media, it is important to analyse how mass media are institutionalised.

Mass media as institutions

The term 'institution' can be defined as:

Enduring regulatory and organising structures of any society, which constrain and control individuals and individuality – the underlying principles and values according to which many social and cultural practices are organised and co-ordinated – the major social sources of codes, rules and relations (in Branson & Stafford 2003: 182).

The above refers to institutions in a general sense. Needless to say, different disciplinary fields – anthropology, classical economics, political economy, psychology, sociology, etc. – will have some specific elements to emphasise. The different disciplinary perspectives on institutions have coalesced into the framework of what is called 'institutional analysis'. *Institutional analysis* has the following general themes:

- The visible structures and routines that make up organisations are direct reflections and effects of rules and structures built into (or institutionalised within) wider environments (i.e. cultural and symbolic patterns of society).
- The dependence of organisations on the patterning built up in wider environments – rather than on purely internal technical and functional logic – produces organisational forms that are often rather loosely integrated structures (i.e. there is a disjuncture between the internal and the external, largely because stable organising requires and results from external legitimation).
- The environmental patterns that drive organising work through linkages and effects go beyond simple direct control (i.e. institutionalised social and cultural meanings as opposed to just adherence to legal and economic rationality).
- The environmental patterns that create and change organisations can be described as rationalised and rationalising (i.e. long-term processes of rationalisation – scientific and professional, cultural and ideological, political and organisational – contribute towards continual possibilities and necessities for expanding and changing organisations) (Scott et al 1994).

Based upon the above broad themes, Richard Scott et al (1994: 56-64) propose what they call a 'layered model' of conceptualising institutions. This model has three elements, namely:

1. Meaning systems and related behaviour patterns, which contain
2. Symbolic elements, including representational, constitutive and normative components, that are
3. Enforced by regulatory processes.

To explicate these elements: By 'meaning systems' is meant the subjective meanings attached to individual behaviour within organisations. This subjective meaning constitutes what Max Weber refers to as 'social action' in so far as it takes into account the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course (in Scott et al 1996:

57). In other words, shared meanings are indispensable to collective activity. Arising from this, the authors present various definitions of institution, to buttress the idea of how institutions become congealed in a particular sense.

By 'behaviour patterns' is meant the 'social action' – the 'informal logic of actual life' – that arises in the interaction of humans. Meanings arise in interaction, and they are preserved and modified by human behaviour (Scott et al 1996: 59).

By 'symbolic elements' is meant the elevation of the meaning systems to incorporate representational, constitutive, and normative rules. *Representational rules* are the 'institutional logics' which establish the framework within which knowledge claims are situated and provide the rules by which the claims are validated and challenged. The 'institutional logics' are the knowledge claims, whether empirically tested or not, which govern ways of organising.

Constitutive rules define the nature of actors and their capacity for action. Constitutive rules are the institutional rules which empower or constrain individuals to pursue certain courses of action. It assumes that certain behaviour is possible given the extent to which the interests of individuals, their rights, and their capacities for action are provided for by specific rules. Institutions, in short, 'construct' actors; it is the institutional structure of society which creates and legitimates the social entities that are seen as 'actors'. Four component elements entailed in the social construction of an actor can be discerned, namely: endowments (e.g. property rights); utilities (an actor's preferences); capabilities (capacity to act, resources); and self-identities (internalised definitions of social location or role).

Normative rules, for their part, refer to conceptions of appropriate behaviour – what we *ought* to do. They may be general, applicable to all. They may be specific to some people. They often become internalised as a result of socialisation. In a word, they are not simply anticipations or predictions, but prescriptions or proscriptions of behaviour.

The features described above can, after Branson & Stafford (2003), be applied in an institutional analysis of journalism. In a word, the foregoing discussion serves to help us understand the key definitional features of journalism as an institutionalised practice. Understanding citizen journalism necessarily involves understanding the institutional trapping or ensnaring of conventional journalism.

To take Branson and Stafford's characterisation of the institutional basis of journalism, and mindful of Scott et al's (1994: 56-64) layered model of institutions, there are six variables that can be used to define how journalism lends itself to institutionalisation. These are: (i) establishment; (ii) regulation; (iii) collectivism; (iv) work; (v) values; and (vi) status.

- **Establishment:** Conventional mass media have an enduring history, going as far back as the period before the invention of the 1450 Gutenberg printing press prototype in the form of one-sheet *corantos*. Since then, it has passed through different phases of growth, cultivating in its wake established meanings and practices.

To the extent that each country has a form of mass media system, complete with a historical context, mass media, and the associated institutionalised practices of journalism, can be treated as an 'establishment'. As such, conventional journalism tends, if it can help it, to bar any outside intrusion into its historical space, expurgating as *unprofessional* practices that would want to deinstitutionalise it. Citizen journalism would thus rightly fit into a frame of practice that would conflict with the historically grounded ways of practising journalism, perhaps indicating why some traditional journalists look upon it with a degree of disdain and mistrust.

- **Regulation:** Institutions regulate and structure their activities. Mass media are no exception – they are given to various regulatory regimes. In most jurisdictions, for example, journalism has adopted ethical codes of conduct to constrain its members or practitioners. These codes are enforced by professional bodies that are voluntary in nature. The debate is still raging as to what is the best mode of regulating the practice of journalism. The dominant paradigm is that journalism must be self-directing or regulatory. In Africa, and elsewhere, there are questions about whether or not self-regulation does not amount to self-service (Ogus 1995; Campbell 1999). To the extent that citizen journalism has not accumulated sufficient historical capital (*see the above point*), it has not evolved sophisticated codes of practice which lend themselves to the kind of system of self-regulation that most traditional journalism has. It thus would appear to exist on the fringes of mainstream journalism.
- **Collectivism:** Although mass media operations revolve around different specialisms (reporting, sub-editing, designing, photo-journalism, anchoring, directing, producing, etc.), they are a collectivist undertaking. Although there is a hierarchy of executive and editorial decision-making – themselves a testament of the institutionalised nature of media production – media activity organises individuals and individuality around teamwork to deliver a unitary output, i.e. news bulletin, documentary, etc. Journalism is therefore built around team-work or collectivism. Even free-lance journalists – some of whom have arrogated to themselves the status of 'citizen journalists' – end up having their work collectivised as soon as it gets into the organisational/institutional mainstream of media production. This is an important point to make because it raises questions about whether or not certain types of citizen journalism can indeed be as revolutionary as is often claimed (cf. Moyo 2009).
- **Work:** Journalism has some specific entry-points. Ordinarily, there are schools of journalism that churn out journalists. Where this is not done, entrants are trained on the job, and conform to some specific house styles of writing or producing news stories. Training institutions offer some certification to entitle one to work as a journalist. In some countries, journalists are required to be registered by a relevant body to work as such. In other countries this is not the case. There is no rigid system of certification for citizen journalists.

Journalists are also members of trade unions in most media organisations and can bargain for better terms and conditions of service. Free-lance journalists – many of whom are joining the so-called cadre of citizen journalists – are not as organised. This leaves them open to all forms of labour abuse by media organisations. Indeed, even those who do not really consider themselves to be trained journalists but nevertheless contribute

user-generated-content (UGC) to media organisations can be similarly abused. For example, it is not clear whether or not CNN's iReporters are remunerated in any way. Now, the counter argument might be that CNN – and other organisations like it – is providing a public space for citizens to express themselves, thereby enhancing the enjoyment of freedom of expression. But these are issues – potentially bordering on economic exploitation – which the notion of citizen journalism is engendering across the globe.

- **Values:** Media work is often underpinned by a shared sense of values. This is translated into a set of ethics, represented in codes of ethical principles. These may be an appropriation of internationally agreed ethical standards and contextualised to guide the practices and routines in a given media institution. The ethical value of journalistic objectivity has received much attention in academic literature, and we must treat it here within the context of news production. Because the standard of 'objectivity' is justified as a quality-control measure, it is important to discuss it at some length here – at least in as far as it is important to distinguish it from some forms of citizen journalism. The first point to make, therefore, is this: journalism was not always objective. In early times of journalistic expression, journalists fought for liberal democratic rights of freedom of expression and intellectual dissent in authoritarian feudalistic societies. They were thus partisan, placing themselves in the service of the radical bourgeoisie and its struggles for intellectual pluralism, etc. (McNair 2001).

According to McNair (2001: 68-69), the emergence of objectivity was a function of three moments in history: (i) philosophical; (ii) technological; and (iii) economic. The philosophy of objectivity was part of the nineteenth century Reformation and Enlightenment developments, with their emphasis on the positivistic method of discovering 'truth' or 'knowledge' 'out there'. Technological advances in the 1830s, such as the invention of photography, coincided with this philosophically inspired search for objective truth. It became possible – so they thought – to represent 'reality' denotatively. Objectivity was also a by-product of a developing commercial market for journalism in the nineteenth century. This process led to the commodification of journalism and increased the need of journalistic media to sell their product (news) to ever broader markets. As newspapers became capitalist enterprises in the 1830s and after, they gradually lost their party affiliation (McNair 2001: 68-69). It was no longer viable to be partisan when the audience began to be seen as de-politicised consumers of media products whose loyalties were only to themselves.

By the twentieth century, the key 'strategic ritual' of objectivity had become the principal legitimising ethic, presenting journalism as 'truth'. Objectivity thus became associated with the following characteristics: (i) the separation of fact from opinion; (ii) a balanced account of a debate; and (iii) the validation of journalistic statements by reference to authoritative others (McNair 2001: 69).

These three characteristics have become 'objectivated' in the hierarchical nature of the news production process, based as it is on the 'gate-keeping' mechanism.

But objectivity is criticised by critical political economists as untenable. The processes of news production, according to this view, are tangled up in the media-institutional relationships with the economic sub-structure

which is controlled by the capitalist/ruling class. Journalistic objectivity becomes nothing but 'bourgeois objectivism' (McNair 2001: 70), so that there is no neutral, value-free perspective from which the journalist can observe and report. In fact, the concept of 'objectivity' is seen as the legitimising ideology to cover the output of cultural institutions which are owned and/or controlled by a small elite of capitalist entrepreneurs and establishment figures (McNair 2001: 72).

There have since emerged other ways of discounting the notion of objectivity, such as: (i) cultural relativism, whereby there is no single absolute truth but a multiplicity of available accounts from which the journalist has to select and construct 'news'; (ii) the 'new journalism', whereby the 1960s saw a group of US journalists, frustrated by the fetishisation of the objectivity principle and limits which they believed it placed on their work, broke free of the conventions of their profession and began to develop a subversive, 'anti-objective' style; and (iii) 'public journalism', whereby journalists see themselves as citizens and thus become engaged in the process of constructing reality as they go about covering issues and events (cf. McNair 2001: 72).

It is these epistemic shifts that have made it possible for citizen journalism to find a place in the scheme of journalistic practice. But, as we shall see in our discussion of the concept of citizen journalism, problems still abound, leading some to identify three categories of citizen journalists – *accidental journalists*, *advocacy journalists* and *citizen journalists* (cf. Ross & Cormier 2010).

- **Status:** Journalism operates within a network of relationships with the public in which the public are both sources and consumers of information. This relationship is built on trust, and journalists adhere to the ethical requirement of confidentiality in order to maintain this trust. Journalism also invokes the notion of 'public interest' to justify its relevance to society. But just as it is conceptually difficult to operationalise the concept of the 'public', it is conceptually difficult to define the notion of 'public interest'. Experience demonstrates that media may have their own set of public-interest objectives, which often conflict with that of the different segments of their actual and potential audience. The status of citizen journalism is not clearly elucidated; in fact, the extent to which the public 'authorise' citizen journalism is not itself clearly elucidated. It appears to be sandwiched somewhere in the crevice of the private and the public. Some citizen journalists have greater public recognition and legitimacy, while others have never known any public recognition and legitimacy. The struggle is to continue to push for a public status of the practice, while ensuring that it continues to draw its lifeblood from private citizens. In fact, it is arguable that the more citizen journalists there are, the more of a *public* affair citizen journalism becomes.

The fact that it is not absolutely clear what status the variegated public gives to mass media should alert us to the problem that is likely to attend the definition of 'citizen media' or 'citizen journalism'. Who defines it? Who validates it? Are the very definitions of citizen media and journalism an attempt at institutionalising their practices?

Defining citizen journalism

Although it is clear that the emergence of citizen journalism is conceptually linked to the debates about the normative nature of journalism, it is not until the advent of new media technologies (the internet, world-wide web [WWW], mobile phones, etc.) that it exploded globally. Introducing new media technology into defining journalism as a social practice means that the professional walls within which the practice evolved have since collapsed, leaving journalism unprotected from the prying eyes of hitherto wandering 'strangers'. Of course, journalism has always claimed to service the public but, as we have noticed above, the notion of the public interest has itself become fractured in the wake of new media technologies. In other words, no longer can media professionals claim to operate in the public interest without demonstrating what that means. The very doctrine of professional journalism is under fire in this deconstructive age. What does it mean to be a professional? Underlying this notion – again as we have already demonstrated in our discussion of the institutional basis of journalism – is the idea of an exclusive practice, reserved for those who would be admitted into it upon completion of a form of training or educational programme.

It is important to emphasise, as we have done above, that the hitherto exclusive nature of journalism is at the core of the debate about the phenomenon of citizen journalism. The phenomenon of citizen journalism has been spurred on by the rise in the availability of the new-media platforms of desk-top publishing. Some of the technologies that have come to characterise citizen journalism are catalogued by Dan Gillmor (2006: 27-41) as follows:

- Mail lists and forums, made of diverse communities of interest;
- Weblogs, a 'many to many, few to few' medium whose 'ecosystem' is 'expanding into the space between email and the Web, and could well be the missing link in the communications chain';
- Wikis, server programmes that allow users to collaborate in forming the content of a Web site;
- SMSs, a service offered by network providers which allows customers to send text messages over the cell phones;
- Mobile-connected cameras, which include the every-day digital cameras that allow users to download, store, edit, and transmit pictures anytime, anywhere;
- Internet 'broadcasting', whereby ordinary people can record and upload anything on to the Internet, as well as distribute it;
- Peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing of files; and
- RSS (Really Simple Syndication), which allows readers of blogs and other kinds of sites to have their computers and other devices automatically retrieve the content they care about.

The totality of the online communicative experience made possible by new media technologies may thus be referred to as 'cybersphere'. The suffix 'sphere' is generally inherited from the idea of the 'public sphere', which is supposed to refer to that neutral space where rational, often male-dominated public deliberation takes place. It was suggested by German political sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1989). The original rendition of the public sphere has been attacked on a number of scores, not least its exclusivist nature. It excluded the poor, the minorities, the

young, the aged, the women, and all other disadvantaged groups of people. To this end, the traditional notion of the public sphere is not amenable to the inclusivist politics of the contemporary new-mediated cybersphere in which citizen journalism has so easily found a home.

To speak of a cybersphere – which may include other spheres, such as the ‘blogosphere’ – is to invoke the idea of citizen participation in cyberspace. Since traditional media have themselves gone into cyberspace, they have become an aspect of the cybersphere. The cybersphere is supposed to afford almost unbounded, non-geographic, non-ethnic, non-nationalistic, access to citizens. As such, the media are not expected to operate according to their old logic of professional exclusivity. All are citizens, supposedly with equal access and claim to cyber-spherical participation.

But what is *citizen journalism*, then? The US based National Association of Citizen Journalists (NACJ) makes a distinction between accidental journalists, advocacy citizen journalists and citizen journalists. According to the NACJ, just because someone uses a cell phone camera to photograph an incident and then uploads it to Flickr or Facebook, it does not make that person a citizen journalist. Just because somebody has a blog and bloviates about his or her favourite subject, it should not be misconstrued that the individual is a citizen journalist (Ross & Cormier 2010: 57).

Accidental journalists are people who are caught unexpectedly in the middle of an event and take photos or videos and upload them to either social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter, or news websites such as CNN’s iReport or Fox News’ uReport (Ross & Cormier 2010: 58).

Advocacy journalism is a genre of journalism that adopts a viewpoint for the sake of advocating on behalf of a social, political, business or religious purpose. It is journalism with an intentional and transparent bias, although it must be distinguished from propagandistic reporting (Ross & Cormier 2010: 60).

Citizen journalism is a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community. It is news of the people, by the people and for the people. Citizen journalists are independent, freelancing citizen reporters. They are not constrained by conventional journalistic processes or methodologies, and they usually function without editorial oversight. Citizen journalists gather, process, research, report, analyse and publish news and information, most often utilising a variety of technologies made possible by the internet (Ross & Cormier 2010: 66).

Simply put: equating citizen journalism with a people-centred definition of democracy signals the idea that citizen journalism is about democratic citizenship. By implication, the notion of citizen journalism is an indictment against what are seen as the undemocratic rituals of conventional media and journalism. There are so many journalists that might be opposed to the suggestion that conventional journalism is undemocratic. But that is exactly what citizen journalism seems to be suggesting. To that extent, citizen journalism is a people-centred, largely online, movement of the so-called ‘We the media’ (Gillmor 2006).

Perhaps, it is important, against the background of citizen journalism, to restate why traditional journalism is seen as 'undemocratic'. Traditional journalism is structured around sources of news. These sources of news tend to be 'official' sources, ensconced in their positions of power. The most powerful sources of news tend to be politicians, businesspeople, NGOs, and the like. These are elite sources of information, although they might legitimately claim to 'represent' the people. But this is a never-ending debate – most ordinary people would disagree that they are being represented by such sources of information. Another point about such sources is that they have the resources – in most cases – to access the institutions of mass communication. On the other hand, ordinary people have no predictable or steady access to the mainstream media. Their issues, albeit important to them, are thus marginalised from the news agendas of many mainstream media.

A third important point to make about the undemocratic elitism of traditional media is that they are given to the conventional definitions of news which emphasise very important persons, controversy, conflict, unusualness, and the like (Galtung & Ruge 1969). These definitions are restrictive. By implication, if something happens to ordinary people, as long as there is no very important person to quote, it is not newsworthy. These value judgements are, of course, bequeathed to most African journalists through the educational system which is largely driven by Western notions of what constitutes good journalism (cf. Banda 2009). The structured nature of traditional media thus tends to be exclusive in its selection of stories and their sources.

Yet another thing that makes traditional media appear undemocratic: their profit-seeking motive can sometimes focus their attention on issues other than democratic participation. It takes a lot of courage for editors to balance profit-making and democracy-making.

By suggesting that conventional journalism is undemocratic, citizen journalism seeks to open it up to the participation of ordinary people. Citizen journalism is thus aimed at de-institutionalising and de-professionalising the practice of journalism. But, given the pluralistic nature of cyberspace, it would appear that there is much in it that does not escape the tentacles of mainstream media.

Citizen journalism may not succeed simply as a way of imagining what is possible with new media technology. It needs to be structured into something or other, but, by definition, it resists that structuring. An example of structuring citizen journalism is community communication, as is evident in community radio broadcasting, for example. Here, the structure imposed on citizen journalism is such that it ought to encourage greater community ownership, participation and management. But over a decade of community broadcasting has given us examples of how problematic the idea can be in practice. There are power struggles that are sometimes glossed over during the planning stages of community broadcasting projects. There are financial constraints, which come to the fore as soon as the so-called 'volunteers' start demanding payment (Banda 2003). There is local political interference. These problems are a tip of the iceberg. The question, then, is: how best can we guarantee citizen participation?

Using Dan Gillmor's technological toolkit proposed above (Gillmor 2006), we can point to other options. For example, individual citizens can opt to set up weblogs and write on different issues. There is the possibility of a 'hit'

from time to time, but one wonders whether such weblogs can effect any quantifiable social change? Sometimes, bloggers complain of not so significant numbers of 'hits'. But democracy is not necessarily a numbers game; the presence of a deep, qualitatively deliberative democracy is not necessarily borne out by the law of large numbers. It is such seemingly small citizen-led activities that culminate into a crescendo of social and political change. But such socio-political change, for it to resonate with the majority of African populations, requires a technological infrastructure that can support massive citizen participation. But, as we have demonstrated in **Chapter 3**, the penetration of new media technology is severely low on the continent, rendering most of peri-urban and rural Africa almost impermeable to the influences of new-mediated citizen journalism.

Indeed, even within urban areas, there are many instances of the technological divide. In much of Africa, the 'urban' is indwelt by the 'rural'. A strict urban-rural dichotomy does not apply so easily in Africa. How, then, can we speak of citizen journalism when the majority of our people are denied access to the tools that can enable genuine citizen participation? It is possible to imagine internet-connected rural areas, complete with tele-centres that can be used for exchanging information about agricultural produce, markets, governance, and the like. It is possible to develop one or two pilot projects, heavily endowed with resources to see how they will pan out. Countries like India and Malaysia are trying out these experiments, in some cases using the so-called Alcatel-Lucent motorised broadband community centres.

Types of citizen journalism

For the purpose of our study, and especially with regard to the question of the ethicality of citizen journalism, the assumption is that there are basically two types of citizen journalism: *non-institutional* and *institutional*. To take the first one: *non-institutional* forms of citizen journalism are extra-institutional, placing the individual at the core of the practice. This appears to be the notion of citizen journalism that readily lends itself to different forms of social networking, where private citizens use a combination of platforms to generate content and disseminate it as widely as possible. Non-institutional citizen journalism thus means the type of citizen journalism which revolves around the individual as such. It seeks no recourse to any organisational framework of constraints.

To illustrate non-institutional citizen journalism, we have established how such citizen journalism seems to thrive in a situation of volunteerism, without any professional strictures to worry about. But such 'freedom' comes at a price: to what extent can the citizen journalist exercise moral or ethical restraint? More often, the unfettered nature of cyberspace has meant that citizen journalists do not answer to any specific authority. They answer to their consciences and to their publics.

Non-institutional citizen journalism, then, is highly individuated and thus self-regulated. The subject of that self-regulation is the individual citizen journalist, not some higher institution external to him or her. Sometimes, citizen journalists find themselves being members of online communities, such as discussion forums, etc. In this case, it is possible to find aspects of self-regulation which are group-based. For example, the Zambia Media Forum – available at The-Zambia-Media-Forum@googlegroups.com – has evolved as a membership-based forum, with a set of loose rules and procedures which govern admission into membership, the conduct of the business of the forum, etc.

However, even here, there is always conflict about what is 'right' or 'wrong'. For example, debates have raged about the language used to characterise certain members. In one instance, a member of the forum sued another member, to the chagrin of the rest of the forum. Although the summons was later withdrawn, it was clear that what might have been (mis-)construed as an unfettered electronic space degenerated into accusations and counteraccusations, pitting a group of members of the forum against another. But what is important here is to emphasise the on-going resistance to the institutionalisation of the forum as a panacea for settling moral or ethical questions.

Institutional citizen journalism, on the other hand, refers to that type of citizen journalism which has a form of organisational structure or constraining ability, complete with external constraints, however minimal. The individual is still an important aspect of the practice, drawing them into a dialogic communication with the many or few recipients of their content.

A key feature of this type of citizen journalism is how media institutions seem to be moving into the space created by non-institutional citizen journalists, seeking to benefit from, and inject their own professional instincts, rituals and practices into, the space thus created. As such, some media institutions, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) encourage their own reporters to become 'citizen journalists', loosening the institutional noose around their necks and allowing them to engage different publics in a less professional environment.

OhmyNews.com, a South Korean online newspaper, has more than 37,000 registered contributors, and is expanding into the English and Japanese language markets; Britain's second most popular news website, *Guardian.co.uk*, hosts a 'News' message board to which readers contributed 647,798 messages or 'posts' between 1999–2005; and the ten most popular topical polls hosted by *ThisisLondon.co.uk*—the website of London's best-selling newspaper, *The Evening Standard*—averaged 48,000 votes apiece (in Thurman 2008: 3).

The *M&G* in South Africa has its own 'Thought Leader' forum, encouraging robust debate from established contributors and their readers. It is centred on 'blogs, opinion, analysis', clearly calling attention to its credibility and seriousness. In situations like these – where media institutions become part of the cyber-community of user-generated content – they find ways of 'moderating' contributions from citizen journalists. Such rules and procedures do not necessarily reflect the formal in-house editorial policy guidelines that such media institutions follow. They allow for a degree of flexibility.

Such institutional citizen journalism is thus regulated from the outside. This seems to be the trend across a plethora of media institutions which have decided to delve into citizen journalism. In his article entitled 'Citizen journalism and the BBC', which appeared in the Winter 2005 *Nieman Reports* issue on 'citizen journalism', Richard Sambrook (2005) observes:

Not everyone in the organization recognizes that this shift is happening or accepts it. Several of the kinds of initiatives I've described above have existed at the margins of our services and are only just beginning to move toward centre stage. Such changes raise policy issues that disturb some colleagues.

How can our journalistic reputation be protected when we are not fully in control of our content? As someone who supports this new direction, I don't suggest the BBC staff abdicate their responsibility for accuracy, fairness or objectivity. There will always be a central place for editorial judgment to be applied. That judgment is the essential brand value of major news organizations. As we open up to contributions from the public, we must do so in a way that is consistent with our editorial values. However, I believe that truth, accuracy, impartiality and diversity of opinion are strengthened by being open to a wider range of opinion and perspective, brought to us through the knowledge and understanding of our audience.

The same is true of the *M&G* editorial guidelines for contributions and comments to the 'Thought Leader' blog (M&G 2007). Thought Leader comment guidelines suggest that it is an invitation-only collection of contributions written by interesting, influential and intelligent voices in politics, development, technology, the arts, sport and more. The guidelines read as follows:

We welcome as much interaction and vibrant discussion between our contributors and their readers as possible – but we do want the website to be a mature and thought-provoking environment, so some guidelines apply for posting comments.

1. All comments first have to be approved by the editorial team before they appear on the website. This may take anything from one minute to 24 hours.
2. Stick to debating the issues and respect other people's views and beliefs. Comments launching personal attacks or that are hurtful and insulting will not be accepted.
3. Keep your comment as brief as possible. If you want to refer to an article on another website, place a link to that article in your comment; do not paste the whole article into your comment.
4. When you have finished crafting your comment, read it again before posting it. Consider whether others will understand your arguments. Something that you meant to be satirical or humorous might not be clear to another reader. Also, take into consideration that your words will remain on the internet for a very, very long time, if not forever.
5. A swearword in the right spot can work well, but gratuitous profanity won't do. If you have to swear, make sure it's justified.
6. Don't write your whole comment in capital letters only.
7. Comments that contain racist, sexist or homophobic remarks – or that may be interpreted as such – won't make it on to *Thought Leader*.
8. There is a difference between criticising a political party, a religion, an organisation, a cultural group or a community and unreasonably attacking such bodies. Try to motivate your comments and explain your arguments as much as you can. Above all, make sure your words represent fair comment.

9. A comment that is obviously off topic – that is, unrelated to the article or contribution in question and the comments that precede it – or that clearly doesn't contribute to the ongoing debate may be deleted by the editorial team.
10. The editorial team keeps a close watch on legal matters too: defamatory comments, for example, will be deleted.
11. Unacceptable comments will be deleted without notification.
12. *Thought Leader* is mainly an English site, though we don't mind the odd word or sentence in any other language. Just ensure that the average English-speaking reader won't feel completely lost.
13. No comments that advertise companies, businesses, services or such will be accepted. We do sell advertisements on the site, though – contact thoughtleader@mg.co.za to find out more.
14. If you feel that someone else has not taken these guidelines into account, please let us know at thoughtleader@mg.co.za. We will deal with such issues as soon as possible. If it is necessary to remove or change published contributions, parts of contributions or comments, an explanation will be given on the page where possible.

Citizen journalism, participation, and empowerment

To speak of citizen journalism is to invoke the idea of citizen participation and empowerment. It is important therefore to spend some time dissecting the idea of citizen empowerment because it is so often associated with the concept of citizen journalism and the so-called liberating power of new media technologies that make citizen journalism possible. The concept of empowerment is important for several reasons. Firstly, it is a word in political currency. Not a single politician can be said not to have used this word on some occasion or other. The development community is particularly credited with having used, and perhaps abused, the word. There are countless non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that claim to work for the empowerment of communities. International organisations, including inter-governmental ones, are clearly among those that cling to the frequent usage of this term.

Secondly, the word needs unpacking because of the *abuse* to which it has become captive. Because of its overuse, it can mean everything or nothing. It can be invoked to cover a multitude of political, social and economic 'sins'.

Thirdly, laying it bare could possibly help to reclaim its analytic and empirical potential. It is a very useful concept and we need to be clear about what it could mean for the practice of our citizen journalism and therefore politics. In other words, we need to challenge our attitude towards the conceptual possibilities and the practical implications it carries for our political sphere in the 'information' age.

Let us start by looking at what the use of the term assumes is *not* in place. It assumes, firstly, that people lack any power at all. We define *power* as the capacity to influence the course of one's life. To suggest that people have no power at all implies that they do not have the capacity to influence their lives in relation to the lives of others.

The second assumption it carries is that such powerlessness is a function of something else – something probably

external to the individual concerned. This allows us to determine what the *causes* of incapacitation could be. This view of powerlessness could thus enable us to describe the conditions that account for the state of powerlessness. It also has the element of historical contextualisation. In describing the state of powerlessness, we can assess the causal aspects of the condition historically, contemporaneously and futuristically.

Its third assumption is the possibility of change that the term carries. It is the action of change that imbues the word with something positive. While the first two assumptions are largely negative, this particular one is positive.

Now, let us proceed to chip away at the concept of empowerment. Based upon the assumptions we have laid out, we would like to assume a tripartite analytical approach to the meaning of the word. We can analyse the concept in terms of three related concepts of (i) absence, (ii) transformation and (iii) presence. To set out the logic of this tripartite proposition: empowerment is about *transforming* a state of *absence* (of power) into a state of *presence* (of power).

To take the first aspect: when we set out to empower people, we do so because we suspect, as we have already suggested, that they are lacking in power. There is an absence of power in their lives. They do not have the capacity and opportunity to influence the course of their lives. They are powerless to make the necessary adjustments to their livelihoods due to a range of reasons. For example, they cannot meaningfully take part in local governance, let alone central governance. They are probably so starved of basic information that they cannot make critical decisions about their lives. They live at someone else's mercy – at the mercy of the economically and therefore informationally powerful.

Now, one person's absence of opportunity may be another person's presence of opportunity. For example, it may suit a politician to keep the electorate starved of critical information about the possibilities available for challenging the politician's suitability for office. The issue of empowerment thus assumes a political dimension in which the question of power relations becomes even more critical. Where there is an absence of capacity and opportunity, there is a likelihood of someone else benefiting from that absence.

It goes without saying that empowering people with information means ensuring that there is no absence of information. Now, it is possible to have an abundance of useless information. To speak of an absence of information is to speak of the non-availability of relevant information that citizens need in order to make meaningful decisions and choices about their lives. It is possible that such information can be mediated through such channels as the mass media. It is possible that such information can be available on the stock exchange. It is possible that such information can be held by public agencies. It is possible that such information can be accessed online. It goes without saying that empowering people with information must mean an *infrastructural* opening up of such communication channels as are available to the majority of the citizenry. Here, new technology – and the related practices of communication, including citizen journalism – can serve to make such channels more open to citizens.

The absence of capacity and opportunity for accessing such information can be attributed to many reasons. Such

reasons can be a historical legacy of bad laws, inherited from the colonial past. This is clearly true – up to a point – of many countries in Africa. For example, there is still in place poor legislation that makes it almost impossible to penetrate the state bureaucracy to get information needed for the conduct of both private and public life. It follows, therefore, that empowering people informationally means repealing such laws to allow for greater access.

Other reasons for the absence of meaningful information are fundamentally political or economic. In either case, the causal attribution helps to unravel the dynamics of disempowerment involved. For example, economic reasons might border on high taxation on computer technology and internet connectivity – in which case such taxation must be changed. Or there might be a political reason bordering on extra-judicial encroachment on citizen access to information – in which case a political decision must be made to change that attitude.

The second aspect of empowerment is that of transformation. We do not merely point to the condition of absence, for the sake of it. We do so because we realise that change is possible, that we can transform that condition into a different state. Such a transformation necessarily draws upon an analysis of the causal factors responsible for the condition of absence. We have already begun to look at the causes responsible for this absence of capacity and opportunity to access information. To be brief: such causes include:

- Technological incapacity
- Structural and legal rigidities extant in any given country
- Archaic legislation
- Reactive policy and legislation
- Low levels of civic education

To take the last point: Much that has to do with citizen journalism has its roots in the extent to which citizens can actively partake of technological tools to enhance their participation in the body politic. This means that transforming any rigid structures, for example, requires repeated civic education. But such civic education should not only be instrumentalist – looking at the *mechanics* of freedom of information, for example – but also emancipatory. It should transform citizens so that they become susceptible to new perspectival and structural-institutional change.

The third aspect of empowerment – presence of capacity and opportunity – is a direct result of the transformation we have described above. The point here is to ensure that empowerment becomes a much more positive force that presents informational opportunities and the requisite capacities to utilise those opportunities. There is little point in having a preponderance of information when people cannot meaningfully use that information. In other words, we need societies where people are aware of the sources of life-changing information, and where there are opportunities for deploying that information. In other words, availability of information must take into account the context of information use. The concept of civic empowerment, then, is much more than meets the eye. We must say it and mean what we say. We must be alive to the practical implications it holds. We must be sure that it addresses the root causes of the absence of capacity and opportunity and that it transforms the *status quo* into

a situation that guarantees the presence of opportunity and capacity. It is here that citizen journalism takes on a more political patina – it becomes a life-changing social practice that citizens must deploy to service their needs.

Problems associated with citizen journalism

If citizen journalism is about citizen empowerment, then it must contend with several problems, apart from getting governments to simply invest in the technologies that enable wider citizen participation. Firstly, as already suggested in the case of institutional citizen journalism, it has to contend with the extent to which the cybersphere itself has become ‘colonised’ by the mainstream media and other business interests. We have noted that citizen journalism does not sit comfortably with certain forms of institutionalisation. Traditional media have now turned to citizens to contribute to ‘institutional’ weblogs. For example, the *M&G* in South Africa has the so-called ‘Thought Leader’ weblog. This is both democratising and institutionalising. Democratising, because the *M&G* has opened up more of itself to citizen participation; institutionalising, because the rules of editorialisation applicable to the *M&G* are applicable to the ‘thought leaders’. The number of ‘thought leaders’ is not big enough – that is another problem. And why should some citizens be called ‘thought leaders’, anyway? This institutional stamp on the weblog makes it – yet again – an elitist medium in cyberspace.

More importantly, however, is the fact that the traditional media are recognising the potential of cyberspace as a marketplace for what we may call transactional *democracy*. When the numbers of visitors become sufficiently large, it is possible to convert them into advertising revenue. So, if there are any spin-offs for citizen participation, they seem to be accidental. Is the overriding pursuit one of potential commercial benefit? We are inclined to think in terms of the less noble objective of ‘hooking’ the actual and the potential market onto their media ‘product’. In other words, just as there was promise associated with the ‘dot.com boom’ in the USA, there is promise associated with the increasing number of citizens with an online presence. In fact, some newspapers, such as Zambia’s *The Post*, had started cashing in on their online edition by asking that people should pay a subscription fee. However, this business strategy seems to have failed, as the newspaper decided the returns were not large enough to warrant its continuation.

Another example of the institutionalisation of cyberspace is the fact that many broadcasters now invite ordinary people to become ‘ireporters’. They are encouraged to send in pod-casts and video images which the broadcaster transmits. It is not clear if these ‘citizen journalists’ are paid for this. Whatever the situation, the strategy is to ‘ensnare’ the practice of citizen journalism into the institutional ambit of media houses. This has its own benefits, of course, not least the fact that citizen-generated content finds its way into mainstream media. But it is often not the kind of content whose impact is normally felt beyond the day it is broadcast. Not that there is anything fundamentally wrong with this approach. After all, it represents an acknowledgement by traditional media that times are changing in favour of citizen involvement in media work.

Another problem – more germane to the internal working of citizen journalism – has to do with its public legitimacy. Many questions have come to the fore, among which are the following:

- Who authorises and legitimises citizen journalism?
- How are citizen journalists to be held accountable to the public good, however defined? Take, for example, 'Facebook', which has been accused of encouraging suicidal tendencies among teenagers by demonstrating how suicide can be carried out. Is this part of the discourse of citizen participation and empowerment that societies would aspire for?
- What type of democratic citizenship is unfettered citizen journalism envisioning? Is it desirable?
- When such moral questions are asked of citizen journalism, is there not enough justification for some form of institutional constraint upon it?

These are very important questions indeed, and they cannot be glossed over. For some people, they point to an even more serious conceptual issue about how the question of new media technologies ought to be approached in society. Must technology be treated as though it were a determinant of social and political change? Or must society harness technology in such a way as to answer society's specific socio-political goals, including the deep moral questions that face any social practice? In the next section, then, we address this question in order to establish the theoretical parameters within which we can embrace citizen journalism both as an outcome and determinant of technological innovation.

Citizen journalism: technologically or socially determined?

For our purposes, we can identify two approaches to understanding how technology is debated in society. These are (i) technological determinism and (ii) social shaping of technology approaches.

i. Technological determinism

This approach has its roots in the writings of Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian media scholar who is commonly known for his assertion that the 'medium is the message' (McLuhan 1964). McLuhan's critics, based on this statement, have portrayed him as a technological determinist (Federman 2004). But this is not necessarily so. For its part, technological determinism suggests that technology, and nothing else, determines the social structure. Although McLuhan seems to suggest that social structure is shaped by the medium extant at any given time, he is concerned with far more important questions than are attributed to him. In other words, he is not concerned with the content or information carried by the medium in question; he is preoccupied with what the medium itself is doing to society.

For example, we cannot dispute the fact that the nature of communication has, at any given time in history, given rise to certain forms of social and political organisation. For example, the fact that we have the biological capacity to speak gave rise to parliamentary systems of representation, capitalising on the fact of 'speaking'. In fact, the word 'parliament' comes from the French verb 'parley', to speak. Radio and television, as technological media (plural for 'medium'), have extended the human capacities for speech and sight. Indeed, we can go further to consider how the US presidential candidates' television debates are structured as a result of the medium of television. The nature of the dress and the presentational style are dictated by the audiovisual medium of television, including the routines and professional practices that have evolved around it.

In this sense, McLuhan can be seen as a media effects scholar. Indeed, he was concerned with analysing the ‘effects’ – what he characterised as the unanticipated consequences – any medium might have on social structure in the long run. As Federman (2004) suggests, McLuhan was concerned about long-term ‘unanticipated consequences’ of any technological innovation on social structure. Such consequences can be positive or negative, desirable or undesirable. Arguably, citizen journalism is an unanticipated consequence of new media technologies.

McLuhan’s definition of a ‘message’ is ‘the change of scale or pace or pattern’ that a new invention or innovation ‘introduces into human affairs’ (McLuhan 1964: 8). It is important to note that it is not the content or use of the innovation, but the change in inter-personal dynamics that the innovation brings with it (Federman 2004). For example, the debate about the effect of television on societal violence touches on the question of unanticipated consequences of media. McLuhan’s concern with the ‘effects’ of any technological innovation meant that he was concerned about how humans can intervene to ensure that any undesirable or negative unanticipated consequences could be forestalled. This interventionist approach does not make him a crude technological determinist; rather, it makes him appear concerned about the policy options that humans must exercise in order to deal with some of the unhelpful unanticipated consequences likely to emanate from the adoption of technology.

It is evident that certain forms of technology have given rise to certain practices of citizen journalism. Weblogging has allowed for citizens to publish their own works and, through the interactive mechanism made possible by the facility, legitimise their status. We know that there are some bloggers who are credited with greater authority and believability. There are others whose works are regarded as lacking in credibility and authority. Without the ‘institutional’ stamp of a media organisation, their works become even less important. Although the technologies have made it possible, at least in theory, for many to be journalists, only a few legitimise their way through the maze of public scrutiny and legitimation. While the nature of the technological innovations or toolkits *determines* the possibility of open-ended communicative opportunities, society would seem to *shape* the terms under which such opportunities become a significant site for communicative power. In that sense, technology is the shaper and the shaped at one and the same time. Everything happens at once, as if to reinforce McLuhan’s own notion of *allatonce*.

ii. Social shaping of technology

Williams and Edge (1996) posit the social shaping of technology (SST) hypothesis, arguing that differing concerns and intellectual traditions find a meeting point in the SST project. They insist that the ‘black-box’ of technology must be opened, to allow the socio-economic patterns embedded in both the content of technologies and the processes of innovation to be exposed and analysed. SST is thus opposed to the idea that technological change cannot be questioned – that it is an immutable, linear progression which changes everything that stands in its path.

As such it is a direct attack on the cruder forms of technological determinism. SST is a broad church that encapsulates many of the critical traditions, including critical political economy, cultural studies, and the like. It frowns upon the suggestion that technology develops according to an inner technical logic. Rather, SST proponents view technology as a social product, patterned by the conditions of its creation and use (Williams & Edge 1996). As such, every stage

in the generation and implementation of new technologies involves a set of choices between different technical options.

According to Williams and Edge (1996), central to SST is the concept that there are 'choices' – conscious or unconscious – inherent in both the design of individual artefacts and systems, and in the direction or trajectory of innovation programmes. If technology does not emerge from the unfolding of a predetermined logic or a single determinant, it follows that there are potentially different technological outcomes. Such choices could have differing implications for society and for particular social groups. The character of technologies, as well as their social implications, is thus problematised and opened up for enquiry.

Williams and Edge (1996) thus adopt a tripartite analytical framework which includes (i) the negotiability of technology (ii) the assumed irreversibility of technology and (iii) the critique of the technological closure associated with technological determinism. SST stresses the *negotiability* of technology, highlighting the scope for particular groups and forces to shape technologies to their ends and the possibility of different kinds of technological and social outcome.

It raises questions about the *irreversibility* that it is assumed underpins technological innovation. It thus questions the extent and manner in which choices may be foreclosed. Certain technological options may be selected and become entrenched – for example as a result of the tendency of new technologies to develop cumulatively, erected upon the knowledge base and social and technical infrastructure of existing technologies – particularly where increasing returns to scale of investment result in 'lock-in' to established solutions (Williams & Edge 1996).

Furthermore, SST points to *closure* – the ways in which innovation may become stabilised – as well as the possibility of reversing earlier choices. SST proponents differ over their characterisation of such choices, and in their approaches to the stability or negotiability of technologies – with related differences over the roles and significance of large-scale social and economic structures (Williams & Edge 1996).

There are policy implications here. By rendering the social processes of innovation problematic, SST has opened up policy issues that had been obscured by technological determinism, and by related simplistic models. For example SST criticised established linear models, which conceived of innovation as involving a one-way flow of information, ideas and solutions from basic science, through Research and Development (R&D), to production and the diffusion of stable artefacts through the market to consumers (Williams & Edge 1996).

And, of course, both approaches – technological determinism and social shaping of technology – have important implications for citizen journalism. Let us address these implications by referring to some of the debates that characterised the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) 3 held in 2007 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

During a ministerial panel on ICT policy and knowledge societies, it was clear that there is no real dichotomy between technological determinism and social shaping of technology. Particularly intriguing were the remarks

made by Jyrki Pulkkinen of the Department for Development Policy in the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He cautioned against assuming a *technicist* approach to ICT. Pulkkinen said ICT should be viewed as a “process” rather than as a “tool”. While assuming a less tools-centred approach helps to avoid the pitfall of technological determinism, it needs to be emphasised that ICT is indeed also about technology, tools and gadgets. There is a good reason for this argument: policy needs to ponder the aspect of scientific and technological advancement and the attendant skills package. So, it becomes important for societies that would encourage citizen journalism to flourish to work on those policy and institutional factors that support a robust infrastructural development programme, complete with technical skills required for the operation of the machines that make citizen journalism possible.

As a matter of fact, the whole debate surrounding improving African participation in global research and development (R&D) is predicated upon recognising, as Declan Korrane of Intelligence in Science (ISC) told the GKP3 conference, that ‘there is no ICT without science.’ As far as we can see, the issue is one of maintaining a healthy conceptual balance. And that balance would seem to be evident in Pulkkinen’s formula of ICT, which included the following factors:

- **I** = Information = Innovations
- **C** = Communication = Cooperation = Democracy
- **T** = Technology = efficiency = growth

This would appear to be a more holistic approach, highlighting a process, and not a hierarchy. It’s not easy to say which element comes first. It is possible that all three can occur simultaneously. Our view is that policy should address all three as though they were inextricably bound up. To isolate one part from this welter of harmony would be to jeopardise the operational unity of the whole. Such an approach certainly allows us to recognise technological and social determinism as aspects of social transformation. The word ‘transformation’ is used by Pulkkinen to indicate the transformative nature of ICT. That is the ultimate goal of technology – to allow citizens, through a permutation of different social practices, including citizen journalism, to develop their full potential for development.

The elements defining ‘ICT’, as presented by Pulkkinen, truly expand the frontiers or possibilities of ICT. For example, seeing the ‘communication’ component of ICT in terms of ‘cooperation’ and ‘democracy’ highlights the very Greek and Latin roots of the concept of communication. To speak of ICT in cooperative and democratic terms is to characterise communication as *koinonia* (Greek term for ‘fellowship’) and *communitas* (Latin term for ‘community’), representing a high level of human relations in which people can consciously relate to one another and form community. ICT is thus much more than the gadgets we see around us. The question is: how do we craft policy to ensure that ICT attains these human-developmental goals, apart from the more ‘efficiency-growth’ related aspects of it?

A key aspect of this conceptual discussion of ICT encapsulates the very idea of the ‘information’ or ‘knowledge’ society. Panellists, who also included UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information,

Abdul Waheed Khan and Malaysian Minister of Energy, Water and Communications, Lim Keng Yaik, settled for the idea of a 'knowledge society'. The main issue here was that the concept of 'information society' is too restrictive for policy operationalisation. For information to be meaningful, it must be processed into knowledge. Knowledge is more usable than information as it lends itself to cultural-contextual variables.

According to the UNESCO publication entitled *Towards Knowledge Societies*, the term 'knowledge society', which the academic Peter Drucker used for the first time in 1969, came into its own in the 1990s, in particular with the detailed studies by researchers such as Robin Mansell and Nico Stehr. The idea emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at about the same time as the notion of 'learning societies' and lifelong education for all (UNESCO 2005).

Citing UNESCO's position *a la* the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Khan outlined four key aspects of the knowledge society, namely:

- Knowledge creation.
- Knowledge preservation.
- Knowledge sharing.
- Knowledge utilisation.

According to Khan, ICT policy must enable each of these processes of the knowledge society. Although we are all for conceptual specificity and refinement, we may wonder if the conceptual distinction between *information* and *knowledge* amounts to the idiomatic splitting of hairs. Knowledge does not just come about; it is originated as *information*, in whatever form. At first, it may appear meaningless. But when contextualised, it assumes properties of usability. The question is: *who* does the processing of information so that it can become knowledge? Is it the end-user? Is it the producer? How, if at all, does the medium of communication affect the information being processed? The truth of the matter is that all these – and many other factors in between – account for something in the generation, processing and distribution of information. As such, how that information becomes 'knowledge' is a complex process, involving highly complex individualised, socialised and politicised reception and decoding dynamics. In any case, the very terms 'information' and 'knowledge' are questionable. Indeed the very term 'society' is not immune from interrogation.

For some scholars, such as Manuel Castells (2000), the adjective 'informational' (as opposed to the noun 'information') should qualify the noun 'society'. Indeed, he goes so far as to speak of the 'network society'. Although this smacks of technological determinism, it still retains the idea of humans 'networked' or joined together in all sorts of transformative permutations and relationships. It also draws from the theory of social capital in which such relational networks can be drawn upon as *capital* to enable us function productively in society and in community. Therefore, citizen journalism – as an ICT-enabled phenomenon – should ideally create networks of people that can efficiently and effectively communicate with one another in business, agriculture, industry, politics, and so on. The nature of those relationships tends to be *informational*.

Following Castells, we would go so far as to adopt the notion of a knowledge-able society. Using the adjective 'knowledgeable' is more descriptive of a society that is actively utilising information and knowledge. 'Knowledge society' seems less active and dynamic, and probably less emphatic of human interaction and engagement in the process of acquiring, processing and disseminating information. To be *knowledgeable* is to be in a position of technical, economic, cultural, social, and emotional *know-how*. To be knowledgeable assumes both a state of *being* and of *becoming*. As such, it is not difficult to ascribe the quality of dynamic action to a knowledgeable person or social grouping.

These conceptual issues, as we have already suggested, are not merely academic and should not be dismissed outright. Pulkkinen was particularly expressive when it came to illustrating how such conceptual underpinnings of ICT translated into concrete policy proposals. He highlighted how the interlinked sub-concepts of 'technology', 'economy', 'socio-politics', 'intellect' and 'culture' became translated into Finnish ICT-for-Development (ICT4D) policies on education, science and technology, innovation, and global trade. Global trade policies would be concerned with a country's strategic positioning *vis-a-vis* such global processes and structures as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), International Trade Administration (ITA), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), and so on.

Where does Africa stand in this matrix of concepts? It is clear to us that we do not seem to have appropriated the kind of understanding of ICT suggested here. It seems to us that we sometimes do not realise that techno-talk must be centred on ethno-talk. In other words, technology exists to serve and service people. There has always been a tendency towards technological determinism whenever we talk about technology, especially new technological innovations. As such, less attention has been paid to what people are actually doing with technology and what technology is doing to serve people's needs. It was not surprising, for example, that the line ministries in most sub-Saharan African countries tasked with developing the ICT policy framework were the ministries of transport and communication. The assumption, which is no longer entirely defensible, was that ICT was about 'nuts' and 'bolts'.

But we know that it is more about enabling people to engage in meaningful relationships of communication, cooperation, democracy, activism, and so on. The 'technology' component of ICT comes in to facilitate that process of communication. Indeed, even at the international level, the UN agency originally tasked to drive the so-called 'summit on the information society' was the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), again demonstrating to us that ICT was viewed largely in technical terms. But this is no longer the case, especially given the fact of technological convergence.

The question of how technology is shaped by society is important for a cultural reason as well, especially in Africa. As such, the question often asked is: how, then, is ICT compatible with African culture?

African philosophers like Kenya's Ali Mazrui (1978) and Ghana's Kwame Gyekye (1997) suggest that ICT, as a western artefact, is incompatible with African culture. More specifically, Mazrui (1978), in his book *Political values and the educated class in Africa*, regarded the computer as a 'cultural transplant' from the North, alien to the

societies and cultures of Africa and only capable of having a devastating or subjugating effect in the African context. In other words, as paraphrased by Wim van Binsbergen (2004) in an article entitled *Can ICT belong in Africa, or is ICT owned by the North Atlantic region?*, the imported nature of the computer might badly fit the tasks and orientation of non-western workers, and as a result it may form a source of socio-cultural disruption, increasing economic dependency and introducing modes of thought which are alien to the working environment in which the computer is being used.

Kwame Gyekye (1997), in the chapter 'Philosophy, culture, and technology in the postcolonial', in the book entitled *Postcolonial African philosophy: a critical reader*, stated that 'technology, as a cultural product, should rise from the culture of a people, if it is to be directly accessible to a large section of the population and its nuances are to be fully appreciated by them.'

Our view is somewhat different; we believe that the question should be differently framed. To what specific uses are Africans putting ICT – whatever the origin? To put it differently: how are Africans *appropriating* ICT? In other words, although ICT can be seen as a largely western invention, its uses, and even its physical properties, can take on African characterisations. For example, the invention of the wind-up radio sets was designed to meet the specific requirements of rural Africa. Indeed, the experimentation by the Indian government of the Alcatel-Lucent motorised broadband community centre is another example of the design of technology reconfigured in terms of the Asian-African geo-cultural terrain.

Binsbergen, who has undertaken research in Zambia and other African countries, places the practicality of ICT in the African context between what he calls 'the local and the global'. In his representation of Kaoma District on the internet, he argues:

The specific case of Kaoma suggests a situation around African ICT which I would deem eminently capable of generalization: when it comes to knowledge production concerning Africa, the Internet only renders to the outside world what that outside world has put into the Internet in the first place. In this light, there would seem to be little reason for the euphoria that generally attends discussions about ICT in African intellectual circles. For the time being, we should look anywhere except on the Internet for valid and representative knowledge production on Kaoma District and its inhabitants...

A new field of tension arises here: that between the medium-specific format (in which inevitably the North Atlantic cultural origin of ICT shines through) and the contents, that in principle may be derived from all knowledge systems of all times and from all over the world. From the extent to which ICT is metalocal, it is valid to say that this medium — irrespective of its North Atlantic origin — may display great flexibility as far as its specific cultural context of use is concerned (Binsbergen 2004: 125).

How, then, is citizen journalism being practised across the continent? And how are the conceptual issues raised above mirrored in the various contexts of practice?

Chapter Five:

The Practice of Citizen Journalism in Africa

EAST AFRICA

The context of citizen journalism

In January 2008, Kenya was engulfed by ethnic violence, fuelled by the irregularities of the December 2007 election. During the election period, the mainstream media was divided along ethnic lines, which was reflected in the level and depth of reportage on issues affecting certain regions. During the violence, some television stations chose to air soap operas and football shows while some of the vernacular stations were used to spread and incite violence. The print media also reported variable versions of similar events, which left a gap of what was the actual reflection of events. This gap was filled by people spreading information that may not have been entirely true, fanning the flames of violence. Kenyans in the Diaspora were also desperate for information. At that point of desperation, Kenya's top bloggers, Ory Okolloh, Erik Hersman, Juliana Rotich and David Kobia, developed a citizen-journalistic platform that would allow the public to share information using the available communication means.

The crowd-sourcing platform was called 'Ushahidi', which means 'testimony' in Swahili. It was a way for the public to share their stories and discount rumours. Ushahidi was used to get citizens' testimonies via text messages, Twitter, Facebook and blogs. At that point, Kenya's online community collaborated and shared content, depending on their location.

Ushahidi complemented the work of bloggers by graphically showing location and information through maps. Through Ushahidi, people received real time information and tips. As Daudi Were, one of Kenya's top bloggers put it: 'At the height of violence, there were rumours that Raila Odinga, who was the opposition candidate had been killed; others were saying that all leaders of the Orange Democratic movement had been killed. When I attended a meeting at the Serena hotel and published photos on my blog, it calmed a lot of nerves.'

During the crisis, people used cell phones to record short videos and take photos, which were shared online; the citizen's were producers of news. The citizens' voices online might not have been as loud as those people

matching in the streets, but the online communities expanded the democratic space and allowed people to share their opinions.

Ushahidi may have been the most powerful crowd-sourcing tool born out of a crisis but the influence of social media and citizen journalists has grown in East Africa. In Uganda, for example, village women are blogging in local languages and exchanging information, thereby breaking traditional barriers. In Kenya, rural constituents are interrogating local projects more than constituents in urban areas. Because social media forums such as blogs provide unmediated, ground-level views, citizen journalism has grown from the mere idea of lack of 'editorialisation'.

Citizen journalism has been defined as a form of citizen media – where individuals write and/or comment on issues they feel are left out of the mainstream media. Content is the main distinguishing feature; while in mainstream media the content is generated by professional journalists, in citizen media spaces the content is generated by users and readers. It can be texts, images, audio files, podcasts, or video. The feedback loop is instant and mainly involves discussions through text or voice.

In East Africa, a number of professional journalists have their own blogs where they share information that is not governed by editorial policies stipulated by their employers, giving rise to a form of non-institutional citizen journalism. The rise in blogging and feedback has encouraged many newspapers in East Africa to set up websites with interactive features where the public is allowed to comment and raise the issues without the fear of being 'cut short' by the editor. In this context, citizen journalism has been viewed as a democratisation of news content.

Uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media

Mainstream media in the region have generally sought to distinguish itself from citizen journalism, arguing that mainstream media content is factual, reported, verified, placed in context and therefore more credible, compared to information in blogs. However, it is reasonable to conclude that fact checking occurs even during blog comments and discussions, which further deepens discussions. It is also reasonable to argue that some of the citizen journalists aspire to be *professional* journalists, placing high standards of verification upon themselves in order to produce high-level content that has challenged mainstream media.

In Kenya, bloggers such as Bankelele have provided expert financial information, making his blog one of the most visited sites. Kahenya, one of Kenya's top bloggers, has negotiated a contract with the *Nation Media Group* to provide them with a technology column. As citizen journalists work towards professionalism, journalists have been accessing some of the sites to get in-depth knowledge on some of the more specialised topics.

Such embracing of bloggers has proved that even if they may be considered to be imperfect news forms, blogs and citizen journalism are exerting great influence and forcing mainstream media to rethink their strategies. Citizen journalism allows readers to engage in conversations rather than in the unidirectional reportage that characterises traditional media.

The democratic value of citizen journalism

The rise in the number of people accessing technology in Africa has broken through the earlier world in which official information was offered through government-controlled broadcast or print media. As United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Director of ICTs, Aida Opuku-Mensah, observes, this development has fostered greater transparency and accountability in the governance process by affording the public a way to check governments.

While citizen journalism has been active during elections in interrogating actions by political leaders, the nexus between democracy and development policies is yet to get solid. According to Riita Weiste of Plan Finland: 'Citizen journalism has not yet been brought to discussions on development policies.' As such, there is no clear-cut evidence in East Africa that citizen journalism has begun to impact on the development process.

The case studies that follow illustrate how individuals and organisations can deploy citizen journalism in the service of specific – and sometimes unspecific and even unpredictable – goals. It is clear that democracy is served by these projects. Perhaps more importantly, it is not immediately clear how such projects will serve democracy in the future – what characterises some of them is the serendipity with which their nobler civic goals have emerged. Here, McLuhan's *unanticipated consequences* theory seems to hold.

Case studies of citizen journalism

Case study 1: Mzalendo.com

When a group of young people from Gatundu North constituency started sharing their frustrations online, they never envisaged that they would form a bond that would lead to the kinds of physical meetings that may have influenced the way they voted during the 2007 general elections in Kenya. Such is the influence that Mzalendo.com has had in rural areas.

Mzalendo.com is a volunteer run project whose mission is to 'keep an eye on the Kenyan Parliament.' *Mzalendo* means 'Patriot' in Swahili and was formed to provide information that would demystify the way parliament works and guarantee the rights that citizens have to question parliament.

The project was started by Ory Okolloh and another person who chooses to remain anonymous. The founders were frustrated by the fact that it is difficult to hold Kenyan Members of Parliament (MPs) accountable for their performance, largely because information about their work in Parliament is not easily accessible.

According to Okolloh: 'Parliament should be one of the most open institutions in government, and yet, beyond the coverage from local newspapers, it is virtually impossible to keep track of what Kenyan parliamentarians are doing; the Hansards are difficult to read for many Kenyans, but Mzalendo.com has found a way to demystify it.'

The process of accessing the Hansards is arduous; they are purchased from the Government Printers and most people do not have the time to filter through the dense information that is contained in them. And this is where Mzalendo.com volunteers come in. They attempt to provide information in simpler terms. In a democracy, citizens are able to participate in government processes if information is readily available to allow them to make informed contributions.

Okolloh again: 'We feel that Kenyans not only have "a right to know" but also need to play a more active role in determining their country's role – this is our effort to do more than just complain about how things are not working in Kenya.'

According to Mzalendo.com, the Kenyan government is still very much a 'closed society' — the presumption is that the public does not have a right to know unless they have special permission. As a citizen project, Mzalendo.com is focusing on one of the major government institutions that should be the most accessible, with the aim of 'opening' it up and demonstrating that it is both possible and necessary for Kenyans to demand and expect more accountability from public institutions.

Case Study 2: Ushahidi.com

Ushahidi, which means 'testimony' in Swahili, is an online platform that was initially developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post-election violence in January 2008. Ushahidi.com's roots are in the collaboration of Kenyan citizen journalists and technological experts during a time of crisis. At the height of the crisis, citizens were able to share information, photos and blog posts relating to the violence as well as peace activities. Most people were able to use mobile phones to produce content and upload it to the web.

The initial deployment of Ushahidi.com had 45,000 users in Kenya, and was the catalyst for a platform that was to be set up in response to the demand. In 2010, Ushahidi.com thus became a platform for mapping rescue efforts in Haiti and Chile after the earthquake.

The Ushahidi.com team is composed of individuals with a variety of experiences – ranging from human rights work, to software development. Apart from the smaller team that earns salaries, Ushahidi.com has a team of volunteer developers primarily in Africa, but also in Europe and the U.S.

Ushahidi.com's code is open source and in May 2008 it was shared with a group in South Africa that used it to map incidents of xenophobic violence. The deployment was considered rudimentary and made the founders realise the need to rebuild the framework from the ground up. Since then, Ushahidi.com has released several versions of the software, which has since been deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Kenya, Philippines, Pakistan and by major media houses – including Al Jazeera and *The Washington Post*.

While the platform was developed at a time of crisis, the team has found a way to encourage organisations to use the platform to receive information from the public. By March 2010, there were ten organisations testing the

platform in Kenya. The organisations range from wildlife conservation, health to youth entrepreneurship.

Case Study 3: Women Of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)

The Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) is a non-governmental organisation bringing together several women's organisations in Uganda to develop the use of ICT tools to solve women's issues. WOUGNET uses the internet to facilitate communication within communities, to share best practices, and appropriate technologies, ideas and problems of other groups working on similar concerns. While WOUGNET puts emphasis on the internet as a *tool* – harking to the notion of social shaping of technology – debate has also focused on how the technology can be integrated with traditional means of information exchange and dissemination including radio, video, television and print media.

In this respect, WOUGNET has been involved in a citizen journalism project, involving blogging and information sharing by rural women in Uganda. With mobile phone ownership in low and middle-income groups rising – confirming the contextual ICT data presented in **Chapter 3** – WOUGNET has leveraged the benefits of mobile phones to allow women to share their opinions and contribute to debates on various topics.

WOUGNET's work with rural women farmers in Apac District, northern Uganda, involves mobile phones as one of the ICT tools to enhance access to agricultural information by rural women farmers. In the past, this information would have been expected to be provided through local radio stations. WOUGNET was featured in the *Women and mobile: is it really a global opportunity?* report – the first comprehensive review of women and mobile phones in the developing world. This report, sponsored by the GSMA Development Fund, the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women and Vital Wave Consulting, explores the commercial and social opportunity for closing the mobile gender gap. The report was released at the 2010 Mobile World Congress.

Apart from mobile phones and blogs, WOUGNET has also used discussion groups, Facebook and Twitter to encourage interaction, which has in turn encouraged citizen journalism in the country. According to Maureen Akena, WOUGNET Information Officer:

[The] Internet is the biggest and most used technology in this project, [in addition to] audio cameras, and audio recorders. The cameras and audio equipment are instrumental in areas where the women may not be able to write; they are able to take a picture that can explain the situation. The impact of this project, especially in Uganda, is so big; there are several reports written by the beneficiaries.

THE MAGHREB

The context of citizen journalism

Analysing the state and nature of citizen journalism in the Maghreb region requires that one considers the political and economic system in which media operate, including the regulatory frameworks that guide media policies

on information pluralism, freedom of expression and media independence. In this regard, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are still lagging behind. As regards assessing and ranking media pluralism, freedom of expression and of the press, some slight differences exist in the Algerian case. The political system in each country does not contribute to promoting a reliable freedom of the press; on the contrary, it appears to prevent the media from promoting a real pluralistic space, and also from supporting the rise of an independent and active civil society.

In Morocco, with the advent of King Mohamed VI, hopes for freedom and liberty were high, only to be dashed after ten years of newspapers being banned and journalists jailed because they dared to publish some 'sensitive' news about the king's health and his family members. Although King Mohamed VI set up a high council for audio-visual media in 2005, which enabled the creation of several public and private television channels and radio stations, the situation is still under strict control through the appointment of the king's close and devoted friends. Arguably, the media policy changes in Morocco are only cosmetic, as they promote the king's positive image and put aside citizens' concerns and difficulties.

In terms of media infrastructure, there is evidence of a significant proportion of the population accessing the internet, for example. About 10 million people – 32% of a population of 35 million – has access to the internet. In practice, however, users and bloggers are subject to authorities' control and surveillance over their articles and comments.

As for Tunisia, press freedom has never been high on the agenda for official authorities. Several international bodies and non-governmental organisations have been criticising the government because of the worsening situation of press freedom and human rights. Needless to say, since President Zine El Abidine Benali took power in 1987, the country has regularly been pointed out for its multiple violations of basic human rights and an alarming lack of freedom of the press. Human rights activists, political opponents, lawyers and journalists are very often harassed and even taken to prison. A case in point is that of journalist Toufik Benbrik.

In the audiovisual sector, however, the situation is quite different, especially with the presence of some private TV and radio stations. However, the owners of such media are reportedly related to or sympathisers of the president. The other achille's heel for the Tunisian political system is the internet network on which the government maintains a tight grip. Many bloggers still face prison charges because of their critical reports on the internet.

In Algeria, there appears to be a relatively free press, compared with its neighbours. Since 2006, it has been like a 'honey moon', with what appears to be a tacit agreement between president Abdelaziz Bouteflika and the private press. The private press accounts for a dominant and prominent position in the media market, with 74 newspapers out of a total of 80 titles. Only 6 papers belong to the public sector. The fact that there is a tacit agreement between private media and the government means that private journalists will not face harassment and imprisonment for their reports and articles, no matter how critical they are towards the authorities. But economic sanctions and fines may apply in the event of acts of defamation and libel.

As far as audiovisual media are concerned, they are under a public-ownership monopoly, although over 75 private local companies nurture public service broadcasting programmes. For the internet, Algerians seem to enjoy free access, without any restrictions, inasmuch as there is no legislation to supervise or monitor internet sites. However, due to what the authorities see as abuses and misuses associated with the internet, there is talk of the authorities enacting new laws to address what they refer to as 'communication crimes'.

It can be noticed that North African countries share the same difficulties and concerns. Over all, existing political systems in the region still need more openness and democratisation, especially given that opposing views are not heard but generally silenced. In fact, there is no real political opposition force that can make it possible for political power to alternate. The issue of freedom of opinion, expression, and the press is under close scrutiny and under strict control of official authorities. As such, the state of media activity ranks low in terms of international norms. In addition, although civil society in the region is considered to be an agent of democracy and media pluralism, it is still in its formative stage, if it exists at all. Thus, local and national civil society organisations – cultural or civil – do not exert much influence, unless they act as 'subcontractors' or supporters of government policies.

The technological basis of citizen journalism

Illiteracy is an important factor that determines the educational and cultural level of citizens in the three countries. It has implications for the levels of political awareness, civic engagement and press freedom as well as readership. In statistical terms, the actual rate of illiterate segments of the population varies in all countries. In Algeria, for instance, it is 23% of a population of 35 million inhabitants; in Tunisia, it is 32% of a total of 9 million inhabitants; and in Morocco, it is 40% of a population of 36 million inhabitants. In fact, these elements enable us to understand the actual uneasy situation of press freedom in the Maghreb region.

Undoubtedly, technology has enabled citizens to have access to different news sources by means of satellite channels, the internet, the computer and mobile telephony. Regardless of educational level, age category, social and work conditions, users feel free to exercise their talents, hobbies and wishes. Also, they implement technology as tools to explore opportunities for friendship, jobs and travels. But, more importantly, as far as citizen journalism is concerned, they express themselves by creating blogs and producing articles that are not accepted in conventional journalism.

Algerian users tend to be passive social networkers, but some of them publish pictures and video, and only a few surf the internet for research and blogs. Facebook is the most important social network applied to friendship and contacts.

Although citizen journalism in the Maghreb region – and Algeria in particular – still has a long way to really exist and become an alternative to conventional media, it is clear that new technologies have enabled journalists to have more opportunities to become multi-skilled and multi-tasked. They can easily and rapidly switch from a written press to audiovisual, and then to electronic, platforms. They perform in perfect unison, using multiple technological

tools that lend themselves to convergence between audio visual, telecommunications and computing.

Against the backdrop of such technological convergence, the main challenge becomes one of journalists having to defend basic principles of journalism, avoiding censorship and containing economic and political pressures. It is important to note, however, that with enhanced skill and adeptability at using technologies, the act of operating freely across a range of technological platforms can itself serve to 'free up' journalists. In that sense, technology can be democratising or liberating.

In the quest for enhancing citizen journalism through technological innovation, free software and open source can play the role of giving Africans a voice in cyberspace. It can become a source for motivation and creativity – a bridge to allow them to find adequate solutions to local problems without having to wait for foreign assistance and expertise.

Even so, it is too early to affirm that mobile technology will become the future of journalism; nevertheless, it has led to the emergence of mobile media and communications. Nowadays, the credo of the technology is to broadcast and publish news and current affairs at any time of the day, regardless of the time differences between countries. The world has become a small village as a result: satellite, fiber optics, the internet and mobile telephony coalesce into a converging platform and practice. Technological convergence has made it easier and more feasible for journalists to eloquently exercise their talents and skills, to shift from one platform to another (press, radio, television, computer, internet and telephone) and, above all, to catch up with future journalism based on rapidity, mobility and diversity. However, this technological prowess should not undermine or set aside ethics, social responsibility, fairness and impartiality as core values and principles of journalism, even in the digital era. Here, it is important to emphasise the need for (citizen) journalists to 'shape' the technology that liberates them.

An emerging blogosphere

In Tunisia, for example, bloggers set up a collective blog called 'Tunisian Witness' which aims to reach Tunisian citizens worldwide, particularly those interested to develop an independent national media and promote Tunisian citizen journalism in general. These bloggers consider themselves to be active citizen journalists, contributing to the idea of citizenship with news, ideas and comments as well as actively participating in forums and debates on issues related to Tunisia. It is important to note, however, that these personal initiatives need to be consistent and fit into a particular frame of citizen journalism. As it is, they tend to be incoherent and inconsistent.

Perceptions of citizen journalism

Against the background described above, the concept of citizen journalism is ill-defined among the population. Some consider it to be the *online* press (It is worth mentioning that most newspapers have their own electronic editions on the internet, with only few titles having exclusively online editions, such as *Tout sur l'Algerie* [Everything about Algeria], accessible at: www.tsa-algerie.com)).

Others see blogs as a part of the citizen journalism movement, with blogs and other sites represented as spaces

for political opposition and a means to promote freedom of expression and the press. However, citizen journalism seems to have a long way to go before it can be widely grasped and comprehended. In spite of this, there are some temptations to build up common spaces on the internet for new forms of expression. In this vein, there is some evidence of *political* blogging, especially in Algeria.

For example, the web site www.agirpoualgerie.com (Act for Algeria) was initiated by a former Algerian security officer living in France. Also epitomising political webblogging is the website www.haddarblog.com, which is authored by an active political opponent, Yazid Haddar. What is clear is that such political activity is enabled through boundless technological interconnection between Algerian and political activists dispersed across the globe. Many of the examples of political blogging involve either former journalists or political opponents based in Europe, especially in France.

There are other types of web sites and blogs which epitomise other types of citizen journalism. These include:

- *Algerie Decouverte* (Discover history, nature and geography of the country)
- *Algerie Femme* (A blog dedicated to women)
- *Hoggar Infos* (About historical patrimony in the Algerian Sahara)
- *kherdja* (A blog dedicated to outings, food and shoppings in the country)
- *Lekra3* (Satire and gossips).

Be that as it may, it can be concluded that there is a 'timid' debut of local citizen journalism taking place in the Maghreb. A good example is the electronic newspaper *Algérie Focus*, based in France, and produced by professional journalists, scholars and experts. It aims to promote freedom of expression and a diversity of opinions. Its chief editor, Faycal Anseur, launched a parallel citizen space with the support of the social network applications of Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Orkut, Flickr, Bebo, Hi5, YouTube, Basecamp, Viadeo, and Webwag. In his introductory address on the blog dedicated to citizens, Anseur explains the reasons behind the creation of it. These include the promotion of public debate in Algeria, going beyond the usual popular physical places where people meet to discuss issues, such as coffee shops. He saw the blog as a public service arena in which power belonged to Algerians. Exercising such communicative power meant that there was no need to filter news and concentrate on less critical views. His attempt was to present an alternative to the traditional media in order to serve citizens' concerns and hardships more directly.

It can be contended that Algerian citizens have generally become citizen journalists unknowingly. Through their contribution to social networks, they find out that they are citizen journalists. Actually, they don't realise that, by taking part in forums and debates, writing articles, reports and commentaries, they pave the way to the birth of new-journalistic practices undertaken by modest and ordinary citizens in the country.

The ethics of citizen journalism

Nevertheless, it is too early – and even immature – to confirm that Faycal Anseur's project fits into the citizen

journalism scope. His understanding of the concept relies on having more freedom to speak out his mind, to express himself on all subjects without restrictions or censorship. Resenting the ethical strictness and political correctness of existing public media, Anseur's immediate aims are to secure more spaces on the internet for free expression of opinions. He feels that there are basic communication gaps between different generations and even within the members of the same society. Also, economic, social and cultural barriers exist between the educated and the not-so-educated, between the rich and the poor, and between men and women. These factors spur him to elevate free and unfettered communication as a platform for generating fresh understandings about justice, politics, economics, democracy, etc.

To this end, Anseur describes the internet as a magic creation, as it enables us to open up a large window on the world, to be informed, and then to inform others. The network offers interactivity, and free, easy and rapid access to networks. It opens up new opportunities for cooperation and friendship, as well as for networks of contacts. In addition, it becomes a platform for new tools and means to exercise talents and expertise of writing articles, stories and reporting news. It will arguably ultimately lead to practising new journalism as a direct response to the failures of conventional journalism.

Conventional journalism has not only disappointed citizens but also dashed their hopes, ambitions and needs. But in the case of Faycal Anseur's project, the concept of citizen journalism needs further elaboration, comprehension and practice. It can be clearly assumed that technological facilities have contributed to the emergence of citizen journalism, but it is far from being considered an enduring process of change, at least for the short or medium term. In fact, citizen journalism is caught up in concerns around authenticity, credibility and controversy. For example, some articles written by anonymous citizens stirring up controversy, anger and protest are either not sufficiently researched or simply biased and unbalanced.

However, due to lack of credibility and impartiality on the part of conventional media, citizen journalism remains an important form of expression and the right way to discover the truth. In fact, those who take part in Faycal Anseur's project tend to be young, energetic, politically motivated and educated. Their comments reflect a high degree of political awareness and a feeling of dissatisfaction with the conventional press which they accuse of political bias and being overcommercially oriented. As already noted, there does not appear to be any proper citizen journalism project that can be fitted into this new form of journalism, nor is there a discernible 'business model' of citizen journalism in the region as a whole. However, such websites as www.emploitic.com and www.Khadma.com are dedicated to procurement and jobs. Their underlying assumption is the need for a rapid and efficient way to manage human resources. Perhaps advertising could become a revenue-raising measure for citizen journalism?

Uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media

Conventional public and private media appear to underestimate or ignore the concept of citizen journalism. Their typical response has been to have online editions of their publications. As such, they exhibit a highly institutionalised

approach to citizen journalism, tending to think of their newspapers as spaces for all citizens' contributions and suggestions.

Besides having a network of regional and local correspondents, some newspapers provide hotlines to their readers for comments and reports on different issues. So, it seems there is no necessity, or even need, to develop a new citizen journalism project which would be an alternative to conventional media. Furthermore, a newspaper called *Le Citoyen (The Citizen)* is, although owned by a private citizen, dedicated to reporting on local news in which citizens are at the core. Citizen journalism as such does not exist because private media owners consider themselves citizens after all. They consider it their duty to defend the basic rights of society, thereby ensuring a degree of public expression.

The democratic value of citizen journalism

As noted above, the practice of citizen journalism requires a political system that is basically founded on core democratic values, including media and political pluralism. In the absence of these criteria, it will be quite difficult to admit the existence of it. In the Algerian case, the country has, since the 1990s, embarked on political and economic reforms. Here, democracy is still in transition, not yet able to fully meet citizens' wishes, ambitions and expectations. Thus, Algerians who suffered from the French colonisation, then disillusioned by the socialist regime and the monolithic party system, asked for legitimate aspirations and better life after the adoption in 1990 of a constitution in favour of multiparty political system and a move to democracy. For Algerians, democracy means equal opportunities to access jobs, education, housing, health, the right to freedom of expression, opinion and press, freedom to create political parties and associations, etc. In addition, they ask for an independent judicial system, law and order, and periodic free and fair elections during which political power can alternate.

The media is an important part of all the processes described above. Journalists are themselves actors or agents of democracy. Inasmuch as their actions are not vain, those working in the private press who opted in the 1990s for the 'intellectual adventure', are today proud of the achievements, but without having paid with their lives and health. Indeed, they succeeded in securing communicative spaces for public opinion. It can be argued, therefore, that conventional media, and especially the private press, still has important roles to play in promoting and safeguarding democracy in Algeria. It will not be easy to ignore its contribution to strengthening democratic values and principles by offering space for debate by politicians, scholars and citizens. In fact, some newspapers dedicated pages to specialists and experts' critical contributions and citizens' letters and reports on wrongdoings, corruption and cases of miscarriage of justice. Whereas citizen journalism appears to be marginally practised, conventional media seem to provide the kind of political forums from which journalists, scholars, political opponents and ordinary citizens can intervene in public affairs.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

The context of citizen journalism

Several citizen journalism projects were assessed in southern Africa, based upon the evaluative criteria described in **Chapter 2**. It is clear that different projects served different citizens in different ways. *Mmegi* presented a case of institutional citizen journalism, with a Facebook group and SMS project for the *Mmegi* newspaper in Botswana targeted at Facebook users, especially youths. It gives citizens an opportunity to give feedback and also post their own content which they think is necessary. Discussion boards provide a platform for debate on news content.

For their part, Kubatana.net and Sangonet were running citizen journalism projects that advance democracy. The *Text 'em campaign*, for example, helps women in Zimbabwe to make a contribution concerning the constitution-making process. Sangonet projects, such as the Soul Beat of Africa project, give NGOs a platform to criticise governments on issues of national importance, apart from facilitating the sharing of experiences.

An interesting finding was that none of the organisations had any clear quality control measures in place. One organisation revealed that any attempt to place quality control measures on content generated by consumers would amount to censorship and that such an act would equate citizen journalism to conventional media. The general view was that any work coming in from any contributor should be viewed as 'quality'. Here, quality was understood as *fitness for purpose*. Even so, many of the media organisations interviewed reserved the right of publication. For example, although readers are allowed to contribute news articles on the internet, the media house will not publish any material they may deem inappropriate, suggesting that *institutional* citizen journalism operates within the general ambit of organisational constraints.

A key feature of the contextual framework within which citizen journalism occurs relates to the sustainability or business model for the phenomenon of citizen journalism. Different organisations reported very different models. On the whole, business models tended to be similar for similar media organisations. Newspapers and magazines clearly had a profit motive for conceiving a citizen journalism project. Their idea is to grow the audience, follow the audience on the internet, and tap into the youth market which has abandoned traditional media. Through this, they hope to attract advertisers onto their sites. The increased mobile technology usage, especially cell phones, also allows media organisations to sell advertising opportunities to potential and actual advertisers. This is meant to increase revenue and hence profits for the organisations. The idea, for other organisations, is to appeal to the media consumers' need for free expression and charge them for it. For example, when media consumers take part in voting and expressing an opinion, they attract a fee, giving rise to a form of *transactional democracy*. These media houses are 'selling freedom of expression for a fee.'

NGOs had a different business model which did not prioritise profit maximisation. The idea was to advance democracy and encourage participation, involvement, debate and decision making in matters of national importance. These organisations receive donor funding and do not have a profit motive. However Kubatana.net

Text' em campaign – where users send text messages to the constitutional committee – charged users at a premium for sending these text messages. The overall business model of this organisation is not to make profits as such, but to sustain its operations through revenue generation.

The now defunct Reporter.co.za had a different business model. Avusa expected to generate content and get news leads from ordinary people and pay for this content at a very low price. The idea was to cut costs but also manage to generate quality content from content consumers. Content generation would be done by the consumers; for example, an ordinary person at the scene of a gruesome shark attack can send images and also text of the description of the event to Reporter.co.za and would be paid a minimum fee for this. Ordinary people actually participate in generating content and do not become passive consumers of media content. This business model failed to take off. There are several reasons why this model failed to work. *Reporter.co.za* was a news website written entirely by its readers, and published articles, images, audio and video they sent. But it turned out that the African media space is not yet ready to engage in a dedicated citizen journalism project. There are still access issues that make it impossible for many people to contribute on this citizen journalism internet site. In addition, people are not yet ready for such radical changes. It will take time to ease them into adopting these concepts. The other reason given is the problem of credibility. Media content consumers do not regard citizen journalism as credible journalism. They prefer media content produced by 'professionals'. The result would be that citizen generated content would not have an audience; hence advertisers would not be secured to sustain the business model.

The technological basis of citizen journalism

In terms of technology, although the internet is increasingly becoming available to more people, mobile technology was cited by many of the respondents as the technology driving citizen journalism. The technology allows for voting, participation, debate as well as generation and sharing of content. For example, handsets with cameras and video allow users to generate content and then upload it on the internet. In Zimbabwe, for example, those interviewed believed that although a number of people had access to the internet and there were initiatives to increase internet access such as the President's donation of computers, the real technology that had the capacity to effectively drive citizen journalism is mobile technology. This is because of its cheap access and also relative ease to use. In South Africa, many people are using the internet and can be reached over the internet, but mobile technology has the real potential to cause a citizen journalism boom, if fully utilised.

The 3G technology in Zimbabwe is, for example, rapidly being embraced by users. It is also possible for people to send text messages and participate in surveys and referendums through their cellular phones. Handsets that have video and photo applications also make it possible for ordinary people to generate content and share it with others through uploading on such internet sites as Facebook, or send it to other cell phone users through SMS or MMS. Facebook is very popular with many users in Africa, unlike Twitter, MySpace and YouTube, which are less known by users in southern Africa. Mobile technology now has the power to drive the uptake of the internet.

There was agreement by all respondents that no special skills were necessary for one to engage in citizen

journalism. People only had to be able to use the necessary technology to practise citizen journalism. Expecting skills from citizen journalists would amount to turning them into professional journalists of traditional media. Citizen journalists should just express themselves and share everything they think is important.

In Africa there are now multiple mediums of telling one story. The technology revolution has made it possible for one journalist to work in print, television and also on the internet. It means a story done by one reporter can now be found on television, in print and on the internet. Media organisations revealed that a case for converged journalism exists although it is being adopted at different speeds by different organisations. These organisations treat converged journalism as necessary for the changing working environment. This has placed demands on media institutions to move towards multi-skilling of journalists. The problem that some media organisations revealed as an obstacle to multi-skilling is resistance to change. However many organisations revealed their reporters were being trained in how to multi-task.

Here, a novel question probed was the extent to which mobile technology could be seen as a possible future of (citizen) journalism. As noted in **Chapter 3**, mobile ownership has increased due to increased efficiency in networks and lower costs in acquiring handsets. Be that as it may, different organisations interviewed saw different opportunities in mobile technology. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television media organisations see it as an opportunity to grow their audiences and hence attract advertisers for financial gain. This was the idea behind the *Mmegi* SMS Facebook project in Botswana. However, NGOs such as SANGONET and Kubatana.net see the whole technology revolution as a way of advancing democracy and encouraging debate and participation in national issues. The organisations interviewed strongly believed that mobile technology was the future of Africa. Most such media organisations had adopted citizen journalism projects of some kind or other, driven by mobile technology. Some were planning to do so.

In Zimbabwe, for example, Econet Wireless had embarked on an ambitious project to link the country with the rest of the world through a fiber optic cable via the Zambian capital of Lusaka. This upgrade in Econet's infrastructure would greatly improve the mobile providers' data, video and voice connections. The services would be transferred at a faster speed amounting to several gigabytes per second and would benefit the whole telecommunications sector, as they would be able to use the infrastructure at much cheaper rates. The country's second largest mobile services provider in terms of subscribers, Telecel, was recently granted a Third Generation (3G) operating licence by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulations Authority (POTRAZ).

The uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media

While most organisations seem to be warming up to the concept of citizen journalism and seeing it as a necessary adjustment to how the media operates, there are some media organisations which still view it with suspicion. There are still issues of what exactly constitutes news, and how does the mainstream media negotiate issues of credibility since ordinary people do not verify their content. At the *Standard Newspaper* in Zimbabwe, there were concerns about possible law suits in the event the paper published an unverified story which would have been generated

by ordinary citizens. In addition, the business models of many newspapers rely on revenue from advertisers and government sources. They do not seem ready to risk offending these stakeholders by allowing ordinary people space in their publications. There is concern that the professional journalist's position in the industry is under threat if everyone is now viewed as a journalist. Instead ordinary people must be called 'citizen writers' rather than citizen journalists.

Some media organisations, especially newspapers, have embraced the notion of citizen journalism sparingly. In South Africa, for example, AVUSA's Reporter.co.za never really saw the light of day. As noted above, there have been several reasons offered for the failure of this citizen journalism project.

The democratic value of citizen journalism

Democracy is defined as a very broad concept. A very important component of democracy is the active participation of the people – as citizens – in politics and civic life. This assumes that there is freedom and pluralism in the mass media. The key role of citizens is to participate in public life. Citizens have an obligation to become informed about public issues, to watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests. In a democracy, people have rights to own beliefs, and to say and write what they think. In a democracy, citizens should be able to choose between different sources of news and opinions to read in the newspapers, to hear on the radio, and to watch on television.

Different projects served different people. While some projects, such as Kubatana.net's *Freedom Fone*, are designed to serve everyone who is committed to democracy, there are others which target donors and funders to help those who are infected with HIV and AIDS. The *Text 'em Campaign* in Zimbabwe is an initiative that serves women as it allows them to give their views during the constitution-making process in Zimbabwe.

The Nat village blog claimed it had managed to document the plight of the people of Nata and managed to mobilise funding for their assistance and improve their lives.

At the *Standard Newspaper* in Zimbabwe, they felt that there needed to be at least standards that would allow content generated by ordinary citizens to be worth publishing. As noted above, there are concerns about possible lawsuits arising from the 'unprofessional' manner in which citizen journalists tend to generate their content, at times without verifying facts. Overall, most organisations interviewed agreed that citizen journalism dismantled all quality control structures. They felt the whole point of citizen journalism is to allow ordinary people to be partners in the making of news and giving them a voice to discuss issues that affect them.

Against this backdrop, the media organisations interviewed believed that the above characteristics defined what citizen journalism is about. Citizen journalism should foster participation, debate and accountability – all of which are important characteristics of a democracy. In citizen journalism, communication should be horizontal, with ordinary people either owning communication channels or being given an opportunity to give their views through

media organisations' channels. In other words, media consumers are no longer just passive consumers of media content but have the ability to question, contribute and hold authorities accountable.

The Nata village blog functions differently from many other citizen journalism projects in terms of guaranteeing democracy to ordinary people. It ensures the plight of people living with HIV and AIDS in Nata is documented to the whole world so that their right to life and medication is fulfilled by government and well wishers. Communication is a fundamental human right and such citizen journalism projects serve to fulfill this right in one way or another.

Case studies of citizen journalism

Case Study 4: The Citizen Journalism in Africa (CJA) Project

The context of citizen journalism

The Citizen Journalism in Africa (CJA) programme, located in Johannesburg, South Africa, presents a form of institutionalised citizen journalism. It was initiated by the Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos) and Sangonet. It is funded by the European Union. The CJA programme is managed by Hivos SA. Its overall objective is to increase outreach in local media of balanced, objective and informative reporting on the situation of targeted marginalised groups, including women, which contributes to an increased involvement and participation of these groups in democratic processes on the national level.

More specifically, it aims to improve the capacity of selected Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the field of gender, children and youth, HIV and AIDS and rural communities to use a mixture of traditional and digital media strategically and with journalistic professionalism to support democratic processes and a diverse and independent media environment. Many African civil society organisations, including community media organisations lack the technical, journalistic and publishing skills to harness on and offline media tools to contribute to a diverse, professional and pluralistic media environment.

A limited resource base is the first impediment to the development of a culture of writing and reporting in many CSOs that are otherwise occupied by the day-to-day routines of their projects. Notwithstanding, media capacity is further hindered by inadequate education levels and cultural traditions, which propagate oral traditions of knowledge sharing. Boosted by the tradition of oral culture, a successful media platform at the local level is community radio. There is also tendency for established CSO groups working on the information dissemination of critical human rights issues to use radio and film as a medium to promote concerns.

Engagement with the online environment is particularly weak amongst CSO groupings and this encumbers knowledge production for mainstream media channels as the internet is increasingly being used as the first research source by the media and general public.

The programme targets 120 civil society and media organisations representing and working for the rights of women, children and youth, people living with HIV and AIDS and people in rural communities.

The programme is implemented in six countries i.e. South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Uganda. In each country two focal points were identified. These were already Hivos partners who are grant recipients. These are organisations that are seen as being strong and have been using media and ICTs to advance their work. In each country, the country focal points and Hivos identify 15 other civil society organisations (CSOs) that would benefit from the project. The idea was introduced to these civil society organisations. Those organisations that showed interest in improving their capacity were invited to participate in the programme. The number of participating CSOs differs from country to country. Initially there was enthusiasm and interest in the programme. With time the number of participating organisations dropped. This was attributed to programme priorities within the organisations, staff turnover, and in some instances, staff were just too busy.

The majority of the individuals involved in the programme do not have a media background. Many have no understanding of the provisions of the law in relation to media and information dissemination. Their concerns are largely the relationship they have with journalists. All the organisations participating in the programme acknowledge the need to have the media on their side. The main problem in all the countries is the payment of journalists. Their salaries are low and they are expected by their institutions to find good stories. The challenge here is that there is limited interest in development issues. Many of the journalists are tasked with writing stories or covering events and yet they do not have knowledge or background of the issue or context.

The other issue that came up strongly was the juniorisation of the news room. Critical stories are given to budding journalists who end up with lousy and uninformative pieces. The organisations also complain that some journalists come to their events but what they report is totally different. Sometimes the organisations are requested by the media to comment or write an article on a specific issue. Most of the organisations complain that more than once what was published is totally different to what they wrote.

Another influencing factor is that many journalists, especially in Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania, will not write a story unless the organisation pays them upfront or promises to pay. They only come to events or cover activities if there will be a benefit for them. In many instances smaller organisations do not have the resources to cover these payments. The challenge is often that if an event or activity is away from the city the journalist has to be accommodated, meals arranged, transported to the venue and also get paid for being there.

There is also a problem of bureaucracy within organisations. If the director is not around no one feels competent enough to make a comment when the media contacts them. The other problem is that many of these organisations are understaffed as a result only the director has the writing and analytical skills. On the other hand these organisations have a challenge where they do not have the technical knowhow in terms of generating their own media. Most of the organisations in the programme do not have a stable internet connection which makes some aspects of communication difficult.

Technical challenges are also a hindrance to some of the partners. In many instances there is only one computer that is connected to the internet. When someone is using that computer the whole office has to wait – or choose to disturb that individual. Most organisations do not have a technical person who would help them use the available infrastructure effectively e.g. network the computers. Often these computers are very slow as they are loaded with all sorts of software and this has an effect on the speed of the computer. Out of 90 organisations in the programme, only five budget for technology. Most play by the ear while others do not have the finances to purchase or even fix broken equipment.

Most of the partners communicate with their target audience in the language convenient to them. In many instances they use pamphlets and posters. They have not considered other forms of communication either due to lack of knowledge or that of resources. Some of these organisations have well developed communication strategies but these have not been implemented due to a number of reasons. Most organisations have not approached donors to help them improve this aspect of their work – communication. Some donors on the other hand have not been vigilant in ensuring that as much as the organisations have great plans they have to budget properly for their implementation.

Perspectives on citizen journalism

At the very beginning of the CJA programme, partners were asked to give an overview of the media situation in their country and what they think of the CJA programme. The various organisations then assessed their strengths and weaknesses, using a questionnaire, and presented their findings, with the aim of addressing any areas of concern within each organisation. The areas assessed were financial sustainability; human resources; writing skills; and communication skills. Generally speaking, the most serious gaps identified were the need for technical capacity-building; infrastructural challenges such as limited access to the electricity grid and only dial-up access available; the intermittent nature of donor support; and the constraints placed on media freedom. Positive aspects included the high level of staff commitment; many innovative approaches in a context of limited resources; and good financial and organisational management.

Country groups assessed the current media context in which the project would be implemented. In most countries there was a reasonable degree of freedom of expression, with the exception of Zimbabwe, where there is a high degree of oppression. The expansion of South African media corporations and business interests into the rest of Africa was noted as a concern. In most cases, the primary media were all owned by government, and there was little independent broadcasting, other than community radio. Self-censorship was noted in some countries, as was harassment of media workers who speak out against government. In some countries, payment of a ‘facilitation fee’ to have one’s articles published was seen as the norm and not challenged. In Mozambique, there were challenges of limited infrastructure, poor rural access and limited technical capacity. Overall, South Africa appeared to have the best technical infrastructure and also the highest degree of press freedom, although with an element of self-censorship.

When asked what would be the benefit of participating in the programme, the common responses were:

- Empowered communities benefiting from the information
- Learning and sharing skills
- Skills development e.g. ICTs, journalism, documentation, facilitation and advisory support.

When the participants were asked what were their critical needs to be able to participate in the CJA programme, the following were the most popular: technical skills; information management skills; facilitation skills; communication skills; training skills; understanding ICT methods and tools; project management; equipment; financial resources; and journalism skills.

When asked 'How should a citizen journalism network look like?' the following were some of the answers:

- Enlightened communities that can identify and articulate their issues using available media channels that are owned and run by the respective communities and the use of information as a form of empowerment.
- Greater access and insight into local issues, communities affected and the local actors working for change.
- The local citizen journalism network should look like a catalyst for environmental justice and social transformation, i.e. it should be a network able to listen to/ identify pressing issues and be able to address them.
- The citizen journalism network should collaborate with all sectors of the community to promote information and knowledge sharing forums which shall contribute to prevent further spread of HIV and AIDS, promote support and care to People living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA), advocacy and gender issues and also address children rights.

A local citizen journalism network should have the following components to it:

- Sharing of resources (information, contacts, networks etc).
- Open and daily communication (email, telephone, forums etc).
- Technical and capacity support (skills).
- Good understanding of each organisation's work.
- Maintain good and valued working relationships.
- All members in the network are active in gathering, sharing and generating information.
- All members complement each other in skills, capacity and outreach.
- Good visibility at national and in areas of operation.
- Interactive network with everyone contributing and benefiting from the network.
- It should be a grouping of grassroots organisations that have a need to interact with media as a means of reaching their communities, or that need the media to highlight issues that are important to them.
- Quality stories and a variety of content, underpinned by:
 - broad and creative distribution;
 - aggregation and amplification;

- inspiration and motivation in network / to audience;
- effective targeting of relevant constituencies;
- mutual support / encouragement/criticism;
- enhanced skills and growth in capacity;
- realistic assessment of challenges (organisational structure, staff retention, brain capacity etc);
and
- participation and respect.

The institutional nature of citizen journalism

The Citizen Journalism in Africa programme focuses on marginalised people i.e. children, women, rural, poor, LGBTI (lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and intersex). It also looks at community based media and ICT organisations. The decision to work with organisations instead of individuals was based on access. Many of the communities the project works with have limited resources. These organisations have infrastructure and they also have access to large numbers of the target audience.

The idea was that strengthening these organisations will in turn give them the skills they need to capacitate others. The other reason was to ensure that the work these organisations do is not lost but is shared at community level and beyond. CSOs from all the areas identified are invited to participate in the programme. As far as possible a diversity of organisations is encouraged. This is largely in line with the information sharing and networking ideals. After the partners have been identified and they agree to participate in the programme, a needs assessment is conducted with each organisation. This is done to understand the nature of the organisation, what they do, who they work with, what skills they have, what infrastructure is available in their organisation, what technologies they have access to, etc. The assessment also helps in understanding the needs of individual organisations and also to find common areas of interest, challenges and need for all partners.

Training

The information from the assessments is useful in the development of a training manual. It also helps in understanding how to interact with the different structures. The level or pitch of the training is determined by the levels of understanding and need identified by the organisations. Each organisation is asked to identify at least two people who will drive the programme internally. The process of implementation is as follows:

- The country focal point (CFP) is trained as a trainer.
- With the assistance of Hivos trainers, they train the local CSOs in a group training session. This is done so that the CSOs can meet other partners in the programme. This also offers them the opportunity to share information and network. The CSOs who participate in this programme come from different sectors.
- The CFP arranges in-house training and support for each organisation. In this case, the CSO identifies their specific needs and how they will internalise things in their organisation. They also note areas where they need strengthening so that they can also train others in their organisation. Together with the CFP they draft a plan and agree on a course of action. The in-house training will include more people from that organisation. The

organisation decides how it includes its partners.

- The CFP also arranges a support plan for each organisation – this is called ‘On the job training’. They come to the organisation to assist partners with challenges or use email and telephones where necessary. The CFPs monitor the progress of the CSOs and from time to time bring them all together to share ideas and information on what they have been working on, their challenges and what they have done to overcome them.

Seasoned media and ICT trainers are contracted to support the programme. These are not just trainers but people with a good understanding of development challenges and have an interest in information and communications technology for development. They are involved in the development of the training manual. The CFPs also make comments on the manual and relevance for their country. Their input and comments are taken seriously and the manual is adjusted accordingly. In Uganda, for example, there was concern that the manual was too wordy – too much text and less graphics. The partners there were concerned that they would struggle to use it with local partners who are mostly functionally literate. They also wanted local examples to be used in various exercises so that participants can identify with issues.

A five-day group training session is conducted with all partners in each country. The training focuses on the following areas:

- Introduction to citizen journalism
- Media regulatory environment
- Journalism ethics
- News
- Photo journalism and video
- Audio and podcasting
- Using the mainstream media for publicity
- Online publishing and Web 2.0 tools

Using new media

Most of the people who participated in most of the training did not know about provisions of legislation in their country. Most did not have emails. Some have never heard of tools like Skype, Twitter, Messenger, a blog and bulk SMS. Others knew there is an organisational email but were not sure what it is as they have no access to it. Some of the partners have erratic connection to the internet while others had no connection at all.

When asked how they communicate with their audiences or target groups most organisations use meetings. They also write letters to leaders. They also have pamphlets that have not been updated for years. Some of the organisations have websites but these have not been updated for a long time. Most of the people in the organisations do not know how the organisation’s website works and how to make it work for them. There is a strong dependency on consultants and most technical support is outsourced.

The majority of the CSOs have information and resources they would like to share with others but do not know how. The training showed them cost effective ways of generating and disseminating information. It also showed them how to use free online tools to their advantage. They learned about blogging and creating a blog site. Some of them created Facebook accounts for their organisations to maximise their reach.

Communication with the CSOs has shifted from sending long emails that bounce back to receiving online messages from different messaging programmes. Most people now share information using web 2.0 tools. They also make requests for information using these tools.

The online learning portal

This is a website that is dedicated to all partners involved in the CJA programme. The portal has a number of roles which include:

- Offering partners a platform to share information about their organisations and activities.
- Allowing people to write articles and stories and be published.
- Offering the individuals the opportunity to learn something new using the online modules.
- Allowing people to participate in online courses and get feedback and assistance from trainers.
- Serving as a platform where individuals submit articles and get feedback on the quality and areas of improvement in their writing skills.

The portal is divided into a number of segments. The main ones are: submitting articles; submitting a blog; submitting a picture; submitting an audio article; and submitting a digital story. It also offers people the opportunity to interact and share ideas on topical issues. It also allows people to comment on each other's stories. The portal has an online editor and moderator. The editor gives feedback to the articles submitted so that people can rework them and resubmit. The moderator looks at a number of issues including language and ethical issues.

When people started using the portal there were major problems ranging from forgetting their details to articles going missing while submitting. Many people started with two line blogs most of which did not make sense. With time people have been writing more and talking about social issues. Many also ventured into writing article.

The portal was designed to give confidence to people. Many have never been published before. Others are scared to write something because they do not have the confidence. People are encouraged to blog first to friends about anything. They also get feedback on their submissions and sometimes other people comment on the blogs.

The articles submitted have improved in terms of quality, length and content. More people are commenting on articles and sharing their own experience. People have also started to write about other things beyond their area of work. They have also been sharing pictures and videos of events and activities. Some of the people who confessed that they have never written anything other than a report have been writing interesting articles on social issues. Most of the people are using the Facebook page of the CJA programme.

The technological basis of citizen journalism

In order to assist partners who have challenges with resources a number of things were done. These include developing toolkits to save time and resources of the CSOs. These toolkits had all kinds of free productivity software – mostly open source. The software included tools and full programmes for editing audio, pictures, video and Open Office. Tutorials were included in some toolkits. The training manual and other relevant documents were also included.

Many of the organisations did not however have resources that would enable them to generate content and share it. Digital cameras and digital voice recorders were given to all organisations. Laptop computers were also given to all CFPs and to some CSOs. Many of the organisations had connectivity challenges. A grant was made available to all organisations who needed to boost their connectivity and to those who did not have internet at all. The CFPs assisted these organisations with the process including choice of service provider and support service options suitable for them.

The CFPs received a small grant to be able to support the smaller organisations. Most of the support was on solving technical problems the organisations were encountering. They also assisted them in developing communication strategies, alternatives of communicating their message, how to use web based communication tools and connecting to the CJA portal.

The democratic value of citizen journalism

The majority of the participants are using Facebook, Skype, Twitter and Blogger. Not too many of them are updating their pages on a regular basis. They have been using some of the tools like Picasa to improve the quality of their photographs and also for sharing albums online. Some organisations like BROSDI in Uganda have online audio blog. This was motivated by a number of their partners who are mainly functionally literate. Most of the information sourced from these people, who are mostly farmers, is in the form of audio. They contribute a lot of content and information to the portal even though some of them do not know how to use computers. From the beginning of the programme it was agreed that the best local formats that work should be used instead of having a uniform approach to information gathering and dissemination.

Many of the participants do not have access to the internet when they are in the field, but they use their mobile phones to communicate and share information beyond just making phone calls. They take pictures of the situations they find and use these as evidence – something they had not considered previously.

As much as there is limited understanding and use of technology especially in rural communities, this programme has shown that one does not have to be highly educated to use the gadgets available. Many of the people have broken the stereotypes that only journalists can write and be published. One of the farmers wrote a story which sees him as the overall winner of the CJA's writing competition. This is also an indicator of how seriously people

take themselves when they are given a chance.

WEST AFRICA

The context of citizen journalism

The study focused on two English-speaking West African countries – Ghana and Nigeria. In Nigeria the study centred on a specific ICT project called Women Technology Empowerment Centre (W.Tec), located at: <http://www.w-teconline.org/>. The project is aimed at promoting citizen journalism among marginalised girls and women. In Ghana, the study focused on a traditional media organisation called Joy FM, found at: <http://www.AfricaNews.com/>. The media house has incorporated citizen journalism in its online strategy. The study also looked at the Africa-wide news portal service located at <http://www.AfricaNews.com/>, based both in Ghana and the Netherlands. Here, the aim was to establish how the portal is using citizen journalism for news gathering and dissemination.

In summary, the study found that in both Ghana and Nigeria, citizen journalism is a growing phenomenon and this growth is being supported by traditional media organisations as well as individuals and non-governmental organisations. The study also found that whilst there are various perspectives on what constitutes citizen journalism, the underlying concept of citizen engagement in news gathering, processing and distribution remains the central focus.

A third finding was that among the key factors accounting for the growth of citizen journalism in West Africa are:

- A vibrant democracy, including freedom of the press and the right to information.
- Technological drive, including the rise in mobile phones and internet penetration.
- The ease of deploying a citizen journalism project.

It is evident that various citizen journalism projects serve various target groups, including specific groups such as marginalised women and girls, or a generic group, such as all citizens.

An equally important finding was that for most citizen journalism projects there is the need to add a layer of institutional approval or control in order to avoid litigation or fuelling falsehood.

There was, however, no evidence of a viable business model for citizen journalism in West Africa. The overall importance of citizen journalism would seem to lie in its ability to engender some action on the part of authorities and other interested groups in response to perceived citizens' felt needs.

Case studies of citizen journalism

Case Study 5: Women Technology Empowerment Centre (W-Tec), Nigeria

Women Technology Empowerment Centre (W.Tec) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Nigeria. It is dedicated to networking for the success of young women in Nigeria. Their activities include initiating a citizen journalism project championed by Ms. Oreluwa Somolu, the organisation's executive director. This is clearly an *institutionalised* form of citizen journalism, managed by the executive director, her staff and a board of trustees. The primary targets of the citizen journalism project are girls and women of Nigeria. The core aim of the project is to provide training for women and young girls on ICTs, especially Web 2.0 tools to enable them to engage in activism and leisure by applying the principles of citizen journalism.

The context of citizen journalism

Several contextual factors influence the practice of citizen journalism within the project. These include:

- A viable democracy that enables people to express their views.
- The availability, easy and accessibility of technology i.e. internet, including an enabling economic and financial environment in which financial gains can be made from advertising on the internet.
- The availability of technical infrastructure, including reliable electricity supply.
- Donor funding.
- Organisational scaffolding. By this, W.Tec means the institutional support that is given to a citizen journalism project to amplify the voices of citizens, and not necessarily the voice of the host organisation.

Perspectives on citizen journalism

W.Tec defines citizen journalism as 'giving ordinary citizens the skills to use all the available ICT tools to tell their stories, promote development in Nigeria and raise awareness about very important issues that affect their existence in their various states.' W.Tec believes its project qualifies as a citizen journalism project because:

The project focuses on how the citizens, most especially career women, women working in NGOs, women activists and girls, can make use of Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, social networking sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, etc.), mobile phones to send SMS or mobile phones with in-built cameras to capture events and distribute these videos on YouTube, for activism, advocacy, awareness raising about issues, or to even help push forward a campaign.

Central to this understanding of the concept of citizen journalism are the principles of freedom of speech, citizen participation and critical reporting of issues and events. These are, according to W.Tec, the corner-stones of a good citizen journalism project. The respondents further stress that citizen journalism calls attention to issues that would otherwise have been swept under the carpet.

This brand of citizen journalism is, according to W.Tec, very different from conventional journalism because there is no professional training or expertise required to be a citizen journalist. They put it thus: 'One can infer that this [citizen journalism] is from the masses by the masses to give the masses a voice.'

W.Tec admits that this understanding of citizen journalism was not really the major consideration for the development of the project. However, following the outcomes of empowering marginalised girls and women to write, talk and report their stories, it became clear that the project suited this particular understanding of citizen journalism.

The technological basis of citizen journalism

Technology has a definitive place in citizen journalism, but that is not all. According to W.Tec, technology shapes and is shaped by the concept of citizen journalism. As such, although technological innovations are a passing fad, W.Tec believes citizen journalism is 'an enduring process that has being advanced through the use of technology in many communities...Technology just makes it easier and enables more people to participate in citizen journalism.' Yet one cannot over-emphasise the fact that technology has, in some instances, *determined* the shape that citizen journalism takes. The internet, mobile phones and affordable digital cameras have made the promotion of W.Tec's citizen journalism project possible. Individual projects under W.Tec usually consist of blogs, videos and social networking technologies. Tools such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are the most widely used in citizen journalism efforts in Nigeria.

The democratic value of citizen journalism

W.Tec's citizen journalism project helps citizens understand and contribute to the dialogue among girls and women in Nigeria. Girls and women form the core of the projects target. This is because 'women, especially in Nigeria, still lag behind compared to their male counterpart in the use of ICT for development...They have a lot of stories to tell, and awareness to raise in line with their work, and personally.'

Since W.Tec project is targeted at individuals and organisations, its management of blogs is undertaken by individuals and organisations trained as part of the project. W.Tec follows up on each trained person's blog and offers advice on ways of minimising abuse of citizen-journalistic content. In a way, this acts as an attempt at ethical quality control. Some of the issues addressed have included libel and rumor mongering.

W.Tec's project has had a significant impact on the organisation itself and the citizens it serves. The project was chosen as a recipient of a *BlogHer* activists' scholarship to attend their 2009 blogging conference in Chicago. The award was in recognition of the project's focus on issues of gender and women.

A piece of anecdotal evidence about the impact of the project involved a young lady who was harassed and beaten in Nigeria by some navy officers for not moving her car out of the way while they were in a traffic jam. The beating

was recorded by a Nigerian citizen on his phone. He put it out on YouTube for all to see. Many of W.Tec bloggers submitted postings on this abuse which compelled the government to get involved in the case. The case went to court and justice was served in favour of the abused woman.

Case Study 6: Joy FM's 'You Report' and Africa News, Ghana

You Report is a project initiated by Joy Online, a subsidiary of Joy 99.7FM. Joy FM is one of Ghana's leading FM stations. *You Report* is managed by a dedicated staff of three professionals who work under the webmaster of Joy Online. The project is targeted at all citizens irrespective of age or geographical location.

While it is open to all to participate, one needs to sign up to be a member. Once membership is approved, the citizen journalists can then post anything they want. The site allows multimedia i.e. text, video, audio, etc. However, posts to *You Report* are subject to institutional approval.

For its part, *Africa News*, another citizen journalism project in Ghana, is a news portal which was initiated by two Dutch journalists, Peter Vlam and Sebastian Vlugt. The project is located in both Ghana and the Netherlands, where a dedicated staff of five (5) is spread across the two countries and serves as gatekeepers for the content that is generated by citizen journalists across Africa.

The context of citizen journalism

As in Nigeria, several contextual factors influence the practice of citizen journalism in Ghana, such as democracy and freedom of expression. But citizen journalism would receive a boost if the government passed a freedom of information law to enable ordinary citizens to access and freely share information. Other factors that influence the practice of citizen journalism include:

- The availability of technology, such as mobile phones, laptops and the internet.
- An economic environment that would attract advertising revenue for new-mediated platforms.
- Donor funding, although *Africa News* emphasises that the major factor in pushing citizen journalism is the ease with which people can contribute and initiate citizen journalism projects on their own.
- Computer literacy.

Although there is no clear sustainability model for citizen journalism, both respondents claim that the concept has 'a future for those who can really handle it well and ensure that information being posted is credible and reliable. It is through this that one is likely to entice prospective advertisers.'

But respondents clearly relate any sustainability model for citizen journalism to quality content. They stress: 'Any serious citizen journalism project needs a professional journalist to monitor the quality of information to avoid any law suit.'

The irony is that limited access to conventional media is yet another factor that drives the uptake of citizen journalism. Such limited access drives those passionate about writing to explore technologies that will fill the informational gap in their lives. All social networking tools, such as blogs, Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube, aid the spread of citizen journalism in Ghana.

The result of the growth of citizen journalism is that there is now a case of convergence between conventional and new media. However the only limiting barrier to active participation of citizens in this process is what the respondents perceive as the slow growth of computer literacy in Ghana.

Perspectives of citizen journalism

You Report sees citizen journalism as ‘when people who are not in mainstream journalism and without formal training contribute to news dissemination.’ This view of citizen journalism resonates with that of *Africa News*. The project is operated by providing a platform for ‘everyone willing to post his/her own stories on the website: i.e. webbloggers, writers, (citizen) journalists, photographers, filmmakers etc.’ More specifically, *Africa News* defines citizen journalism as ‘creating a platform for the ordinary person with no or little journalism background to package and disseminate information that would impact on the lives of others.’ They further emphasise that citizen journalism provides the chance for the layman to act as a professional journalist by playing an active role in processing and disseminating news.

Reinforcing this perspective, *You Report’s* understanding of citizen journalism is that it ‘allows people who think certain issues or thinks should be known by others to share them.’ The project originators believe that citizen journalism ‘does not follow any strict principles or standardisation; news is provided in its raw state without any gate keeping.’ This differs significantly from conventional journalism. It is this understanding that informed the creation of *You Report* as a medium to enhance citizen participation in news generation and sharing, representing, nevertheless, a form of institutional citizen-journalistic platform.

An important finding, however, is that *You Report* originators view citizen journalism as a passing fad occasioned largely by techno-hype. They state: ‘It is currently a must have in a news organisation; tomorrow there will be something new.’

The originators of *Africa News*, on the other hand, believe the concept of citizen journalism is to ‘simplify and enhance the concept of freedom of information and expression.’ They believe that citizen journalism differs from convention journalism because ‘with citizen journalism it is the public that set the agenda and control the flow of information while conventional journalism is solely reserved for trained journalists.’ As such, *Africa News* holds the view that citizen journalism is not just occasioned by techno hype, but rather it is gradually becoming a source of credible and fast point of news delivery e.g. Twitter and Facebook.

Uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media

Africa News believes that most of the conventional media in Ghana are yet to take advantage of converged journalism. Evidence of that uptake will consist in taking advantage of both online and other ways of spreading the news to widen their following. The reason for such slow rates of uptake is partly because media houses are poorly resourced. As such, it is difficult to train staff to catch up with latest trends in journalism. But there are signs on the horizon that more multi-skilled journalists will take to journalism, including citizen journalism.

One notable achievement of the project so far has been the use by CNN Africa of the news content generated by citizen journalists during the Guinea crisis. However, there are occasional ethical issues reported, not least the use of copyrighted pictures by *Africa News*.

The democratic value of citizen journalism

You Report serves all groups of citizens and 'helps citizens to know a lot of things going on around them without depending solely on conventional journalism.' As a feature of that process, the penetration of internet and mobile technology continues to be the main driver of citizen journalism in Ghana.

In order to avoid litigation, all content posted on *You Report* is reviewed and approved before it is posted onto the site. Despite this restriction, the originators of *You Report* believe that their project qualifies as a citizen journalism project because it allows people to log in with their own passwords and usernames and contribute whatever they want.

In terms of the impact of the project, certain items that have been posted on the site have ended up becoming major news items in conventional media. Because content is screened, there have been no ethical issues that the project has had to deal with.

Africa News also services all citizens by focusing on issues which would otherwise not gain space in the mainstream (international) media. Hence, it has served as a perfect platform for local communities to get their problems/ views across. The project also puts in place quality control measures to watch against sub-standard information; they do this by employing journalists as gatekeepers. As such, as already stated above, they succumb to a form of institutionalised regulating of citizen journalism. Nevertheless, the project would seem to elevate citizen involvement in that 'all the original content uploaded on the website is done by our citizen reporters before our team of editors look at them for approval. They write on any subject of their choice without anyone giving them story ideas or directions and make videos on their own with their mobile phones.'

Having presented these case studies – across the four regions of Africa – it is important to make sense of them as a whole. What follows in the next chapter is a general discussion of how the case studies fit into the project of citizen journalism and democracy-building in Africa.



Chapter Six:

General Discussion

The findings of the case studies above can be discussed in terms of the following analytical categories:

- The context of citizen journalism;
- The technological basis of citizen journalism;
- The uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media;
- The viability of citizen journalism; and
- The democratic value of citizen journalism.

To take the first category: it is clear that citizen journalism thrives in a context of democratic pluralism. The key ingredients of such democratic pluralism include freedom of expression and the attendant freedom of the media as well as access to information. In short, the overall legal and constitutional framework must be one in which media can flourish. A related aspect of this is the democratisation of communication and media. Here, communication is understood in its expansive sense as encapsulating different forms of media. In other words, the architecture of communication must be one which enhances a plurality of media platforms and a diversity of opinions.

However, it is clear from the findings that conventional media – which in most African countries account for most of the public channels of communication – are so centralised that they are not easily open to the impulses of citizen participation. There is evidence, however, of institutionalised forms of citizen journalism which, while admittedly opening up the communicative sphere to citizen participation, subordinate the practice of citizen journalism to institutional ‘quality’ control mechanisms. Citizen journalism is never completely without institutional strictures of regulation; it evolves within the context of established regulatory conventions and rules.

In terms of the technological basis of citizen journalism, there are two paradoxes that must be negotiated: the deterministic nature of technology and the social influences that shape the deployment of technology. As noted in **Chapter 4**, it is true to suggest that citizen journalism in Africa is a product of technological innovation, especially the tools associated with Web 2.0. Here, the social networking platforms of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc., are worthy of mention. Their interactivity has facilitated the kind of dialogical communication lacking in the routinised

practices of conventional journalism. However, to characterise all conventional media as unidirectional in their practices would be inaccurate.

There is a degree of innovative uptake of citizen-journalistic practices by several conventional media institutions. However, it is also true to suggest that such uptake is given to institutional considerations. Such considerations include the possibility of reaping advertising revenue from online platforms. The key issue, then, is one of the extent to which online platforms will afford conventional media an opportunity to commercially populate a cyberspace whose economic value is yet to be significantly realised. Another issue is the extent to which the porous nature of new media technologies will subvert the commercial considerations of many media institutions. So far, there is evidence that people are not actively looking to purchase online news content. How long this situation continues will depend on the news or information scarcity-abundance consideration. In short, the more scarce valuable news or information becomes, the more likely people will be willing to pay for it online. Only then are we likely to see the contours of a model of financial sustainability for online forms of communication, including citizen journalism.

At the same time as new technologies are changing the face of mass and interpersonal communication, we must not disregard the power of citizens to decide how they will deploy such technologies in their affairs. The social uses of technologies are thus significant. It is evident that many of the respondents in this study view technologies not as an end in themselves, but as enablers of human activity. Indeed, human activity encapsulates the motivations that drive the manner in which technologies are deployed in the service of citizenship. People decide what to do with technology. They decide how to use it to their advantage, but the design of technology can shape and sometimes limit those choices. What is clear, then, is that citizen journalism is caught up in the symbiotic relationship between the nature of the technologies available to them and the uses to which they put those technologies.

Mobile telephony seems to be leading the way in citizen-journalistic communication. That it has converged within its audio, visual and other properties means that citizens can carry in their palms an online newsroom capable of what would otherwise require disparate platforms. But the cost of accessing some of the more specialised functions of the cell phone is still high for the majority of Africans. This requires the active intervention of governments to ensure the affordability of ICTs.

In terms of the uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media, there is evidence of institutionalised forms of the practice of citizen journalism. There is a generalised belief in the power of citizen journalism to inscribe citizen participation and empowerment. Almost all conventional media seem enamoured by this possibility, but their reasons for indulging in citizen journalism projects go beyond the goal of citizen empowerment *per se*, as we have noticed above. Commercial considerations seem paramount.

In some cases, especially as evident in the Maghreb, conventional media get involved in citizen journalism projects because they believe cyberspace is simply another platform for carrying on their traditional functions. In other words, there is nothing special about cyberspace except that it is another space in which ordinary people can be found. As a result, their online presence becomes an extension of their physical presence. But such a conclusion,

if not qualified, would be an oversimplification. There are examples of conventional media which explore citizen journalism as an opportunity for re-igniting the pulse of democratic participation on the part of citizens by promoting a robust and intelligent public debate about public affairs. The *M&G's* 'Thought Leader' and Joy FM's 'You Report' blogs seem to fall into this category.

The financial viability of citizen journalism is in question. There is clearly no definite reference to a sustainability model for citizen journalism. But it is evident that advertising – and possibly sponsorship – is seen as a potential way for citizen journalists to sustain their activism. As a matter of fact, some citizen journalists harbour the idea that they might woe enough 'hits' to interest potential advertisers in the cyber space they occupy. But it is not yet clear what shape such a model will take.

What is patently clear is that the sustainability of citizen journalism must be viewed in a larger sense. It must be equated with democratic sustainability. As long as there are citizens willing to take up the communicative spaces afforded by new ICTs, citizen journalism will thrive or sustain itself. In a word, the sustainability of citizen journalism must be inextricably linked to the sustainability of democracy itself. In a sense, the overall cost of accessing technology has everything to do with the enhancement of citizen journalism. For example, governments must be concerned about providing the necessary conditions for technological development and innovation in order to allow for easier and more expansive use of ICTs. This could contribute towards the overall sustainability of citizen journalism projects.

Lastly, in terms of the democratic value of citizen journalism, it is clear that all the respondents attach great importance to the role of citizen journalism in promoting democratic citizenship. The most important element involves the extent to which citizen journalism allows for citizen participation in the production of media. Interestingly, the general view is that conventional media, if properly structured and operated, could enhance citizen participation in public life. As such, citizen journalism occupies the place of an alternative medium which allows for such citizen participation and empowerment to occur. This is an interesting finding because it suggests that conventional media would be acceptable if they became more accommodating to citizens. Here then is an opportunity for conventional media to add value to their role by becoming more inclusive and participatory.

There is another role that citizen journalism seems to play: it adds to the number of existing media platforms. This means that citizen journalism contributes towards media plurality – a necessary condition of democracy. More importantly, however, it contributes towards media diversity in that it expands the range of opinion available in the public arena. Citizen journalists are citizens first and foremost. As such, they bring to the practice of their particular type of journalism their own motivations, aspirations, and opinions. This has a way of enlivening democracy, deepening it, placing it in the hands of ordinary citizens. It is a way of de-bureaucratising or de-institutionalising the practice of democracy, and making it become everyone's business. Here lies the sustainability of citizen journalism, and of democracy itself.



Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the nature, uptake and democratic value of citizen journalism in Africa. More specifically, it sought to:

- Analyse the context of the practice of citizen journalism in Africa;
- Assess the technological basis of citizen journalism;
- Ascertain the level of uptake of citizen journalism by conventional media; and
- Evaluate the democratic value of citizen journalism.

It is clear that citizen journalism operates in contexts that differ from country to country, and from region to region. The Maghreb is radically different from many other parts of Africa, exhibiting less free and democratic media environments. However, the uptake of new technologies seems higher in such countries than in other parts of Africa, demonstrating that governmental policies have everything to do with the extent of technological penetration in Africa. What needs to be underscored, however, is the need for freedom and technology to go hand in hand. High levels of technological penetration without attendant high levels of freedom do not guarantee high levels of citizen journalism. As the case study on Algeria shows, the practice of citizen journalism in restrictive environments can at best only be 'accidental'.

The very concept of citizen journalism, in relation to technology, is in flux. While it is associated with non-institutional forms of journalistic practice, it is clear that there are institutional forms of citizen journalism as well. As a result, one needs to adopt a more elastic definition of citizen journalism that allows for a diversity of communicative experiences.

Technology seems to drive the adoption and practice of citizen journalism, but it is by no means all-determining. Free will appears evident in the ways in which individuals and organisations deploy technology in the service of different human ends. So, it would appear that one needs a conceptual balance in understanding how technology shapes, and becomes shaped by, human motivations and actions. Citizen journalism, then, is both technologically driven and socially inspired. It is here that the viability or sustainability of citizen journalism can be located. As

long as there is demand for it, it will be sustainable.

The democratic value of citizen journalism thus becomes its model of sustainability. Citizen journalism does not stand alone; it is embedded within the social structure. As such, institutional support for democracy can easily translate into enhanced forms of citizen journalism. So, there is need for countries to review their overall democratic infrastructure – legal and constitutional orders, economic and financial arrangements, political practices, etc. – in support of democratic consolidation. In the end, it is such reforms that will aid the practice of citizen journalism.

As such, given that this is only an exploratory study, it would be productive to research further into the practice of citizen journalism, particularly taking into account:

- How conventional media are repositioning themselves *vis-à-vis* the phenomenon of citizen journalism;
- How governments are actively or inactively creating conditions that support or militate against the growth of citizen journalism;
- The impact of citizen journalism on democracy and development; and
- How citizens see themselves as empowered, if at all, by citizen journalism.

References

Ahonen, TT. 2008. *Mobile as 7th of the mass media: cellphone, cameraphone, iphone, smartphone*. New York: Futuretext Ltd.

Banda, F. 2009. Exploring media education as civic praxis in Africa, in *Mapping media education policies in the world: visions, programmes and challenges* edited by Divina Frau-Meigs & Jordi Torrent. New York: UN-Alliance of Civilizations: 225-242.

Banda, F. 2003. *Community radio broadcasting in Zambia: a policy perspective*. PhD thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria. [Unpublished].

Binsbergen, WMJ van. 2004. Can ICT belong in Africa, or is it owned by the North Atlantic Region?, in *Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global culture* edited by WMJ van Binsbergen, RA van Dijk & JB Gewald. Leiden [etc.]: Brill: 107-146.

Branston, G & Stafford, R. 2003. *The media student's book*. 3rd edition. London and New York: Routledge: 182-202; 473-488

Campbell, AJ. 1999. Self-regulation and the media. *Federal Communications Law Journal* 51(3):711-771.

Castells, M. 2000. *The rise of the network society*. 2nd edition. Malden, MA.: Blackwell.

Diamond, L & Plattner, MF. (eds). 1999. *Democratisation in Africa*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dzidonu, CK. 2000. Looking back, moving forward: a look at the information "revolution" from an historical perspective, in *Into or out of the digital divide? Perspectives on ICTs and development in Southern Africa*, edited by D Lush, H Rushwayo & F Banda. Lusaka: Panos Southern Africa.

- Federman, M. 2004. *What is the Meaning of the Medium is the Message?* [O]. Available: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/MeaningTheMediumistheMessage.pdf>. Accessed on 6 July 2009.
- Galtung, J & Ruge, MH. 1969. The structure of foreign news, in *Media Sociology* edited by J. Tunstall. London: Constable: 259-298.
- Gillmore, D. 2006. *We the media: grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*. Beijing, Cambridge, Farnham, Köln, Paris, Sebastopol, Taipei, Tokyo: O'Reilly.
- Gyekye, K. 1997. Philosophy, culture, and technology in the postcolonial, in *Postcolonial African philosophy: a critical reader* edited by EC Eze. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell: 25-44.
- Habermas, J. 1989. *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hyden, G & Okigbo, C. 2002. The media and the two waves of democracy, in *Media and democracy in Africa* edited by Goran Hyden, Michael Leslie & Folu F. Ogundimu. New Brunswick (U.S.A) and London (U.K.): Transaction Publishers: 29-53.
- James, T (ed). 2001. *An information policy handbook for Southern Africa: a knowledge base for decision-makers*. Johannesburg: International Development Research Centre.
- Librero, F (ed). 2007. *Digital review of Asia Pacific 2007-2008*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore: Sage.
- Mail & Guardian Online. 2007. *Thought Leader comment guidelines*. [O]. Available: <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/commentguidelines>. Accessed on 6 July 2009.
- Mazrui, AA. 1978. *Political values and the educated class in Africa*. London: Heinemann.
- McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- McQuail, D. 1987. *Mass Communication theory: an introduction*. London: Sage.
- Miniwatts Marketing Group. 2009. *Internet statistics for Africa*. [O]. Available: <http://www.internetworldstats.com>. Accessed on 5 July 2009.
- Moyo, D. 2009. Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election. *Journalism Studies* 10(4): 551-567.

Nulens, G. 1997. Socio-cultural aspects of information technology in Africa: the policy of the World Bank studies on media information and telecommunications (SMIT). *Communicatio* 23(2):15-23.

Ogus, A. 1995. Rethinking self-regulation. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 15(1):97-108.

Orbicom. 2007. *Emerging development opportunities: the making of information societies and ICT markets*. Montreal: Orbicom.

Paul Budde Communication Pty Ltd. 2009. *Africa - mobile market overview & statistics*. [O]. Available: <http://www.budde.com.au/Research/Africa-Mobile-Market-Overview-Statistics.html>. Accessed on 5 July 2009.

Ross, R & Cormier, SC. 2010. *Handbook for citizen journalists*. Denver, Colorado: National Association of Citizen Journalists (NACJ).

Scott, WR, Meyer JW & associates. 1994. *Institutional environments and organizations: structural complexity and individualism*. London: Sage.

Thurman, N. 2008. Forums for citizen journalists? Adoption of user generated content initiatives by online news media. *New Media & Society* 10(1): 139-157. [O]. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325>. Accessed on 5 July 2009.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). 2006. *African Information Society Initiative*. [O]. Available: <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/abtaisi.htm>. Accessed on October 1 2006.

UNESCO. 2005. *UNESCO world report: towards knowledge societies*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Williams, R. and Edge, D. 1996. The social shaping of technology. *Research Policy* 25: 856-899.

