John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation
Writing the Story of Transformation

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

global forum for media development
GFMD

Summary Notes
STRENGTHENING INDEPENDENT MEDIA INITIATIVE
October 10 – 14 Convening
Salzburg, Austria

I   Background: Strengthening Independent Media Initiative (SIM)

This is a report on the 3rd annual Strengthening Independent Media (SIM) meeting, which was held in Salzburg, Austria, October 10-14. SIM is a growing community of private and public donors that seeks to:

a) encourage strategic focus and coordination in the international field of independent media development,
b) increase the flow of financial support from private and public sources,
c) promote innovation within the media development sector, and
d) foster communication between donors, researchers and implementers.

SIM represents a partnership between the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which has underwritten the first three SIM meetings, and the Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS), which has organized them. In addition, the Global Forum for Media Development, which represents a wide range of program development and implementing organizations, has assisted in sharing outcomes from the project. This report covers the first three days of the SIM gathering. A fourth day, October 13, was a donor-only conversation and is not included in this summary report.

The theme of this year's meeting was **Digital Media – Strategies to Optimize Investment and Promote Innovation and Sustainability.** Within that framework, a sub-set of conversations focused on Africa as a region of special interest to many meeting participants. Thirty individuals, representing a range of major public and private donor organizations, as well as thought leaders in digital media and research, attended the three and one-half day gathering. A number of off-site participants added tweets and blog commentary to the SIM website.

Highlights from the convening are available on the SIM website at sim.salzburgglobal.org, including video of the following presentations:

- *Digital Changes Everything, Or Does It?*   Ethan Zuckerman, Chairman, Global Voices
- *Whence Killer Aps?*   Steve Bratt, CEO, WWW Foundation

II   Keys to Effective Investment in Digital Media Development

The participants discussed the ways in which digital media will continue to transform the production, distribution and consumption of news and information, with a particular focus on the use of mobile devices. Already, six in ten people throughout the world have a cell phone subscription. As more mobile devices are connected to the internet, the opportunities for information sharing will multiply exponentially. Participants agreed that while cell phone applications are multiplying rapidly, much greater investment is needed to push the boundaries of mobile usage to produce, access and share more reliable, useful, in-depth content.

Attendees agreed that digital technology is rightly the focus of growing attention, and the donors attending reported that most media development proposals now include at least some digital component. Yet, much of the world's population still relies on "old" media (e.g., community radio, newspapers). Indeed, 75% of the world's population lacks internet access through any device. Understanding and measurement of media usage is confounded by the extraordinary rate of change in technology availability and adoption, even in remote regions of the world, and by the phenomena of people consuming old content in new ways (e.g., listening to the radio via cell phones) and creating new forms of news and information (e.g., social media crowd sourcing during crises and disasters). Thus, participants emphasized the importance of understanding variations in media ecology in specific regions when making media development investment decisions.

The participants articulated over the course of the meeting a number of **elements they considered critical to successful investment in new digital media** -- or for that matter in mixed media systems that blend elements of old and new. As the meeting progressed, these were referred to as "Salzburg Principles of Media Development":

- **Risk-taking:** Receptiveness to proposals that challenge conventional thinking, reflecting novel ideas, program strategies, and business models. Capability to manage a funding portfolio that includes high risk investments and therefore a higher proportion of projects that can be expected to fail.

- **Innovation:** Entrepreneurial approach -- an interest in seeking out non-traditional grantees. Willingness to invest in start-up as well as established organizations and networks. Openness to providing support for individual entrepreneurs. Commitment to testing new ways of finding and supporting creative ideas, individuals, and organizations. Interest in experimenting with new technologies.

- **Long-term, sustained investment:** Sensitivity to the critical need for multi-year funding, particularly for start-up digital media ventures. Willingness to cover fixed expenses and overhead costs, not just project funding.

- **Flexibility:** Ability to make "second stage" investments in the most promising start-ups, and to offer a mix of vehicles to fit individual circumstances (e.g., grants, loans, technical assistance, capital support, program related investments, including equity stakes in for-profit ventures).

- **Site-specific strategy:** One size does not fit all. Media investment strategies must fit a particular location as well as the target audience and desired outcomes. Research on how various media are used and relied upon produces knowledge vital in designing strategy and measuring impact.

- **Collaboration:** Understanding local regulations and relationships is important in mounting sustainable initiatives. Donors need to share their insights and networks to increase chances for effective media investments in diverse regions of the world.

- **Commitment to Learning and Accountability:** Meaningful evaluation of media grants and commitment to making results publicly accessible to advance best practice.

III   On the Radar: What to Watch

During the course of the meeting, participants highlighted a number of promising technological advances, as well as trends in the uses of digital media, that will be of increasing impact for funders:

- **Voice Applications:** Great strides are being made in the development of new technologies to support voice browsing on the internet using phone trees. These technologies will be an important tool for reaching those previously cut off from the web.

- **Web 3.0 (the semantic web):** As technology advances and the next generation of machines can identify the meaning of data on the World Wide Web, research will be more easily shared and analyzed. This will be a great help to media development data, which are not already standardized, and can be very difficult to search and compare.

- **Use of "Killer Apps" as Tools for Social Change Movements:** Steve Bratt (WWW Foundation) defines a killer app as a computer program that is so necessary or desirable that it proves the core value of some larger technology (example: e-mail). There are a number of recent killer apps that demonstrate the power of media technology as a mobilizing or advocacy tool. Steve Bratt mentioned www.Ushahidi.com and www.openstreetmap.org as examples.

- **Transparency Initiatives:** Efforts by the U.S and UK governments are underway to release enormous amounts of data on the web through www.data.gov and www.data.gov.uk . Using these sites as a template, donors could support replication in other countries, thereby working toward greater public transparency and accountability.

John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation
Writing the Story of Transformation

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

global forum for media development
GFMD

IV   Challenges to Effective Investment in Media Development

Attendees flagged and discussed a large number of obstacles to effective media investment. These challenges tend to be long-term, complex and inter-connected. They reflect issues related to:

Accessibility

Training (Practitioner & Student)

Connectivity

Access to Capital

Challenges

Affordability

Data/Info Integrity

Transpar- ency

Legal & Regulatory Systems

Challenges that received particular attention during this year's SIM meeting were:

- **"Imaginary Cosmopolitanism":** Ethan Zuckerman (Global Voices) challenged the audience to think about the extent to which the web is actually stimulating global exchange and dialogue. Using Facebook as an example, he noted that while 500 million people are members, they tend to connect with or "flock to" a relatively small sub-set of friends and like minded individuals (130 on average.) The question for donors is how to better exploit the web's connective capabilities and encourage people's interest in the wider world. Part of the answer could well lie in more reliance on public "curators" or what Charlie Beckett (POLIS) terms Citizen Publishers or Networked Publishers. *Note: a video of Ethan Zuckerman's speech is available on the SIM web site. See also Charlie Beckett's blog site. Both available at: sim.salzburgglobal.org.*

- **Accountability**: Owen Barder (a visiting fellow at the Center for Global Development and former Director of International Finance and Development Effectiveness at DFID) challenged the group to think about accountability writ large, positing that it needs to shift from being about commentary (privileged groups holding each other accountable; the old media paradigm) to broader and more direct citizen engagement.

- **Translation:** With over 2,700 languages spoken in the world today, and some 7,000 different dialects, translation is an enormous issue, particularly for those donors interested in promoting broader global awareness and/or good governance. There was agreement on the need to develop improved technologies for machine translation, as well as to ramp up efforts to help mobilize and support networks of volunteer translators. (Ethan Zuckerman highlighted as a model a 40,000 person strong network in China, www.yeeyan.org in which volunteers translate English into Mandarin, and pointed out there was no comparable effort to translate Chinese into English).

- **Content Gap**: In discussing barriers to the adoption of web technologies, Steve Bratt pointed to "a local content gap" as a major issue noting that locally valued information and services are in limited supply when one looks at global web content.

- **Sustainability**: Steve Shepherd, (Dean of the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism) posited that to be viable, the "new" news organization must have the capacity to: a) support original reporting, b) curate and aggregate the work of others (including competitors) and c) collaborate with its public – building a network of bloggers and others who can enhance content. All agreed that even those news organizations that have embraced these ideas are yet to find clear answers to the sustainability question.

V   Questions for Media Assistance Donors

Over the course of the convening, a number of provocative questions were raised that will help inform the agenda for future discussions:

- ***What will it take for the media assistance sector to develop as a field?*** Sasa Vucinic (Media Development Loan Fund) compared the media assistance sector with the social investment sector, which has coalesced over the past 3 years in a way that media assistance hasn't -- promulgating standards and best practice, commissioning research, supporting intermediaries, instituting a practitioner award program, etc.

- There are different stages of innovation and capital formation. ***Can a single funding mechanism straddle all these lines or are different elements/players needed at different times?***

- ***Is sustainability a realistic expectation?*** And, if not, what does this mean for the donor/donee relationship?

- ***How can funders help reduce grant-seekers' fundraising costs?*** The costs of obtaining a grant can be disproportionate to actual project costs, and are also significantly higher than in other sectors. For example, in business, the cost of obtaining external financing ranges from 1% to 3% of the project cost; for a social investment the comparable ratio is 5% to 10%. But for a grant, it can be as much as 25%. This imbalance places an undue burden on grantees.

John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation
Writing the Story of Transformation

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

global forum for media development
GFMD

- Where markets work, all would agree that investors should bear the burden. But what about areas where markets don't work? What is the appropriate role of the not-for-profit funder organization? *How can funders stay one step ahead of the market, finding and supporting something that a commercial entrepreneur might not?* What are the metrics funders should use in assessing risk? How do they differ from that of a commercial investor?

- *Where are the most impactful change-levers?* Is there a particular project, technology or region where concerted, collaborative work on the part of a broad-based group of funders could be transformational?

- *How can funders help drive demand, as well as supply?* In what ways can funders promote broader interest in world news and events, getting beyond the parochialism Ethan Zuckerman described.

VI   Funding Proposals and Follow-Up

Before and during the meeting, SIM participants were invited to share proposals that they or colleagues wished for the meeting to consider. Twenty-three projects were posted. *(See http://sim.salzburgglobal.org/page/proposals-collaboration)* The postings represent a varied range of opportunities in media development. Some of the proposals were publicly presented and discussed (e.g., proposals tabled by Steve Bratt of the WWW Foundation). Time did not permit a careful review of each proposal by the full group, however, so attendees agreed that **donors who had an interest in a particular project should contact the proposal sponsor directly.** It was also suggested that SIM members circulate the proposals to other colleagues in their respective agencies or foundations and that SGS ensure that donors who were unable to attend the SIM meeting receive a note about the proposals with a link to the website. If you have an interest in a proposal but would like to comment on it or request more information anonymously, please contact Clare Boyle, who can forward your request.