

**Summary report**

**Phase 1 progress and outcomes**

**June 2006 to December 2007**

**Implementing the Ford Foundation grant:**

**‘New Threats and Opportunities for Freedom of Expression’**

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# Freedom of Expression Project

## Phase 1 Progress and outcomes

Phase 1 of the Project ran from June 2006 until December 2007. This report summarises the learning and outcomes from this phase and outlines how Global Partners intends to build on these achievements with the help of an extension grant from the Ford Foundation. Phase 2 will run from January to December 2008.

## 1. After ‘Stone Soup’: the background

The Freedom of Expression Project developed from the ‘Stone Soup’ roundtable discussions launched by Jon Funabiki in 1999, between Ford Foundation staff, grantees, journalists and other experts.

Their discussions identified the need for a strategic grant making agenda on freedom of expression: concentration of ownership in transnational media industries was increasing and at the same time civil liberties were being eroded, as a result of the ‘global war on terror’.

Stone Soup highlighted the need for a more expansive understanding of freedom of expression. Until this point, grant making in the arena of free expression had tended to focus on direct media censorship. An expanded understanding of the right would incorporate consideration of a wider range of issues. These could include: some groups’ unequal access to means of communication; poor media coverage of social justice issues; and the significance of art and cultural diversity in a healthy democratic society.

The discussions noted, too, the enormous changes taking place in communications as digital networks evolve, based around the internet and mobile phones.

Ford Project Officer Becky Lentz and Global Partners developed the grant for the Freedom of Expression Project, to further understand and begin to address these issues. The Project took the form of a cross-programme exploration, with 22 Ford Programme Officers contributing to the grant. Its overall aim was to expand the role of civil society in freedom of expression debates, nationally and internationally.

Global Partners has now completed the key activities of the initial grant period (see box). The Project’s working papers and workshops have developed a common platform for information exchange between Ford staff and their grantees, have laid the foundations for collaborative civil society networks and identified key issues and an agenda for future action.

### Key activities, Phase 1

- Focus group research: gather the views of recommended grantee partners to develop a common language for talking about freedom of expression issues.
- Commission, publish and disseminate working papers, and issue framing documents on freedom of expression in a global digital environment.
- Produce a report that profiles the Foundation’s and other funding organisations’ work related to freedom of expression since 1996.
- Plan and hold three regional workshops in Latin America, Africa, and East Asia to learn more about the regional contexts of freedom of expression challenges and facilitate the formation of networks.
- Provide stipends to enable civil society groups to participate in these regional meetings.

## 2. Project milestones

<b>2006</b>	Interviews with Ford Foundation programme officers; scoping of project
<b>September 2006</b>	Nairobi workshop on communications in Africa
<b>October 2006</b>	Ford Foundation Peace and Social Justice/ Knowledge Creativity and Freedom meeting, Delhi
<b>November 2006</b>	Internet Governance Forum, Athens
<b>January 2007</b>	First three project baseline papers complete Free Media event, Memphis
<b>February 2007</b>	Project website goes live <a href="http://www.freedomofexpression.org.uk">www.freedomofexpression.org.uk</a> Manchester workshop (Europe and Middle East)
<b>spring 2007</b>	Information and debate papers commissioned
<b>May 2007</b>	Buenos Aires workshop (Latin America) International Communications Association meeting, San Francisco
<b>July 2007</b>	Nairobi workshop (Africa)
<b>autumn 2007</b>	Civil society papers commissioned
<b>September 2007</b>	UNESCO and Council of Europe communications event, Strasbourg
<b>October 2007</b>	Ford Foundation Media Arts and Culture meeting, Moscow
<b>November 2007</b>	Yogyakarta workshop (Asia) Internet Governance Forum, Rio de Janeiro
<b>winter 2007</b>	Democracy and Arts and culture papers commissioned Summary report of Phase 1 to Ford Foundation
<b>early 2008</b>	Final Phase 1 report to Ford Foundation



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## 3. Scoping and framing the issues

### The intersection between free expression and communications: an overall framework

One of the first major tasks was to develop a framework for exploring and analysing the issues. The framework we developed has three elements.

1. The concept of freedom of expression as a foundation human right
2. Four thematic questions to assess the impact of change on social goods
3. A layer model of the networked communications environment to help analyse change.

### 3.1 Freedom of expression as a foundation right

Freedom of expression, as defined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a foundation human right. It guarantees that we can receive and exchange information, regardless of frontiers. Where this right is protected, we can safeguard other rights and freedoms. We can discuss, debate and organise for social change. Democracy can thrive, economic development can advance and culture can flourish. The open exchange of opinions and ideas is at the heart of what makes us human.

The right to freedom of expression itself rests upon a variety of communication platforms, from face-to-face conversations to mediated communication through television and newspapers. Changes in these modes of communication associated with technological advances and digitalisation must therefore have an impact on freedom of expression. It is an overarching goal of this Project to unpack and explore these impacts.

We have also examined whether freedom of expression is a useful framing concept for analysing the communications environment and its relationships with democracy, justice and human achievement – all issues of concern to the Ford Foundation.

### 3.2 Four thematic questions

At the outset, we interviewed a number of Ford Programme Officers who had contributed to the grant. We aimed to establish their expectations and areas of concern, and to ensure that the Project would answer the Foundation's needs. Four themes emerged, which all depend on freedom of expression as a foundation right. We shaped these into four 'key questions' around which to base the work of the project.

#### Information and debate

Does the networked communications environment expand the ways we can get information and access public debate?

#### Civil society

Does the networked communications environment increase our ability to act together for change, nationally and transnationally?

#### Democracy

Does the networked communications environment offer the possibility of changing how we 'do' politics, empowering people and strengthening democracy?

#### Culture and education

Does the networked communications environment create more opportunities to share and develop human creativity?

### 3.3 A layer model for analysing the environment

To answer to the key questions we have to be able to understand the nature of the networked communications environment itself. Who controls it? Who has access to it? What information does it contain? How is the environment perceived and used?

To explore this, we developed a model of the networked communications environment that enabled analysis in four distinct 'layers': infrastructure, code, applications and content. This model is shown on page 4, and its relationship to the four questions on page 5.

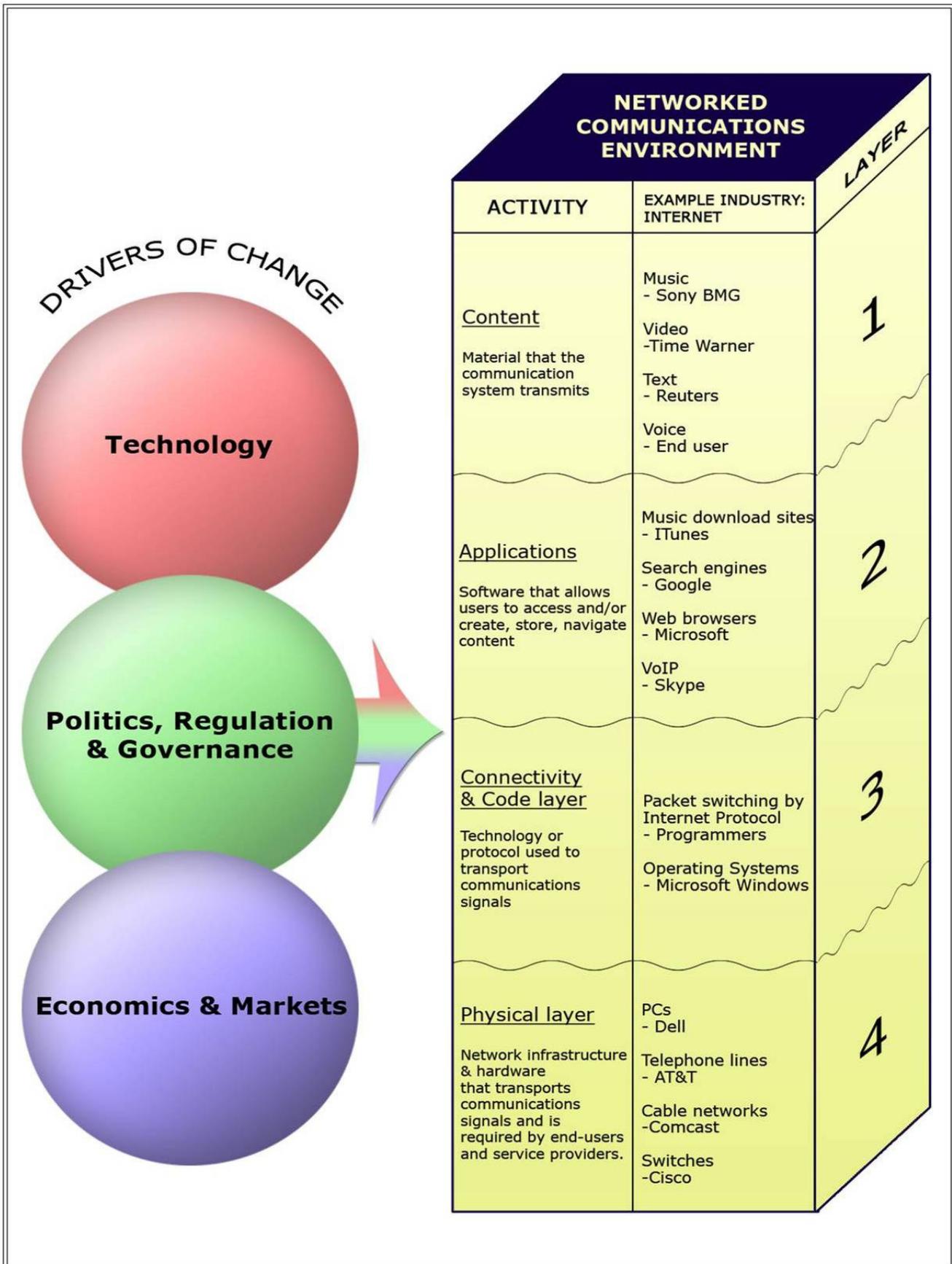
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*'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'*

Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**Figure 1. The layer model of the networked communications environment**

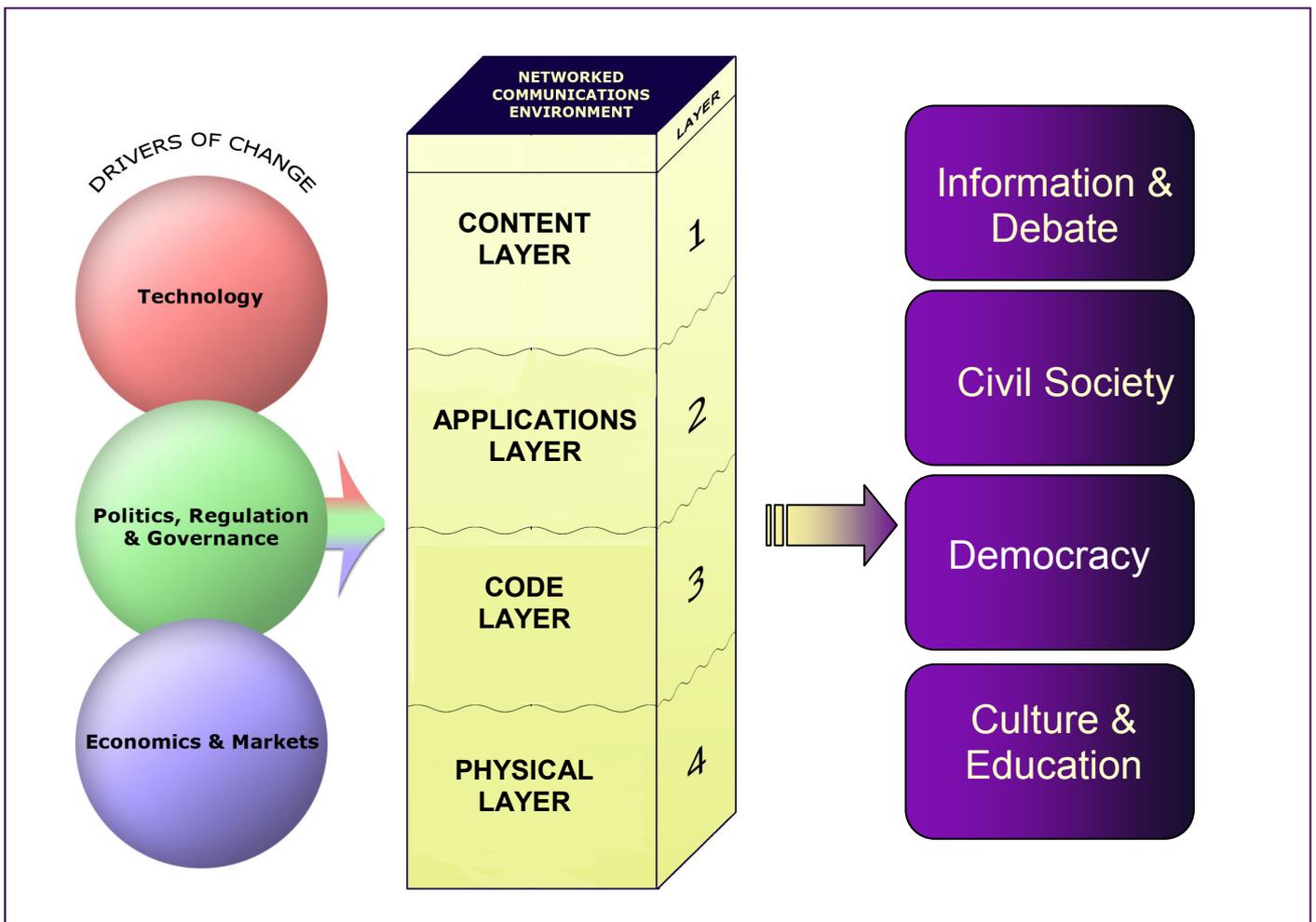
A key early lesson of the Project was that policies pursued at any of these layers have significant implications for an expansive definition of freedom of expression. If we focus only on the 'content layer' then we are ignoring significant dynamics. Each of the four layers is subject to technological, political and economic influences.



**Figure 2. How the layer model and the Project's key questions relate**

The layer model and the four key questions link together in the overall framework for the Project's work. At each layer in the communications environment, technology, policy, regulation and markets all have implications for our ability to realise the potential of new communications technologies to:

- expand the ways we get **information** and access public **debate**
- increase our ability in **civil society** to act together for change, nationally and transnationally
- change how we 'do' politics, empowering people and strengthening **democracy**
- encourage **culture and education**, and create more opportunities to share and develop human creativity.



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## 4. Headline findings and outcomes

### These are based on:

- The Project's working papers. We commissioned four main papers to analyse existing evidence and debate, and a number of shorter papers to explore specific issues or case studies in more depth.
- Participation in international discussion forums and consultation with experts.
- A series of global workshops in Manchester, Buenos Aires, Nairobi and Yogyakarta. We brought together members of civil society working on a wide range of relevant issues, to test the Project's assumptions and analysis.

There is more detailed discussion of our findings on page 9.

### 4.1 Our findings

- **New communications networks are transformative and disruptive.** They are radically changing how we communicate with each other. This has the potential to be interactive and empowering, but there needs to be urgent action if this to be the case.
- Within this environment **the mobile phone is emerging as the dominant platform.** It's likely to be a key means of receiving and imparting content in the future.
- Evidence shows that **the creation of communication capacity in itself is a 'good'**: it's impossible to predict the imaginative uses people will make of technology for cultural, political, social and economic ends.
- The networked communications environment is governed by overlapping policy spheres at national, regional and global levels. These are converging as digital technologies bring previously separate communication platforms together. **There is an urgent need for advocates of free expression to participate** actively in the ongoing revision of governance frameworks and regulatory policies **at all four layers of the communications environment**, to ensure that human rights and public interest values are integral to regulatory frameworks.
- Stakeholders in the converged communications environment tend to operate in separate realms of knowledge and expertise. **It's important to break down barriers within civil society and encourage collaboration** between human rights, technology, democracy, academic and media activists and professionals. The aim is for everyone to share knowledge and work together to shape a communications environment that protects human rights.

- Governance of this emerging environment is complex, as its many stakeholders have varied needs and interests. **All stakeholders – government, business and civil society – need to be involved** in defining appropriate regulatory frameworks, and where relevant in implementing and maintaining them.
- In civil society, government and the media, **many organisations are not yet harnessing the full potential of networked communications.** This is partly due to a lack of technical know-how and partly due to their structures and modes of operating. Many organisations try to apply known ways of operating to this new environment, without recognising that new technologies can require fundamental changes in how they organise and operate (e.g. moving from 'gatekeeping' to 'curating' information).
- There is an emerging consensus that **the existing international human rights framework is adequate** to protect and promote rights in the networked environment. There is no need for the international community to draft a new set of rights. However, work is needed to:
  - clarify how communication rights such as access to knowledge and information fit under the umbrella of international human rights and ensure that they are protected in national and international law
  - develop a set of principles or means of linking new issues, such as the need for network neutrality and interoperability, to the international human rights system
  - assess whether existing human rights enforcement mechanisms are adequate to protect human rights in the networked communications environment.

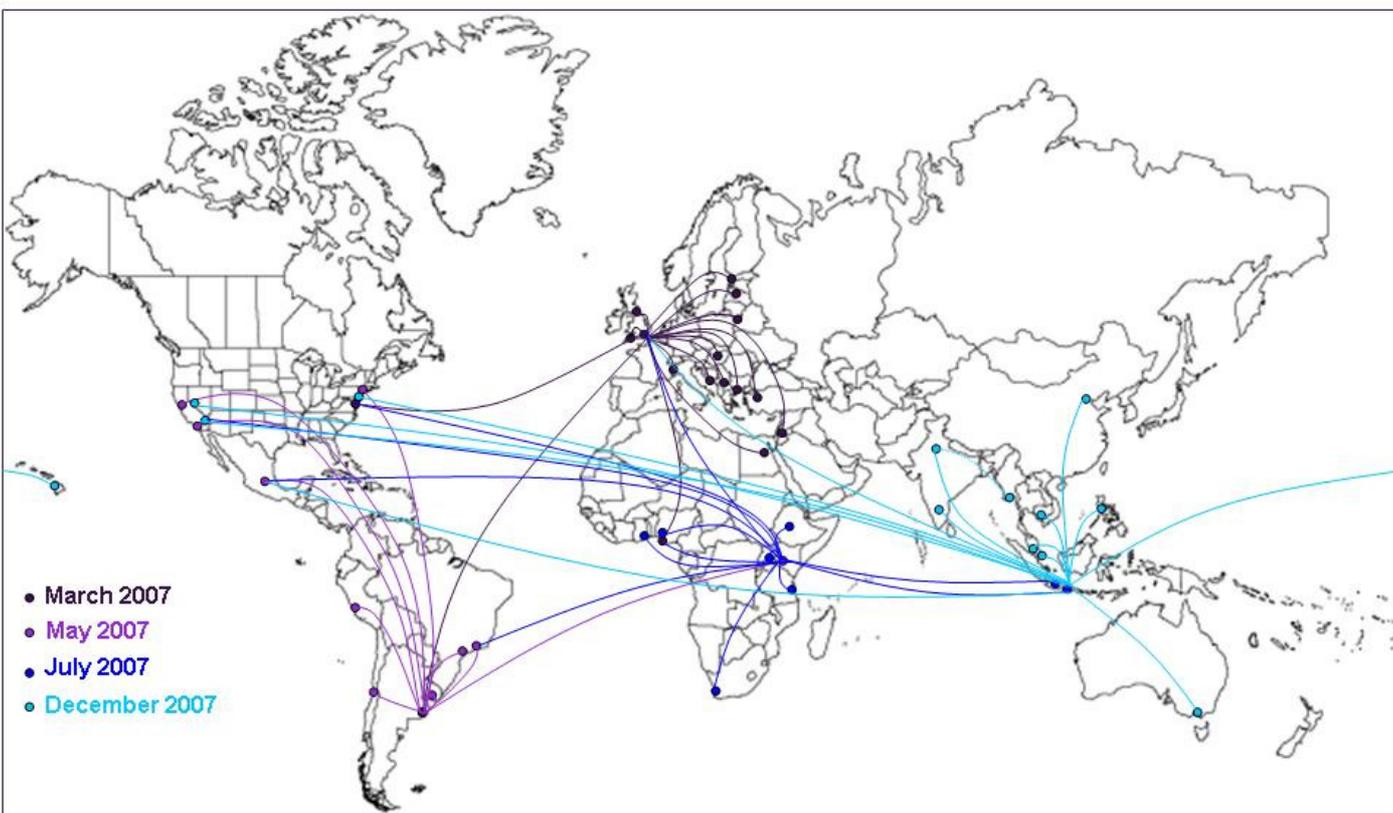
### 4.2 Project outcomes

- **Regional and global networks of civil society groups have developed.** These include people from different professional backgrounds who have a shared understanding of, and interest in, the issues. (See map on page 7)
- We have identified **key individuals and groups who could form regional hubs** to help these networks develop further.
- The workshops have led to further **work and alliances on specific issues** at local levels.

- We have demonstrated that there is a **clear appetite amongst civil society groups across the world to work and collaborate** on these issues. We believe this is a reflection of the fact that this demand is not being met elsewhere.
- We have identified **overlaps between the concerns of this Project and the work of other groups** and institutions, and opportunities for future collaboration.
- We have identified existing **policy forums and advocacy opportunities** for advancing freedom of expression in the networked world. Of particular note is the Internet Governance Forum and its associated networks, coalitions and working groups.
- We have **compiled the Project's resources and learning** online for partners and interested parties to use. A full list is on page 8.

### 4.3 The Project's global network

The Freedom of Expression Project's global network of interested parties and workshop graduates has grown during the course of the Project. By the end of Phase 1 the Project's network grew to include approximately 200 people from 36 countries. The map shows how the network has developed through the workshops in Manchester, Buenos Aires, Nairobi and Yogyakarta.



#### Some participants' views on the workshops

'Diversity is beautiful – it's very rare to go to a conference where people bring up such a huge range of ideas. Here they kept jumping into my head!'

'These discussions have given me a good handle on how to begin to navigate this environment. Before, everything was scattered, and now I have some way of thinking about it.'

'I'm convinced by the need for global linkages, regional activities that deal with the specific, and feedback between the two.'

'This conference has highlighted a pent-up demand to talk about the issues across the continent. It has been a good building block, helping me to apply things internationally.'

'The benefit of this seminar was the communication between people defending freedom of expression using different strategies. There's a real possibility to build bridges between people.'

'This is the first time that we're looking at the nexus between freedom of expression and communications. The conference has been very relevant as it's started the debate.'

## 5. Project resources

The Project's resources are all available online at [www.freedomofexpression.org.uk](http://www.freedomofexpression.org.uk) including:

- Project papers
- Links to other organisations working in the field, to relevant initiatives and research data
- A glossary of key terms to promote communication across disciplines. It covers communications technology, human rights and governance issues.
- Reports from each of the Project workshops, with regional insights.
- Copies of presentations from the workshops.
- A news archive of relevant stories in 2007

### Project papers

#### ***Freedom of expression at the Ford Foundation: history and renewal***

By Joe Karaganis and Waad El-Hadidy. Explores donors' strategic funding approaches to freedom of expression over the past decade, in the context of evolving networked communications.

#### ***Freedom of expression in the age of networked communications: an overview***

By Becky Hogge. Examines current arguments concerning the implications of new communications for freedom of expression.

#### ***The contemporary communications environment: mapping the communication platforms of freedom of expression***

By Lisa Horner. Examines how people access information, which sources they trust and who controls and regulates these sources.

#### ***Shaping the networked world: drivers of change in the networked communications environment***

By Lisa Horner. Examines how technological, political and economic factors interact to change the shape of the communications environment.

#### ***New frontiers for freedom of expression? Increasing access to information and debate through new communications technologies***

By Lisa Horner. Addresses the Project's first key question: does the networked communications environment expand the ways we can get information and access public debate?

#### ***The changing role of journalists in a world where everyone can publish***

By Suw Charman. Examines traditional and citizen journalism in the networked communications environment.

#### ***How can new technologies be harnessed to create an enhanced public service media environment?***

By Charlie Beckett. Explores whether the notion of public service media will be undermined or enhanced by networked communications.

#### ***The networked communications environment: the case of Kosovo***

By Laura Kyrke-Smith. Explores the implications for freedom of expression of the massive expansion of communications technologies in Kosovo since 1999.

#### ***Activism in the networked world***

By Lisa Horner. Addressing the Project's second key question, it examines how networked communications are affecting civil society, their implications, and what can be done to foster the environment as a space for positive collaboration.

#### ***The internet and civil society in Singapore***

By Geoffrey Pakiam. Explores the impact of the internet on relations between state and society in the controlled media environment of Singapore.

#### **Forthcoming:**

#### **(title to be confirmed) Democracy and the networked communications environment**

By Greg Power: Addresses the Project's third key question, exploring how the networked communications environment offers the possibility of changing how we 'do' politics

#### **(titles to be confirmed) Arts, culture and the networked communications environment**

Two papers, by Rick Karr and Jeff Chang, address the Project's fourth key question, exploring the potential of networked communications environment to create more opportunities for sharing and developing human creativity.

## 6. The findings in more depth

In this section, we give our findings in more detail, setting out specifically how they address the Project's four key questions.

### 6.1 Does the networked communications environment expand the ways we can get information and access public debate?

Networked technologies present better prospects for the development of a public sphere in which civil society can actively participate (a Habermasian model) than the traditional, offline mass media. There is considerable optimism about the potential of new communications technologies. They give people a wider range of easily accessible information and the opportunity actively to participate in news gathering, analysis and dissemination.

However, the overall picture is complex. Huge numbers of people do not yet have access to the networked communications environment, either through lack of infrastructure or high costs. The configuration of old and new 'gatekeepers' — those who exercise control over information flows and debate — is continuously evolving. There are risks that new technologies can replicate existing power inequalities and exclusions. It can be difficult in some regions for people to envisage a positive role for the state in enabling or improving access, when their experiences of state action have been primarily negative.

To develop an inclusive public sphere, work needs to be done to:

- promote the development of communications infrastructure where it does not exist
- promote regulatory regimes that reduce barriers to access
- increase access to and participation in public debate amongst minority groups. This includes physical access to new communications technologies, access to excluded language groups and the illiterate
- work with those more closed governments that intervene heavily in the media, to help them understand and adapt to increasingly open and dynamic communications environments. The aim would be to prevent the closure of new or potential communication spaces
- improve communications literacy in all groups. The aim would be to help shape positive norms and values, and to prevent uncivil argument and the fracturing of the public sphere
- encourage citizens to seize the chance to participate in the mainstream media, so as to promote more open and dynamic 'networked journalism'
- develop communications policies that maintain opportunities for the development

**'If NGOs don't pay attention to the political aspects of communications they will end up having their political views and actions curtailed'**

participant,  
Buenos Aires

#### Regional contexts

The workshops enriched the Project's learning, providing specific insights into regional communications and policy contexts. These are detailed more fully in our workshop reports, available at [www.freedomofexpression.org.uk](http://www.freedomofexpression.org.uk)

#### Latin America

The communications environment, both 'old' and 'new', is dominated by media oligopolies and their failure to foster a plural and diverse media environment. This has led to the dominance of public discourse by an elite/government alliance and the exclusion of minority groups from the public sphere.

#### Africa

There are huge opportunities to expand access to communications via private investment, which has been

demonstrated by the rapid uptake of the mobile phone across the region. While access and infrastructure are key issues, there is considerable potential for groups to use networked communications to reassert their local identities and to preserve the diverse languages and cultures that exist across the continent.

#### Asia

Technology uptake has spread across much of the region with great speed, with state investment and regulation playing a significant role. Imaginative uses of communications technology are having significant impacts on traditional media, political dynamics and arts and culture. It is difficult to generalise in terms of politics and technology uptake and use (perhaps even more so here than in other continents), and local, national, regional analysis remains important.

of public interest, publicly owned communications. Such policies could include: ownership restrictions, transparency requirements, and public funding

- promote collaborations between countries and regions, particularly south-south collaborations, where there are similar concerns, e.g. access, literacy, marginalisation of some groups.

## 6.2 Does the networked communications environment increase our ability to act together for change, nationally and transnationally?

Networked communications give civil society groups new opportunities to work together for positive social change. However, if they are to be effective, these groups urgently need to appropriate new technologies rather than simply use them. This means they need actively to shape them and adapt them to meet specific needs.

Political and economic changes are encouraging the development of a 'networked society', organised around dispersed and fluid structures rather than rigid vertical hierarchies. In response to this, forms of networked activism are emerging, but fluid or dispersed social movements can be less effective at advocating for specific policy change.

The forms activism takes, and its effects, are intertwined with the local political economy. In more closed political systems, networked communications are presenting new spaces for mobilising that are less regulated than mainstream media. However, this does not necessarily instigate a 'linear' process towards democracy and openness; new relationships are emerging between those with relatively more and less power.

Networked communications also give anti-progressive groups new opportunities to mobilise along political and cultural lines and offer new outlets for hate speech.

Networked applications (wikis, social networking sites, purpose-built campaigning platforms or websites) could help civil society groups draw on the benefits of both centralised and dispersed organisational forms. Yet even in the networked online world, person-to-person communication is significant. Relationships, based on trust and shared values, are essential to collaborations.

Further action is needed to:

- guard the existing openness and potential of networked communications against full appropriation by corporations or shut-down by governments in the name of security
- make capacity-building a priority, to ensure that civil society groups have the knowledge and resources they need fully to appropriate new technologies and use them to their full potential

### Examples from the workshops: freedom of expression in action

Communications technologies are creating new opportunities for freedom of expression. A few examples:

... New technology makes it possible for a Javanese composer to record and share music based on the traditional musical scale

... The internet makes sexual health information and support available to young gay men in Nairobi

... A rural community in Indonesia has up-to-the-minute information about nearby volcanic activity, via a community-based system that integrates SMS alerts and the internet

... The rural poor in Brazil have access to public debate and information through community-owned telecentres and free public internet access points

... A Maasai community in Kenya has new options for preserving and promoting their artefacts, knowledge and culture

- facilitate networking and knowledge-sharing between civil society groups, both online and offline and across the varied disciplines and professions that are stakeholders in this environment. It is important to build bridges between those who have technical knowledge and those with other relevant expertise.

## 6.3 Does the networked communications environment offer the possibility of changing how we 'do' politics, empowering people and strengthening democracy?

Networked communications offer new opportunities for strengthening formal representative democracy in three main ways.

1. They can improve representation, creating chances for genuine dialogue between government and governed.
2. They can improve the mechanisms of democracy, for example through e-voting.
3. They can improve government efficiency, for example through tailoring the provision of public services to meet the needs of different groups.

However, these opportunities are coupled with new challenges. The overall result of experiments in networked governance will depend on the motivation, resources and commitment to democracy of those designing, implementing and using systems. For example, online consultations can increase cynicism rather than engagement if governments do not use feedback effectively. Through making voting easier, e-voting can

remove the reflection and engagement with politics that is needed in healthy democracy. Networked governance also presents new dangers in the arenas of citizen privacy and surveillance. In the long run, successful networked governance could result in a gradual shift away from representative democracy towards new models of deliberative and participatory democracy at both national and international levels.

In the short term, effort is needed to:

- build political and communications literacy amongst citizens, to ensure that evolving systems of networked governance are built from the bottom-up and owned by the people
- ensure that access to information legislation is enacted and enforced in all countries, and integrated into networked governance systems
- find balances between security in privacy to govern the collection and use of personal data by governments. Inclusive multi-stakeholder discussion should drive this process
- give local government and emerging democracies support and institutional space to experiment and develop new systems of democracy and governance based on networked communications.

#### **6.4 Does the networked communications environment create more opportunities to share and develop human creativity?**

The ability to express ourselves and our identities openly and freely is a central part of the right to freedom of expression.

Artistic and cultural expression play a significant role in society, acting as powerful means of communication that reflect wider social and political dynamics whilst at the same time having profound influence on them. Culture is central to individual and collective identities, helping people to define and understand themselves and the world around them.

In many instances, networked communications are having a positive impact: bringing people into contact with new modes of expression, giving a new voice to marginalised groups,

strengthening appreciation of diversity and creating new forms of expression through collaboration and 'mash-ups'.

The networked environment presents new opportunities for artistic and cultural expression. It enables new opportunities for collaboration and creativity, opportunities to realise new identities and to create new kinds of spaces. At the same time, networked communications bring these activities into a global marketplace. This brings new threats including mass marketing, commoditisation and restrictive intellectual property regimes that reduce access to cultural knowledge.

Effort is needed to:

- expand access to, and understanding of, the networked environment amongst all people, particularly minority and excluded groups
- ensure that minority groups have the knowledge and resources needed to exploit new opportunities to preserve and promote their culture
- expand opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and culture between geographically separated groups, for example through the translation and digitalisation of literature.
- promote neutral and non-commercial spaces for expression and sharing both online and offline
- forge an intellectual property regime that promotes a balance between innovation and ownership in the networked world, benefiting creators and creativity, whether individual or collective, rather than business alone. Special consideration should be given to expanding access to educational resources across the world
- promote the participation of civil society organisations, particularly in the global south, in international regulatory arenas (WTO, WIPO, ICANN)
- explore the role that artists and cultural activists can play in advocating for a networked environment that protects freedom of expression, making better links between them and groups such as technology experts, activists and journalists.

**'Laws can't keep up with changes in technology. Technology is continually developing, so we need continuous discussion'**

participant,  
Nairobi

## 7. Proposals for Phase 2

.We believe there is now a significant opportunity to realise the goals of the Ford Foundation to support human development within global and regional networked digital communications environments. There is real potential to work towards democratising communication and empowering people, including those who are dispossessed, poor or excluded. There are opportunities to increase people's access to knowledge, to help them in developing communication and collaborations with each other, and to stimulate human creativity.

For these gains to be realised however, there is an urgent need to ensure that the developing communications environments are shaped by principles that support the interests of human communities.

We are seeking an extension of the Ford Foundation grant to establish these public interest principles and to build support among a broader set of stakeholders.

Global Partners proposes to work with the US-based Consumers Union to undertake Phase 2 of the programme in 2008.

### Planned activities 2008

- Develop and promote public interest principles that guarantee freedom of expression at each layer of the communications environment.
- Involve key stakeholder groups, including business, regulators, other donors and global civil society, by establishing a high-level steering group that commits to promoting these principles in their own sphere of interest.
- Establish a global network of civil society groups that will actively promote these principles, monitor developments in their regions, identify opportunities for advocacy and act upon them. We will bring these groups to the June Minneapolis meeting (National Conference for Media Reform, sponsored by Free Press) for a meeting with key US-based groups.
- Convene a major gathering of key stakeholders in late 2008 to agree on a programme of action that will promote these principles.

We also recognise there is a particular challenge in promoting these principles in dynamic, fast-moving undemocratic societies such as Vietnam and China. In collaboration with local Ford offices we hope to work to develop a framework for the issues that enables us to articulate and realise public interest goals in these environments.

**'Freedom of expression is the most important condition for the realisation of cultural existence. The communications technology facilitates the process.'**

Prof Kwame Karikari,  
keynote speech,  
Nairobi

December 2007

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The Project's original research, commissioned papers and workshop reports are all available on the website, together with further resources and useful links.

[www.freedomofexpression.org.uk](http://www.freedomofexpression.org.uk)