Report of the Workshop on News Agencies in the Era of the Internet

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## Table of contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

2 The Future of National News Agencies ........................................................................ 3

3 Opening Addresses ..................................................................................................... 5

4 Workshop Presentations .............................................................................................. 6
   4.1 Towards a New Business Model for News Agencies ............................................. 6
   4.2 A Review of Past Interventions: CANAD, SEANAD and WANAD .................. 8
   4.3 The National News Agency in a Time of Technological Economic and Political Change .......................................................... 10
      4.3.1 The South African Press Association (SAPA) ........................................... 10
      4.3.2 United News of Bangladesh (UNB) ....................................................... 11
      4.3.3 ANTARA News Agency (Indonesia) ....................................................... 11
      4.3.4 WAFA News Agency of Palestine ......................................................... 12
      4.3.5 MONTSAME, News Agency of Mongolia ............................................ 12
      4.3.6 The Press Trust of India (PTI) ............................................................... 14
      4.3.7 Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA) ..................................................... 15
      4.3.8 Ghana News Agency (GNA) ................................................................. 16
      4.3.9 The Khabar Broadcasting Agency (Republic of Kazakhstan) .............. 18
      4.3.10 Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) ..................................................... 18

5 Local and Global: some strategic choices ................................................................. 19
   5.1 News Agencies in the Internet Age: A Presentation by Dr. Daya Thussu ....... 19
   5.2 Inter Press Service (IPS) .................................................................................... 19

6 Should national agencies give way to regional news agencies? ......................... 21
   6.1 The Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC) .................................................... 21
   6.2 The Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA) .......................................... 22
   6.3 Women's Feature Service (WFS) ..................................................................... 23

7 Agencies, Technology and Development .................................................................. 24
   7.1 Systems and Electronics Development (SEDCO) ........................................... 24
   7.2 PETRA News Agency ....................................................................................... 24

8 Discussion Panels ....................................................................................................... 25
   8.1 Diversification of Services ................................................................................. 25
   8.2 Ownership and Management ............................................................................. 25
   8.3 Marketing and Client Relations ......................................................................... 26
UNESCO has since early eighties supported the establishment of national news agencies with a view to improving news collection and dissemination within nations and promoting greater diversity of news sources in international news. UNESCO’s many initiatives included the establishment of regional news agencies in Africa (CANAD, SEANAD and WANAD), and support for PANA (Africa) and CANA (the Caribbean). However, by the turn of the year 2000, it was becoming clear that many national news agencies were in crisis. There was growing concern in UNESCO about the gradual commercialization of news, and its implications for the media representation of rural and poor segments of societies, and for the ability of these populations to participate in national democratic processes. Concern was reinforced by the collapse of news agencies in some poorer countries and the diminishing interest of some governments in supporting them. At least one important consideration, in its potential both for exacerbating as well as for contributing solutions to the crisis, was the impact of new Communication and Information Technology, notably the Internet.

The UNESCO Communications Division thus initiated preparations for a Workshop on News Agencies in the era of the Internet.

The Division circulated an explanatory paper for the benefit of workshop invitees and contributors. This, amongst other things, noted that several national news agencies in Africa had shut down, and others were near to closure. The classical model of news collection and dissemination, at the core of which were the national news agencies, had been undermined by the Internet and other factors. Some agencies had veered closer than ever to governments, at further cost to their credibility; while others were trying to privatize, but without the benefit of an adequate evaluation of the changing context and its implications for agencies’ survival. The Internet challenged nations to consider what kinds of news collection and distribution that they should encourage. What were the implications of the Internet for competition, quality and accuracy in the supply of news? Was news just a commodity to be determined by the market place? Such a view sat uncomfortably with the philosophy and policies that had previously underwritten UNESCO activity in this area. UNESCO policy presumed a correlation between pluralism of sources of information and the exercise of citizenship and democracy. News was seen as a form of public information that should wholly embrace the cultural, education and scientific realms. The purpose of the Workshop was to develop a forward looking strategy that would help news agencies anticipate and adapt effectively to change, and in the process to re-evaluate their role, mission and performance.

The Workshop brought together in Amman the representatives of 13 news agencies from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern and Central Europe, and the Middle East. These also reflected a broad range of different kinds of news agency, including both national and regional agencies, those whose ownership was either public or private or a mixture of both. In many instances, these agencies were in the process of accommodating to significant political and economic transformations of their respective nations. Also in attendance were:
three academic, one technical and three experts who formerly managed UNESCO sub-regional news agency development projects in Africa and UNESCO staff (a list of attendees is provided in Appendix II). The workshop agenda (Appendix III) included presentations by representatives of the participating national agencies in plenary sessions and a series of smaller discussion panels each dedicated to a particular theme. The main outcome of the workshop was a set of seven discussion papers, together with corresponding recommendations, that emerged from the discussion panels which addressed issues related to diversification of services; ownership and management; implementing Internet strategies; marketing and client relations; personnel training, professional development and professionalism; networking; and the future of national news agencies.

Workshop discussions and recommendations demonstrated that the Internet is indeed both a significant opportunity for news agencies and a threat. For example, the Internet offers the potential for significant reductions in communications costs in the gathering and dissemination of news. It also extends the potential reach of national agencies, at least for the benefit of clients who have Internet connectivity - still sparse in many parts of the developing world. The Internet is also a source of competition that, along with other factors, contributes to a destabilization of traditional markets. The Internet poses many technical, designs, professional and strategic challenges. However, the relevance of the Internet and appropriate responses to it can be misjudged unless the technology is analyzed in relation to the broader context of agency operations. Among the most important contextual factors identified in the Workshop were tensions in the relationships between agency executives and their political, media or other owners. Tensions had been exacerbated by broader changes in the media environment, including the impacts of deregulation and privatization of previously State owned or controlled media and other organizations, and greater competitiveness on international media markets as a result of the loosening of restrictions on movements of global trade and capital. In Africa and elsewhere these trends had eliminated or gravely weakened several national agencies. Strategies of accommodation to the Internet were likely to be successful in as far as they articulated and provided a response to such changes in the broader environment. Successful strategies were likely to address one or more of the following, among other issues:

(i) The cultivation of a more entrepreneurial climate within national news agencies to help them compete against other news suppliers and to identify new market opportunities. This entails: nurture of a new professional culture, the elaboration of a different business model, the reconstruction of ‘brand identity’, the organization of innovative patterns of ownership, strategic alliances; foresight in the provision of incentives and rewards for workers, and a re-definition of the range of activities that are proper to national agencies, possibly extending to multi-media strategies.

(ii) Elaboration of structures of separation between agency operations and political authorities. This entails willingness on the part of political authorities to maintain subsidies where these are clearly needed to ensure the adequate realization of a national agency’s main work, while creating the conditions for both editorial autonomy and agency accountability.
Preservation of mission to serve the information needs of the nation as a whole. This entails strong commitment to principles of national inclusiveness, accuracy and impartiality, strong enough to ensure that the drive towards self-sufficiency is compatible with the continuing contribution of news agencies to an informational public sphere of great diversity and quality.

There is considerable scope for technical and training support across all areas of agency operation. Cutting across the three elements identified above is the issue of organization form: for example, there are regional agencies, broadcast and Internet based agencies. The basic mission of a news agency, its public service functions, can be achieved in a variety of different ways, using different organizational vehicles and technologies.

2 The Future of National News Agencies

Discussions on the above theme revolved around the background paper prepared for the workshop by Dr. Oliver Boyd-Barrett, entitled *The Future of National News Agencies* (Appendix I). This paper developed ideas that had earlier been explored in presentations to the 1999 annual seminar of the European Alliance of Press Agencies, and at a workshop organized by the Center for Mass Communications Research at Leicester University in March, 2000, *International News in the Twenty-First Century*, and in two journal articles (2000a; 2000b).

The paper discussed the current climate within which national news agencies must operate, the main challenges that they confront and highlighted strategies for resolution of difficulties, and the place of the Internet within such strategies. The paper also discussed the question: just how important is it that national news agencies should survive? Drawing on a wide range of examples, the paper argued that a number of national news agencies are in distress demonstrated most dramatically by the threat of or indeed their own, and dysfunctional economic problems that threaten the normal operation of an agency such as inability to pay staff. Somewhat less dramatic signs included rifts between agency owners - be they politicians, bureaucrats or media managers - and agency executives; conflicts of interest between agencies and their own members and clients over such matters as subscription fees and access to new or traditional services for new clients; increasing competition from independent local agencies, from international agencies and from other media systems that have gone ‘wholesale’ in some way; and difficulties in raising finance for electronic or Internet web services, or simply for support of adequate levels of news coverage.

The paper identified the essential causes of the crisis facing news agencies as:

- Low potential for profit or for income in excess of operating expenses, which arises in part because many agencies have been set up that way, or as a result of internal cultures that do not favor entrepreneurship or as a consequence of the weakness of domestic market conditions;
• Newspaper concentrations and the formation of international multi-media conglomerates that have lukewarm commitment, at best, to national agencies, and whose ‘dumbing down’ of editorial content reduces their requirement for traditional agency services. If anything, these have an economic incentive to set up internal news agency operations to replace national agency services;

• Breaking down of the classic ‘wholesaler’ model of news agency operations, as the result, in part, of the Internet, and of the proliferation of media-owned and other web-sites that offer competing sources of news;

• Reduction in state support to agencies that had been dependent on state subsidy, with continuing state interference with their editorial autonomy.

Given that a crisis existed for many news agencies, did this have significance for the wider public; were there grounds for public concern? The paper noted that national agencies serve significant functions. They provide affordable services of domestic and international news to national and local media; their news portfolios typically aim to be comprehensive with respect to the representation and interests of the major different constituencies of the nation state. They are important and privileged sources of news for political, economic and financial institutions. They serve as a conduit for services of international news agencies to local, domestic media, and also feed back local and national news to the international news agencies and thus can influence the international representation of their individual nation states. They are typically more driven by goals of public service than of profit maximization. They are often regarded by governments as tools of national development and as vehicles that offer positive or at least balanced images of their respective countries for international consumption. The disappearance of national news agencies would likely lead to increasing fragmentation and unreliability of news sources. It would diminish the contribution of the media to the construction of a public sphere; and it would reduce the tools at a government’s disposal for the development of national development and identity.

Solutions to the crisis of national news agencies were seen to include:

• Diversification of services and products for non-media clients including the technology for the gathering and dissemination of news) entailing the development of more entrepreneurial institutional cultures;

• Training and professional development in all areas of journalistic, managerial and technical skill;

• Networking, for example the pooling of experiences, of news and other content, the sharing of resources, and other approaches to mutual aid;

• Re-articulation of relations of news agencies with the forces of State, Capital and Civil Society. (Major political transitions of recent years have helped the development of new arrangements for the governance of news agencies in relation to the State, media and her clients, in ways that effect both the financial and civic communities; these models deserve close scrutiny so that lessons learned can be more widely applied).
The paper ended with a review of the principal opportunities and threats afforded by the Internet. In particular it was noted that while news agencies in principle have some distinctive advantages when it comes to exploitation of the Internet (for example they are not bound, like their traditional ‘retail’ clients, to product models that are based on the notion that content must be enveloped within a given physical and programming package for client consumption, as in the case of newspapers and broadcasting), the world of the Internet is a very accessible one for news providers and hence a very competitive one, in which the brand identities of powerful global media conglomerates might obliterate those of small national news agencies. The paper concluded that the Internet is likely to be a significant factor as agencies position themselves for a new, more competitive, digital and multimedia era. However, in itself, the Internet, it is not a solution. It becomes a solution only when situated appropriately within a broader strategic vision.

3 Opening Addresses

Workshop delegates were welcomed by Mr. Martin Hadlow, Director of the UNESCO Amman Office and Regional Communication Adviser for Middle East and Gulf States.

Mr. Claude Ondobo, UNESCO Deputy Assistant Director General for Communication and Informatics and Director of the International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC), speaking on behalf of the UNESCO Director General mentioned the many agencies and agency-related projects that UNESCO has supported in the past, including WANAD, SEANAD and PANA. UNESCO he went on to add had also helped many national news agencies in the Middle East, the venue of the workshop (most importantly WAFA: the news agency of Palestine) and also news agencies in the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific as well as select European countries. Mr. Ondobo underscored the fact that UNESCO saw news agencies at the heart of national information collection and dissemination endeavours. The Internet had introduced fundamental changes to processes of news collection and distribution, nationally, regionally and worldwide. News agencies would have to adapt to this new environment and explore other possibilities to enhance their roles in national media landscapes. Beyond the technical challenges posed by the Internet was an even more fundamental issue, touching on the very concept of national news agency and raising the question: what kind of news collection and distribution mechanisms should countries promote and encourage? This in turn raised other questions: was news to be considered merely a commodity? Should news of the cities be privileged over news of the countryside? Should a national news agency represent all segments of society and promote their participation in the national democratic process? Mr. Ondobo invited workshop participants to study the whole question of news collection in the light of the Internet and the process of democratization. He went on to add that UNESCO was committed to the guaranteeing information pluralism and diversity, particularly in developing countries and without privileging any particular source, and this in turn is related to the development of civil society and democracy. UNESCO’s role was working to help countries build the necessary infrastructure of a news system free of monopoly control of
either government or commerce, and that would ensure that all citizens could participate in communication processes. In his conclusion, Mr. Ondobo praised the initiatives undertaken in Jordan to democratize media institutions.

The official inaugural address was presented by Dr. Taleb Rifai, Minister of Information for Jordan who noted that the timing of the workshop coincided with a period in which Jordan was restructuring its own media institutions, including state broadcasting. He noted the importance of information credibility and relevance to the success and prestige of news agencies in democratic societies. National news agencies had grown up in the realm of official media and that many official agencies, he believed, had lost sight of the heightened level of education and intelligence of the people, and now they faced a challenge of credibility. Dr. Rifai called for a new sense of professionalism, and a redefinition of goals and objectives within which strategies for the adaptation of the Internet can be developed.

Dr. Rafai continued to add that the future of news agencies lay in greater professionalism and the restoration of credibility. The news agency of Jordan, PETRA, was in the process of emerging from the umbrella of officialdom and struggling to be independent. It was no longer the sole news provider: the Internet had helped introduce an influx of new news sources to Jordan. PETRA was trying to find a new language with which to address the people. In this process, it has benefited from the help of UNESCO, particularly in the area of training. Dr. Rifai concluded by adding that in becoming more independent, it was important that PETRA should not succumb completely to commercial pressures. Its goal should be to balance its mission of public service with commercial sustainability.

4 Workshop Presentations

4.1 Towards a New Business Model for News Agencies

Dr. Boyd-Barrett opened the first session of the workshop with remarks that built upon his background paper, The Future of National News Agencies. In this presentation, entitled ‘National News Agencies in a Global Context’, Dr. Boyd-Barrett identified some outcomes that could be hoped for from the workshop. These included:

- a better understanding of the actual and potential opportunities of the Internet, seen with reference to other key issues faced by news agencies;

- relations between: agency and media bosses, agency bosses and political authorities, public service and revenue goals, agencies and the constituent members of the ‘nation’, and between different news agencies.
With specific reference to the Internet, key questions that the workshop would likely address had to do with:

- how the Internet helped news agencies relate to their publics, political systems, media owners/clients and financial and other specialist clients;

- how the Internet enhances access to media services, the quality of content, the production of content, brand identity, competitiveness and entrepreneurial culture;

- how the Internet impacts on expenditure, revenue, skills and staffing, strategic alliances.

Dr. Boyd-Barrett suggested that news agencies were moving away from an older business model towards a new and quite different model. Key features of the old model included:

- an income system that depended significantly on subscription fees for whole news services calculated in relation to market size or share;

- high dependence on government subsidy and/or on fees paid by media owner-clients;

- additional services for media and non-media clients that included carrier, consultancy, public relations, customized news supply;

- high dependence on leased fixed-line communications;

- text services dominate;

- separation of text, from video, voice and data services (where non-text services are provided at all);

- ‘monolingual’ and ‘mono-modal’: that is say, language of delivery is restricted to one or two official languages; with a tendency for text to dominate;

- high distillation of sources: that is to say the agency heavily edits and/or repackages source material;

- strong relationship with one or two leading international agencies, plus bilateral news exchanges;

- strong market orientation to institutional clients, especially media, and also government agencies and large corporations;

- low brand identity; with tendency for brand to rest on historical longevity.
Key features of the new model, by contrast, include:

- subscriptions and fees are tailored flexibly to whatever the client wants to use;
- lower dependence on government subsidy and on fees from owner-clients;
- additional services for media and non-media clients continue to include carrier, consultancy, public relations and customized services, demonstrating an ever higher degree of specialization and customization, some of it web-based, and augmented by web-related advertising and fees for inter-linkages;
- growing use of Internet for news production and delivery, but additional broadband requirements for reporters and clients of multi-media services;
- integration of text, video, voice and data services;
- multi-lingual (many language services for different language communities) and multi-modal (all forms of expression are employed);
- lower distillation, that is to say, through the Internet, agencies encourage users to connect directly to sources;
- market orientation is both institutional and individual, with specialist and in-depth services for institutional clients and more standardized and general-interest services for individual clients;
- high brand identity, nurtured by service image and quality.

4.2 A Review of Past Interventions: CANAD, SEANAD and WANAD

This session, entitled ‘News Agencies: a Historical Perspective’, comprised presentations by Mr. Ed Moyo and Mr. Alex Quarummye on the experiences of SEANAD (Southern and East Africa News Agency Development Project), and by Mr. Cheikh Sy (formerly Chief Technical Adviser of both projects), CANAD (Central African News Agencies Development Project) and WANAD (West African News Agencies Development Project). The presentations were collectively entitled: CANAD, WANAD, SEANAD: The Objectives and Achievements: Historical Perspectives. Collectively, these projects generated or helped to sustain an impressive number of national news agencies in Africa during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. 13 in the case of WANAD, 12 in the case of SEANAD). However, some of these agencies are now in dire need of resuscitation. Under UNESCO’s guidance, the emphasis of external support was directed to training (sometimes through joint training programme involving other media institutions), in such areas as editorial skills, archiving/documentation, communication technologies, and in specialist content areas such as health issues, agriculture and food-sufficiency.
It was demonstrated during the presentation that the projects had not been able to establish merely one model of appropriate intervention because the circumstances of each country, each agency, were so different one from the other. In Zimbabwe, Ziana, the national news agency, was strong, while in Tanzania, Shihata had almost perished (and is now extinct). In addition to training, the projects also helped supply equipment, ranging from basic start-up technology (even typewriters) to state-of-the-art computers. News exchange was another area of activity. SEANAD supported the design of electronic 'mail boxes' by telephone, a system that was later transformed into software for writing, filing and exchange of news items. The server was based in Zimbabwe, and other agencies were given PCs: the agencies only had to dial the server to offer and collect news stories.

Summarizing the outcomes of these projects, Mr. Moyo highlighted their successes:

- the establishment of comprehensive, nationwide networks of newsgathering and distribution;
- contributions to institution building;
- the achievement of permanent improvements in flows of information between urban and rural communities;
- permanent improvements in exchanges of news between countries;
- support for training in journalism, language training and other skills.

Mr. Cy spoke of the significance of news agencies in the contexts of the WANAD and CANAD projects, where news agencies were symbolic of sovereignty in new nation states, and served an ideology of journalism-for-development. He noted the differences between Francophone and Anglophone African countries. In the territories that had been governed by France, news agencies began life essentially as mailboxes for Agence France Press, the world’s only French language international agency. Other influences were Belgian (e.g. AZAP in Zaire) and Portuguese (e.g. Angop in Angola). Now many of the agencies that had been helped were in trouble and might disappear if no substitutes were found. In the 1960s through to the 1980s, the agencies typically experienced an uneasy mixture of autonomy and dependence; their editorial content was primed to provide what has been disparagingly referred to as ‘protocol’ news. Motivated staff was hard to retain. Markets were weak, and subject to government intervention. In the 1990s to the year 2000 there has been more evidence of training, correspondent networking, enterprising commercialism, pluralism and diversity of voices. UNESCO’s support is still needed today in selected cases: for example, technologies are often obsolete, and in countries whose governments do not appreciate the content that news agencies produce, the agencies are perishing through a mixture of political intervention and inadequate financial support.

This preceding session was followed by National News agencies reports. The summaries presented hereunder are based on reports presented to meeting by Agency representatives.
4.3 The National News Agency in a Time of Technological Economic and Political Change.

4.3.1 The South African Press Association (SAPA)

SAPA has experienced many of the problems typically confronting national agencies owned by newspaper cooperatives. The challenge of the Internet has a way of exacerbating those problems. This was the first of ten presentations in the session entitled 'The National News Agency in a Time of Technological Economic and Political Change'.

SAPA is a not-for-profit organization owned by South African newspaper groups, and is the only non-government national agency – the government subsidizes no agency in South Africa. Newspaper subscriptions are based on respective circulation figures. Important clients include the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the South African government, and the new Government Information Services, established in 1999. SAPA maintains correspondents throughout South Africa. For international news SAPA subscribes to Associated Press, Reuters and DPA, and is currently in negotiation with PANA. More significantly, the agency has survived the transition from apartheid to democracy. During states of emergency imposed under apartheid, authorities required journalists to walk away from scenes of unrest and their reports had to be officially confirmed. SAPA's policy was to report everything in full, and clients were advised when stories might contravene security regulations. This established a level of credibility that has sustained the agency to the current day.

Exploitation of the Internet to establish innovative services has been constrained by SAPA's newspaper owners who are in competition with each other for a diminishing share of advertising revenue and have their own Internet ambitions. Many no longer participate in traditional cooperative activities – notably, routine news feeds to SAPA of member newspapers' own 'spontaneous' news. By cutting news feeds to SAPA, members increase pressure on SAPA resources. More than 80% of any domestic SAPA news file is now self-generated. Symptomatic of tensions with newspaper members are attempts by some, notably the Independent group, to establish competing agencies.

Tensions with owner-clients signified a trend that Mr. Mogale thought would eventually lead to complete commercialization of SAPA, moving from a supply-driven to a demand-driven product. The agency would become increasingly independent from (and in competition with) its founders and owners. This might involve broadening the shareholder base, and formation of regional alliances, developing into a possible "Southern" news agency, representing agencies across the southern hemisphere.

The Internet would be the backbone of commercialization, with a significant impact on traditional newsgathering practices: even extending to commercial sponsorships for sports reporting. Any such developments would have to respect the agency's reputation and good name and its mission to serve the public interest.
4.3.2 United News of Bangladesh (UNB)

UNB demonstrates the potential for survival of a privately owned national news agency even in a country that is generally thought of as poor, albeit populous. Mr. Ruhsan Rahman, Business Development Manager, delivered the UNB presentation. UNB is one of two national agencies: BSS is the government owned national agency and UNB is also national, but privately owned which was launched in 1988, when an authoritarian regime still prevailed. In its early days, it had to cope with interventions from the Ministry of Information, as well as with issues of bribery and intimidation. Since democracy was established in 1990, news has flowed more extensively within the country as well as between Bangladesh and neighboring countries. Nonetheless, UNB finds it prudent to appoint advisors from the major national institutions, including the army. These advisors help the agency to secure access for its journalists to important centers of power and can defend the agency in moments of difficulty. Not being an official national agency, UNB finds that it is not always treated with the same degree of seriousness as its rival, BSS.

UNB was the first fully computerized agency in Bangladesh, employs fewer correspondents than BSS, charges slightly less, and has more clients. It has an Internet service that offers free real-time headline news stories. It has started the first agency news service in Bangla language, a language that is spoken by 300 million people.

4.3.3 ANTARA News Agency (Indonesia)

ANTARA is in transition, in the midst of major political and commercial transformations. The Internet has facilitated but did not cause the establishment of profit-oriented business services, and has triggered a more competitive business environment. The growth of for-profit business activity correlates with substantial reductions in government subsidy. Mr. Heru Purwanto, Executive Editor, delivered the presentation.

ANTARA was established in 1937 by newspaper proprietors, in the context of national liberation first from Dutch colonizers, then Japanese occupiers. Independent for 17 years, the agency was later nationalized, remaining under government control through four administrations. Reporting to head office in Jakarta are 27 provincial bureaus and 200 correspondents, with additional bureaux or correspondents in 9 international capitals, disseminating 250 daily news reports in Indonesian and English. International news comes from AFP, Reuters, DPA, Xinhua, Kyodo, Asean News Exchange, the Organization of Asia Pacific News Agencies, the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool and individual developing country agencies. Reuters Monitor, Bridge-Telerate, and Bloomberg provide financial news.

Formally non-profit, the agency developed business-oriented news services, some now online, from the 1980s, in response to market demand and technology development. Business services include a press release wire, Asia-Net, Asia Pulse (a consortium of regional agencies that provide information on business opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region, ANTARA Financial Economic and Commodity Research, V-SAT and Internet-based news services, and Indonesia Market Quote and ANTARA News Photo Services. Most business services involve strategic alliances with local or foreign partners, including Australian Associated Press, Reuters, and PT Telkom, Indonesia’s state telecommunications company.
In permitting business services, the government used them as a pretext for reductions in subsidy that has fallen from a peak of 60% of the annual budget to only 2% today. Legislation was recently passed enabling ANTARA to become independent. A privatization feasibility study, undertaken by ANTARA journalists and employees, is under way, and ANTARA may transition from state-control to status as a private or semi-private news agency. However, while new legislation offers ANTARA its independence, it also provides an opportunity for the government to set up another news agency.

The agency computerized in 1986, adopting the Internet in 1994 for exchanging news via email with other developing countries' national agencies, disseminating news to end-users, subscribers, Indonesian embassies, and for internal communication (Intranet). The Internet yields savings by reducing reliance on leased-lines. ANTARA plans an Internet-based real-time data service, and expects use of the Internet for day-to-day editorial operations. It has applied for a license to be an Internet Service Provider. Its photo service is offered to clients via dial-up, Internet and Satellites services.

The Internet benefits not only ANTARA but also its actual and potential competitors; there has been a mushrooming of other information companies in recent years. The best response to competition is improvement in quality, but enhancement of quality is a further pressure on scarce resources. This is also true of the competition: of three competitors that appeared in recent years, two collapsed, unable to establish an adequate network.

Illustrating the combined impact of technology and political change Mr. Purwanto noted that ANTARA has decentralized its news editing process, and that some bureau offices in major provinces distribute news directly to all subscribers without sending it to the Jakarta newsroom for prior editing. A significant outcome of new business and Internet strategies is that subscribers are no longer limited to media, but include individuals, private companies and government agencies.

### 4.3.4 WAFA News Agency of Palestine

The WAFA presentation was delivered by Mr. Ziad Abdel Fattah, Director of WAFA's Jordanian Center. Mr. Fattah noted that WAFA was established in unique circumstances, namely as the agency of a nation still in the process of emergence through struggle. It was established by fighter correspondents, operate in wartime conditions, and many of its staff had been killed. The agency does have a web-site where news is offered in English, Arabic and Hebrew, free of charge. Otherwise, the agency has not been able to move towards advanced communications technologies. It has been the beneficiary of a UNESCO/Italy grant, starting in 1998, to support its international communications activities.

### 4.3.5 MONTSAME, News Agency of Mongolia

The MONTSAME presentation was delivered by Mr. T. Baasanuren, General Director, who noted that his country was in a process of transition towards democracy and a market economy, away from socialism and a centrally planned economy. The agency is a represen-
tative example of many agencies that are adapting to such a transition. As in other developing countries, the need to adapt to a new information environment and state-of-the-art technology constitutes an additional and significant challenge. The Internet is a prime example, regarded positively as opening up many opportunities for cooperation.

MONTSAME is a state agency founded in 1921 that currently has 121 employees. It adapted the Internet from 1994, using it for news distribution in English, Russian and Mongolian languages. Monthly rent for direct access is $2000, so that Internet reach is greatly limited. The agency has been funded by UNESCO/IPDC to modernize its computer hardware and software. It plans to distribute its English, Russian and Chinese magazines through the Internet. It is hoped that the Internet will facilitate future exchanges of information with other agencies, but for the time being, reliability requires that the agency continue with its current leased line for main services.

MONTSAME receives international news from Reuters and ITAR-TASS (Russia), for which it pays annual subscription fees. Other international sources identified in the agency’s web-site include Xinhua of China, Kyodo of Japan, and Yonhap of Korea. On-line provision of just a small proportion of international agencies’ news-files would suffice for most domestic users in a country like Mongolia, especially if they could pay less for a shorter service. The implication, therefore, is that if international agencies are more flexible in their relations with national agencies, they might better serve the national media of developing countries.

Other difficulties noted by Mr. Baasanuren were the absence of financial independence, inadequate resources, insufficient salary levels, weak sense of professionalism among editorial and technical staffs, and scarce training opportunities. One solution is to enhance available resources through diversification of services, which may include photographic, graphic, voice, audio-visual, moving-image services for television clients, automatic teletypesetting services for print clients and provision of news for client Internet services. The agency produces four newspapers – a weekly English language newspaper, a weekly Russian language newspaper, a weekly newspaper in traditional Mongolian script, and a 20-page daily bulletin in Mongolian. These are supported in part by advertising. Until now, MONTSAME has not had to worry about revenue: it has been subsidized by government, and has provided its news services free of charge to clients. However, its ambition is independence, both political and financial. Already, legislation has been introduced by Parliament that will enable this to happen.

Mr. Baasanuren was of the view that national news agencies would continue to experience difficulties of the kind he had described, but considered that they continued to play an important role. National news agencies offer secure state-sanctioned sources of information. They typically enjoy privileged status and access to sources and resources and are important and inexpensive domestic sources of information and sources of national news for international media.
4.3.6 The Press Trust of India (PTI)

Mr. Vijay S. Satokar, Deputy Editor of Special Services, delivered the PTI presentation. His observations addressed brand identity and the Internet. Many agencies took a century to develop brand reputations for authenticity, accuracy and speed. The Internet enables newcomers to construct brand in far less time, in competition against established players.

Founded in 1949, PTI has the advantage of being owned by a cooperative of leading Indian newspapers, with 450 domestic newspaper clients. Formed during national independence, it symbolizes freedom from dependency on information monopoly.

The Internet’s contribution to brand is restricted by low penetration in developing countries; for India, this is projected at 1.2% for 2005, by which time telephone penetration will still only be 20%; PC penetration may reach 60%. The rate of advance attracts considerable business interest. Portals offer news services, subscribing to agencies like PTI, sometimes supplemented with their own reporting networks. PTI’s owner newspapers, suffering first from broadcasting and now the Internet, hit back with their web-sites. These have brand names associated with credibility, but compete in turn with PTI’s own site.

Having computerized operations in the 1980s, PTI established its web-site in 1999, responding to competition from other news sites. PTI’s site provides free access to major national, international, sports and commercial news, and its principal purpose is promotional. All services - text, pictures, graphics, and data - are available to media and non-media subscribers by e-mail. The web is an additional delivery vehicle that extends the range and reach of services. Diversification does not depend on but is facilitated by the web. Diversified services include PTI Features, PTI Mag (write-ups on political, social and other subjects), PTI Data India, PTI Economic News and PTI Science Service. PTI-Bhasha distributes PTI Mag for Hindi subscribers. The Hindi language market grew more important following the financial collapse of previous agencies that had served the ‘language press’ in competition with PTI, namely Samachar Bharati and Hindustan Samachar. PTI’s Hindi service generates less revenue than the English: Hindi newspapers are smaller, attract less advertising, and pay lower subscriptions. The agency has added a photo and a screen-based news-update service (News Scan) together with financial news services such as Stock Scan. PTI TV produces televised news and corporate feature stories. The agency distributes services internationally to the U.S., U.K., Australia and U.A.E. Other new services include a domestic PR Wire Service and a news service for mobile phone users.

Such diversification strategies often involve alliances. Asia Pulse, for example, is a consortium involving PTI and four other media organizations; together these provide a global on-line industry data bank. Asia Net is a joint venture of Asian information vendors for worldwide circulation of press releases. PTI distributes international news in India from AP and AFP, as well as AP Photos and International Commercial Information. It has exchange arrangements with 100 news agencies, including NANAP and OANA.
Such new services draw on PTI’s established reputation for accuracy, objectivity, and credibility, and on its infrastructure of personnel and communications networks. These include a staff of 1,600, of whom 400 are journalists, 100 bureaux countrywide and nine in international capitals, 30 stringers at home and 35 part-time correspondents abroad. The agency’s owners, representing a wide variety of different newspapers, languages and political leanings, underpin PTI’s reputation. Recent diversification reflects the opening up of the Indian economy but is also driven by a sense of insecurity about the traditional client base as print newspapers cope with their own economic woes.

**4.3.7 Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA)**

Ms. Neviana Hadjiska, editor of the International News Department, delivered the BTA presentation. Like many agencies, BTA is accommodating to dramatic transformations of context, including the transition from state-control to market economy. Of interest is a new articulation of relations between the news agency and the country’s governing authorities. Under communism, BTA had a market monopoly on wholesale news provision - subject to government control – and on distribution of news from international agencies. BTA still sells to all national media, 60% of regional media and 150 non-media clients. Now BTA faces competition, particularly from international agencies, including Reuters, AP and AFP. A competing domestic agency, by contrast, was unable to survive as a regular news agency in this relatively small country (Bulgaria has approximately eight million people). With the transition to a market economy, BTA must accommodate to a decline in government subsidy from 100% to 25% of income, and to restrictions on the categories of expenditure for which the subsidy can be used. One response has been cost reduction: the agency has closed 50 correspondent bureaux abroad, and is now almost fully dependent on the international agencies for foreign news, including Reuters, AP, AFP, ITAR-TASS, DPA and some regional news agencies, mainly Balkan.

BTA has a long history (100 years), but association with the previous communist regime does not serve it well on the domestic market. It enjoys full journalistic freedom, but shoulders responsibility as a public medium, so is placed in the delicate position of having duties to both government and to non-government clients. For example, in one dispute, opposition media complained that BTA was not distributing ITAR-TASS news; but the government did not want BTA to continue its ITAR-TASS subscription.

The agency is supervised by the democratically elected Parliament and as such, it represents all political parties. Parliament elects the director general; but since in effect it is the parliamentary majority that controls the election, the choice favors one who is loyal to that majority, and ensures that the agency respects government interests, even if these are generally also national interests.

BTA first introduced an intranet system for clients to access its internal informational network by means of a local telephone call, but this was dependent on the expensive satellite network of the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company. The Internet, by contrast, has provided cheaper, faster and more reliable communication. BTA has uploaded all of its
products onto the Internet, and its site now has 15 news channels. Some clients, including even AP and Radio Free Europe, still require telex distribution. BTA now transmits information only through its Internet network and electronic mail. Internet portals represent a new category of client. There is a risk that some smaller media clients may download domestic or international news free from portal sites (but so far, smaller clients have not cancelled BTA subscriptions) and BTA is making every effort to protect its product by creating differentiated levels of access to its web server. BTA’s site represents competition for the sites of some of its larger clients.

Other than the portals, the Internet service has not attracted new clients, nor has it proved to be a source of advertising revenue. BTA continues to be a relatively expensive wholesale supplier. Its competitive advantage is one of accuracy and reliability but keeping up-to-date can be expensive. In summary, the Internet is both opportunity and threat, but perhaps more opportunity than threat.

4.3.8 Ghana News Agency (GNA)

The GNA presentation was delivered by Mr. Robert Kafui Johnson, General Manager. Transitioning from government ownership to privatization, GNA’s relationship to government is undergoing structural re-articulation, reducing the potential for political intervention. Previously, the government appointed senior agency executives and the agency’s director was part of the presidential entourage. Appointments are now made by the National Media Commission (NMC) representing a broad spectrum of interests (the NMC elects its president from among its members). 90% of agency funding still comes from government, the remainder from sales and advertisements. Established in 1957 as first news agency in Sub-Saharan Africa, GNA contributed to African and Ghanaian emancipation. Ghana’s first President, Dr. Kwame Nkumah, regarded GNA as a counter-weight to biased reporting by international news agencies. GNA’s mission was to help build a viable, cohesive nation-state.

GNA is now in difficulty, due in part to policy fluctuations of different ministers. Computerized in 1989 with aid from UNESCO, the computer system broke down in 1996 and was not properly re-installed. One provincial office of GNA has only one, old, typewriter. There has been no recent investment in infrastructure. Foreign bureaux have closed. Subscriptions for international agencies are in arrears. The photographic section is non-operational. A web site established in 1999 has been suspended while the agency re-designs its production. In coverage of year 2000 national elections, a local radio station emerged as best source, in part because of effective use of mobile phones, showing how slow GNA had become.

GNA is designated a subvented institution to be commercialized during the first phase of the public Sector reform programme. As a managerial rather than journalistic appointment, Mr. Johnson represents a commitment to effective management. The General Manager implements policies of the Board of Governors and oversees day-to-day operations affecting 217 employees. Four department heads assist him: Editorial, Administration, Engineering
and Accounts. Main services comprise the Home News Bulletin, and the Foreign News Bulletin, a compilation of news from international agencies. There is a Daily Summary of major news events, domestic and foreign, available in hard copy. There is also an advertising service that pre-finances and places adverts for clients on a commission basis.

Current obstacles to GNA progress include:

- inadequate financial resources and unpredictable release of approved funds;
- obsolete and malfunctioning technology, vehicles and equipment;
- increased cost of transmission of news to PANA, Reuters and other foreign news agencies;
- inability to attract and retain experienced professional staff.

The following remedies will help GNA achieve its objectives:

- replacement of broken-down computer and other equipment;
- review of operational methods and packaging of products;
- enhancement of revenue through expansion of client base for advertising services;
- price increases and regional extension of advertisement services;
- expansion of marketing, sales and promotions.

Management consultants have developed a strategy, whose formal approval is anticipated, for self-sufficiency within four years. It requires $750,000 technology investment within the first 18 months. It redefines the agency’s mission, which is to provide high quality, commercially sustainable service that contributes to Ghana’s overall development. It seeks enhancement of GNA’s traditional services (e.g. web-site), new products/services (e.g. audio news, press releases) to more clients, and critical cost efficiencies (e.g. via technology modernization). It identifies GNA’s existing strengths as ‘reputation of excellence and an image as the preeminent institution operating in the news and information sphere in Ghana’, its client base, national network, and dedicated staff. Constraints include lack of access to capital, and absence of a business/marketing culture. The plan calls for a pro-active sales programme, a corporate planning system, incentives and training, and a funding campaign to help raise some of the needed capital.
4.3.9 The Khabar Broadcasting Agency (Republic of Kazakhstan)

Ms. Dina Bukayeva, Senior Editor delivered the presentation on Khabar. The Khabar Agency, not a news agency in the traditional sense of that term, raises the question of whether one future model of agency development may be broadcast organizations that operate simultaneously as wholesalers and retailers. Khabar is the largest and one of the youngest (five years old) broadcasting corporations in the Republic of Kazakhstan and in all of Central Asia. Its potential audience is 64 million. It has two television and one-radio channels and broadcasts in Kazakh, Russian and English. It has received assistance from the Thomson Foundation of Great Britain; also from UNESCO (in becoming a member of the Asian-Pacific Broadcasting Union). Khabar's focus is news, and information programmes fill 35% of the day. A web-site comprises information about Khabar Agency, and a selection of news. Overall, the agency employs more than 90 people. Its satellite receiving stations pull down news editions from many international agencies, and its television programming is distributed by Intelsat-703.

By the mid-1990s, there was a profusion of new media in Kazakhstan. As of the end of 1996, 220 television stations, 50 radio stations and some 20 news agencies were in operation. Decrees issued by President Nazarbaev placed the media under the control of his administration. One of these, issued on 17 March 1995, limited the volume of advertisements appearing in the independent mass media. This produced serious economic difficulties for the independent media. Presidential decree No. 2518 of 14 October 1995 stipulated that virtually all the media in Kazakhstan be controlled by the presidential National Agency for the Press and Mass Information. The National Agency, which consisted only of representatives of the state-run media, was made responsible for practically all issues regarding the media.

4.3.10 Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)

Mr. Waled Al Isami, Chief Engineer, delivered the SANA presentation. SANA is a government agency, with local and foreign correspondents in more than 20 countries. It has a staff of 200 journalists and 15 engineers. Staff come from diverse backgrounds: there is a need for training that will introduce them equally to the working of the agency and provide them opportunity to become familiar with the new technology. SANA is currently in the process of up-dating its technology, with a data bank that will make services available on demand. It has already introduced Internet bulletins in several languages for clients around the world.
5 Local and Global: some strategic choices

5.1 News Agencies in the Internet Age: A Presentation by Dr. Daya Thussu

Dr. Thussu’s presentation considered the role of the major international agencies, and the opportunities provided by the Internet for new operators in developing countries to establish alternative news agendas. His presentation was the first of two under the heading Local and Global: some strategic choices’. Dr. Thussu noted that the major global agencies for text, video and financial news are principally American, British and French. U.S./U.K. influence in global news flow is further extended by organizations such as CNN and BBC World. Dr. Thussu identified various efforts that have been made in the past to establish alternative news agendas that are less determined than mainstream media by the drive for marketability. He offered examples of significant news stories that have been inadequately covered in mainstream media. To the problem of the commercially driven media of the ‘Northern’ countries is added the problem of Southern governments that use media to promote news that reflects positively on them. In the meantime, globalization brings about a greater profusion of commercially oriented media in both North and South, and a corresponding decline in public service ethos.

A number of the alternative agencies that have emerged have had only limited influence on mainstream media - they include PANA, NANAP, Gemini, and IPS. Dr. Thussu argued that establishment of an alternative to corporatized global communication is a moral imperative, a necessary requirement for the democratization of global news. There is still enormous communications disparity between peoples of the North and South in terms of available media technologies and access to media. He quoted a 1999 Intelsat annual report stating that some four billion people around the world remain without access to communications services. Although the Internet has great potential, digital connectivity is being used much more for the purpose of developing new businesses than for harnessing the technology to eradicate mass illiteracy and other grave social problems. Less than three per cent of the world’s population currently participates in the new cyber-culture; the Internet is dominated by English language web-sites, and most search engines are optimized to English language. Improvements in access continue to be impeded by the high cost of receiver equipment, high connectivity charges, poor access to telephone lines, and government controls.

5.2 Inter Press Service (IPS)

The IPS presentation was delivered by Professor Anthony Giffard of the University of Washington and a member of the IPS board. The presentation assessed the Internet’s threats and opportunities for news agencies. IPS was founded in the 1960s by Roberto Savio, to link together European and Latin American news agencies and to assist agencies of newly independent nations by technology transfer, technical assistance, training and carrier
services. IPS’ main product is its World Service, producing 30 reports a day on events and processes affecting the peoples and nations of the South. Primary languages are English and Spanish. Reports are translated into many other languages, and widely distributed.

IPS began Internet distribution in 1994, using a web site set up by the Norwegian telecommunications company, Telenor. The home page (the Global Gateway), based in Rome, was launched in 1996, with a Spanish-language equivalent added in 1997, produced in Montevideo. IPS leverages its Internet presence through arrangements with several web portals, including OneWorld Online. A keyword searchable archive dates from 1994. Visitors see headlines and the first lines of items; only subscribers can access complete texts. A text-based graphic design accommodates users with slow Internet connectivity. 7,000 hits a day come mainly from the U.S.A. IPS also sends customized news packages to over 5,000 subscribers, mostly NGOs, U.N. and E.U. officials, media and educational institutions and personnel, libraries, trade councils and government ministries.

Distributing via Internet portals greatly extends the reach of IPS services. IPS, OneWorld and the Panos Institute together are designing InterWorld Radio to distribute news scripts to radio stations for reading directly on the air. In the U.S.A., the main distribution channel is Global Information Network (GIN) daily distributing about 70 English and Spanish language reports to over 300 clients, two-thirds of whom are African-American newspapers, and many of whose readers do not have web access. Some national agencies (e.g. OPECNA, QNA, and WAM) use IPS channels to reach a larger audience. The web also facilitates in-house correspondence among IPS correspondents and bureaus.

On the downside, the Internet has undercut IPS carrier services, which previously generated a third of revenues. Demand for technical services has dwindled since technical advances, deregulation and privatization slashed the cost of telecommunications and undercut other services. Savings from lower telecommunications rates have been offset by the cost of developing and maintaining web sites. Not all clients have high bandwidth access or the appropriate hardware and software, so IPS still has the cost of dedicated data circuits and satellite feeds, in addition to its web sites. The Internet intensifies competition and gives direct access to sources once available only through news agency services. Clients resist paying for categories of information that many regard as a social right, particularly when they concern development. Funding from potential donors, an alternative or complementary source of revenue, is drying up. Furthermore, the Internet is not ubiquitous. Calls from rural Africa, for example, are expensive. Local connectivity between ISPs is not universal. Calls across Africa must still sometimes be routed via Europe or the U.S.A. Computer hardware is expensive and highly taxed. Copyright protection is inadequate. Experts skilled in computer maintenance and web content production are scarce. Per capita incomes are low. Several current projects may improve on this situation, including significant funding to support Internet connectivity.

However, the Internet poses a fundamental question to IPS and like-minded ventures. Given that the kind of information that IPS has committed to gather and distribute is now widely and directly available on the Internet, have the ‘alternative’ news agencies outlived their purpose, and if not, what is their function now?
6 Should national agencies give way to regional news agencies?

6.1 The Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC)

The CMC presentation was delivered by Mr. Richard Cox, Global Services Editor. His was the first of three presentations under the title 'Should national agencies give way to regional news agencies?'. CMC evolved from the merger of the commercial operations of the Caribbean News Agency Ltd. (CANA) and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU). A Chief Operating Officer reporting to a Board of Directors drawn from the two constituent companies leads CMC. CMC demonstrates how in regions of the developing world that share economic and other structures, a regional news agency may have greater viability than isolated national news agencies. CMC combines traditional news agency, Internet and audio-visual operations, and is increasingly commercializing its operations.

Established in 1976, CANA is owned by a dozen of its subscribing media entities. It serves over 100 clients with wire, radio, Internet and photo services throughout the Caribbean. It operates a 24-hour regional, digital satellite network with approximately 50 downlinks.

The CBU, established in 1970, is an association of 25 radio and television stations, plus 20 associate members outside the region. The merger between CANA and CBU recognized that both organizations faced similar market opportunities and threats. It reflects an intensification of rationalization in the Caribbean, as indicated by the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, a response to increasing competition in world markets for traditional Caribbean produce. Limited human and capital resources constrain the potential for individual national news agencies in the region, although CMC benefits from government information services of the different island nations. Free-market pressures have increased the number of media entities, while altering the nature of news demand. There is evidence of increased concentration of ownership and involvement of non-regional interests, particularly from the United States. There is growing competition for advertising dollars, and this negatively impacts on traditional domestic television channels. Format specialization in radio accelerates the move towards automation and music at the expense of news and information.

In response to market pressures, CMC seeks to intensify its commercial operations and become a 24-hour purveyor of regional news, information and entertainment packages. Its goal is to be recognized worldwide as the premier source for Caribbean news, information and programming, producing 20 hours weekly of commercially-driven TV programming by the year 2002, and an all-news and information Caribbean radio network operating 12 hours daily by the end of 2001.

A new division, the Global Services Division, will tap the potential of the Internet. CMC has two contracts to supply proprietary data to companies, as well as maintaining web-sites.
The CANA on-line web-site includes top stories from the CANA Wire Service, which draws on Reuters for international news. Other available online services include an electronic news retrieval (dail-up or e-mail) service; a public relations wire service; CANARadio, including a daily 15-minute news programme; CANABusiness$ Interactive; and Internet training for government and private sector executives; Caribbean Newspaper Clipping Service; Caribbean News on-line for web sites; and an on-line photo service for newspapers and web-sites.

6.2 The Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA)

The FANA presentation was delivered by Mr. Farid Ayar, Secretary General, providing insight into the actual and potential role of news agency associations to advise, represent and support the operations of their national news agency members. In the Arab world national news agencies appeared during the process of national emancipation from imperial powers, starting life as government information departments, and assuming functions previously performed by imperial administrations. Their establishment reflected the view of new governments that the international news agencies should not be depended upon to transmit politically appropriate news and views into and out of national territories. Most Arab news agencies were official State organizations, leaving little or no role for the private sector. Exceptions included the Middle East News Agency, MENA (established by four Egyptian publishing houses, but later nationalized) and the Maghreb Arab Press Agency that started as a private company but was annexed to the State in 1973. The role of national news agencies is particularly important given the political significance that Arab governments attribute to national mobilization, the information dependency of retail media on agencies, the relatively weak financial conditions of Arab ‘retail’ press and broadcast media, and their local orientation. Regional agencies (examples include the International Islamic News Agency, HNA, and the Gulf News Agency) operate principally as news pools, tending to reflect the influence of one or two strong members, or falling prey to tensions between member nations. The Gulf News Agency was eventually annexed to the State of Bahrain and became the national news agency of the State of Bahrain.

The constitutional and official status of most Arab news agencies does not encourage innovation and enterprise within institutions controlled by their respective Ministries of Information. Employees are employees of the State. Conditions, therefore, are not conducive to creativity. The level of technology is typically modest. Many employees have limited skills in English language and this is an impediment to adaptation of new technology.

Arab News Agencies are prepared to privatize as demonstrated by the commissions of a study to implement the reclassification of the Arab Emirates News Agency from 'official' to 'semi-official' status. The Jordanian News Agency has also embarked on the road to privatization. In addition, the Lebanese Minister of Information announced a decision to privatize the National Lebanese Information Agency, and merge it in a single corporation with the Lebanese official radio and television. Mr. Fayar noted that the new agency would face a challenge in reducing the size of the existing: 1,200 employees, in an operation that cannot realistically justify more than 150.
FANA has worked for over a decade to assist with the modernization of news agencies and the introduction of technical innovation. Some agencies, such as the Kuwait News Agency and the Gulf agencies have sufficient capital for this transition. Some others would like to, but do not have the resources. FANA has helped arrange for the commissioning of expert studies of Arab news agencies, with the aim of improving efficiency and preparing for privatization.

6.3 Women's Feature Service (WFS)

The WFS presentation was delivered by Ms. Angana Parekh, Director. WFS began as a multi-faceted UNESCO project in 1978. Of seven that were started, only the India-based WFS survives. Originally a project within IPS, based in Rome, WFS became an independent non-profit organization in 1990 and moved to New Delhi, India. It is the only independent organization of its kind. Its revenues come from international donors, sales and projects. 20% of its income derives from the sale of articles. On a weekly basis, the agency produces news, features and opinions on development from a gender perspective. Its original mission was to write on women’s issues per se, but its unique selling point today is that it provides a gender perspective on a very broad range of issues related to development; 90% of its stories fall into category. It works with 80 journalists from 35 countries and sells to publications in 11 countries. These correspondents produce some 400 features annually and 500 news-briefs. WFS counts many NGOs amongst its clients. Stories are marketed to mainstream newspapers, news agencies, newsletters and journals. As a diversification strategy, the agency offers advice on media strategy; produces and broadcasts radio and video programmes on commission, and produces dailies at international workshops on development issues.

WFS believes that media and communication are critical for women’s equality. In 1992, WFS switched from distribution through IPS to electronic mail, and as a result the service reached much greater numbers across a broader geographical spectrum. The Internet has facilitated organization and networking. The agency’s web-site is scheduled to go on-line early in 2001. In India, there are many barriers to Internet access: illiteracy, poor English language skills, inadequate infrastructure, and affordability. On the plus side, the Internet is a good antidote to censorship, and it gives individuals and small groups an opportunity to reach a mass audience. However, news agencies still have a role in offering people a usable and easily accessible product. Agencies and newspapers have more credibility than many other Internet news sources; agencies in turn have broader newsgathering networks than retail media.

Among the challenges that WFS faces are the increasing focus of mainstream media on ‘marketability’ and profit orientation, with a consequent ‘dumbing-down’ of content. Large newspapers prefer to carry stories they themselves have generated. Many are cutting costs at the expense of news, especially impacting on features agencies. Newspapers are themselves increasingly writing the features once provided by agencies. To meet market demands response strategies have included: more attractive packaging; shorter articles; stronger focus on small town newspapers; flexibility in payment terms to accommodate clients’ pay-by-use; commitment to quality; complementarity with, rather than duplication of, the content that mainstream media already offer; diversification; and exploitation of Internet opportunities.
7 Agencies, Technology and Development

7.1 Systems and Electronics Development (SEDCO)

Mr. Majdi Shawish, Product Manager for Media Solutions, delivered the SEDCO presentation. This was the first of two presentations in a session entitled ‘Agencies, Technology and Development’. This presentation looked at the potential of computer systems for news agencies. Current national agency strengths include valuable accumulative corporate knowledge, years of local experience, and valuable local content. Weaknesses are often to do with technology (related to existing channels of delivery etc.), marketing (e.g. poor brand identity and weak market positioning). Opportunities include expansion of market size through introduction of new services, capitalization of accumulative knowledge, and expansion in channels of delivery. Threats include competition from international news agencies, local portals, and from local private and commercial agencies. Responses include the deployment of a KM system; survey, categorization and evaluation of knowledge; expansion of delivery channels (Internet portals, mobile phones), new services and multimedia presentation.

7.2 PETRA News Agency

Ms. Waffa Aqaileh, Head of Administration, delivered the PETRA presentation. The Jordanian news agency, which is still wholly funded by government, was established in 1969 and has been computerized since the 1980s. The first integrated computer system was not introduced until the early 1990s. By 1992, the agency could receive from and transmit to 32 news agencies. An archival system for news and photos was introduced in 1997 that marked the beginning its news and photos services on the web. The Internet has become the only distribution mechanism for photos to newspaper clients in Jordan. It has reduced communications costs and extended the agency’s reach, both in terms of geography and in terms of categories of client. However, multiple sites are necessary, as are programmes that transmit news easily and quickly to the media, and satisfactory electronic archival systems for Internet access have yet to be developed. While PETRA works to bring its Internet services to state-of-the-art condition, media clients still prefer to receive news that is traditionally packaged via direct lines.

The Internet is currently more useful for production and networking than it is for publishing. Currently, the PETRA site attracts 500,000 visitors a month (a high percentage of them from the U.S.A.). There have been improvements in computer connectivity between central and other offices of the agency. The agency currently employs more than 25 correspondents in the major Arab and world capitals.
The programme of the workshop foresaw the holding of six discussion panels. There was nonetheless general acceptance among workshop representatives that there should be one additional panel to consider the conditions of agencies such as some of those within Africa that are currently moribund or otherwise close to collapse. Each panel had a chair and rapporteur, and their reports were considered at the final session of the Amman workshop.

Following herewith are the summaries of the panel discussions:

8.1 Diversification of Services

Certain examples of diversification were noted, including Reuters for whom general news services to traditional media clients now accounts for less than five per cent of total revenues. Some forms of diversification are achieved most cost-effectively through strategic alliances with others and/or through exchange arrangements. The cooperative structure of agency development groups such as WANAD and SEANAD could help identify sources of additional revenue. There was some disagreement as to whether there was still sufficient space in the market for national agencies to pursue niche markets in financial news. Other potential forms of diversification that were identified included the packaging and sale of archival services, the establishment of sports services, and the sale of advertising to web sites. In the case of sports services there was concern that this market requires substantial new investment, and that there are some well-established competitors already. It was noted that diversification strategies require increased professionalization and the establishment of a business culture. This panel did not formulate specific recommendations.

8.2 Ownership and Management

This panel formulated five recommendations:

- Improvement of management and business skills through management consultant reports and training courses;

- Introduction of flexible systems of incentive and reward to help motivate staff to develop initiative and to achieve excellence;

- Review and experimentation, as far as local circumstances allow, with new and more effective methods of articulation between national need and commercial autonomy while allowing agencies to continue to serve the best interests of the state and the public;
• Review and experimentation, as far as local circumstances allow, with new and more effective methods of articulation between the owners of cooperatively owned news agencies and the executives of those news agencies, methods that will provide agencies with greater commercial autonomy, while enjoining them to continue to serve the best interests of their owners and the public. It is envisaged that commercial autonomy will benefit owners by relieving them of financial responsibility of supporting their news agencies through high subscription rates;

• Where local markets for news services are weak, there is a continuing necessity for government assistance. In this event it is important that government funding should be adequate to ensure that the basic mission of a national news agency is fulfilled - which is to report on and to distribute news about the nation as a whole, for the benefit of local and international news consumers. Inadequate financing undermines the usefulness of the news product, and undermines the credibility of both the news agency and the government whose responsibility it is, in these circumstances, to support it. The working group recommends that agencies that are in the position of persistent and possibly fatal under-funding should be identified as among the most deserving targets of any campaign to encourage outside donors to support the work of national agencies.

8.3 Marketing and Client Relations

There was broad agreement as to the need to retain the existing client base while acquiring new categories of subscribers, and the desirability of coherent and proactive marketing strategies to achieve these objectives which take into account the characteristics and potentialities of new technologies, notably the Internet. The likelihood of coherent marketing strategies, or even of marketing departments, is greatly influenced by whether agencies are state owned and/or subsidized, have a protected or ‘captive’ market, and have a culture of management and entrepreneurship. Another consideration has to do with the range of services that agencies are constitutionally obliged to provide, in other words the discretion they have in decisions about how to allocate their resources most cost-effectively to generate revenue in excess of expenditure. Some agencies are legally defined as not-for-profit. Agencies have a variety of resources that they can leverage, extending even to the rental value of their own offices and equipment, and their potential as sites for advertising. It was noted that an important part of marketing is review of and responsiveness to client needs and interests. Processes of client review and responsiveness to client need, can be informal, but can also be facilitated through formal opportunities for discussion between agencies and clients. The Internet itself can be used to facilitate such communication.

8.4 Implementing Internet Strategies

Most agencies represented at the workshop have Internet presence. There is growing interest in leveraging Internet presence to generate revenue. The Web is being used for a variety of purposes and reasons: as a means to reduce communications costs of news collection and
news delivery to subscribers, to enhance editorial product, to promote services, and to establish or revamp brand image. Significant personnel and technological constraints were identified. There are problems of training staff and retaining staff when trained. Technology is expensive to purchase or upgrade; local connectivity may be weak; and there is considerable heterogeneity of technology level among clients. As a tool for reaching individual clients, Internet strategies face the challenge of consumers who expect Internet information to be free, and news agencies often lack effective marketing and strategies for monitoring customer behavior that would help overcome resistance to subscription services. The panel formulated the following recommendations for using the Internet to generate revenue:

- Packaging specific kinds of news – local, national, international, sports, business – and selling them separately;
- Selling material from archives, either online or on CD ROMs. There are firms that will package and index the material for a fee;
- Offering photographs and graphics to illustrate current news events, or from archives, on a subscription basis or per item;
- Providing audio feeds for Web-based radio stations;
- Packaging spot news for hand-held computers or cell phones;
- Providing updates for existing Web sites;
- Designing and hosting Web sites for other organizations or businesses;
- Developing statistical reports on client use of web-sites Developing revenue from sale of advertising space on sites and from establishing links to commercial sites.

8.5 Personnel Training, Professional Development and Professionalism

The summary paragraph from the panel report identified major challenges facing the agencies in these areas:

It was felt that the news agencies failed to attract qualified personnel as wages offered were lower compared to those given by newspapers or other media organizations. In addition, there were no training facilities for journalists and agencies mostly utilized opportunities offered by other organizations for training media personnel. Almost no agency had any budget for providing in-house training to the staff. Although promotional avenues did exist, they were not attractive enough to hold back journalists lured by better wages in other organizations.
8.6 Networking

A wide range of networking strategies was identified among agencies represented at the panel. These included bilateral and multilateral exchanges of news, shared training courses, mutual observation visits and training. The panel identified continued cooperation in sharing experiences in editorial, management, marketing and technology skills courses.

8.7 The Future of National News Agencies

This panel formulated the following recommendations:

- Some national news agencies are in grave danger, and may not be able to survive. The panel specifically calls upon UNESCO to launch a rescue mission for such news agencies. It is timely to conduct a review and appraisal of national news agencies that are in danger with a view to identifying solutions that may help save or resuscitate them.

- Some countries are still without national news agencies. The panel recommends that UNESCO should continue its efforts to ensure that all countries benefit from the services of national news agencies.

- National news agencies can and do provide important functions that benefit governments, media and nations, and these functions cannot easily substitutable by other institutions.

- The traditional model of a developing country national news agency, one that is wholly owned and controlled by the State, may now be dated or inappropriate in some circumstances.

- In place of the traditional model, there are alternative models that need to be identified and considered. These would include agencies in which the government collaborates with public and private media and other client groups. They would include agencies that, though governments might heavily support them, are protected by effective mechanisms that prevent direct government intervention in their operations. Ghana’s National Media Commission offers one possible model. Consideration should also be given to the potential of regional news services, for example along the lines of the Caribbean Media Corporation.

- Agencies that combine effective public service functions with services that facilitate self-sustainability are well placed to achieve widespread credibility in a way that the traditional model of national news agency often has not.

- Many agencies have been constitutionally or legally inhibited from introducing commercial enhancements to existing services, or new commercial services, or
simply from making a profit over and above operating requirements. Such impediments need to be reviewed and if possible removed, always provided that national news agencies continue to perform public service functions in the interests of the nation and the nation’s media, to a high degree of excellence. In this context it is timely to review and possibly re-conceptualize the original mission of news agencies in a manner that fully acknowledges the wide range of activities that agencies already or may in the future undertake, and with reference to the increasingly complex technological, business, political and global contexts in which national news agencies must today operate.

- It is timely to compile data that may demonstrate how and to what extent the services of national news agencies are used by their important clients.

- For the immediate future, an advocacy campaign is advisable, one that will help bring together influential people in those countries whose national agencies are threatened, to urge on them an appreciation of the benefits of national news agencies.

- There is still considerable scope for the enhancement of training provision to promote the technical, editorial and management skills of national news agencies. This is particularly important in the case of news agencies whose financial viability is threatened. Such training may be delivered in a variety of forms, including distance education.

9 Discussion

Workshop presentations and panels confirm the relevance of many issues identified in the background paper prepared for the workshop. There was broad acknowledgement of the Internet’s importance as both threat and opportunity, and broad acceptance that Internet strategies need to take account of the wider context of trends in national development, media industries and globalization. Discussions were candid, and the presentations and panels have yielded helpful insights. With reference to national agencies, hard data was not much in evidence, so that although discussions may accurately indicate trends, it is not possible in this context to fully substantiate these with statistics. The absence of hard data is itself symptomatic of the desirability of having centralized tracking processes for news agency data.

The inaugural address by His Excellency Dr. Taleb Rifai identified a network of critical interconnections and tensions between state ownership, credibility, professionalism, commercialism and public service, to which there were constant references during the workshop. Most participants recognized that the context within which national agencies operate has grown more competitive. Few doubts were expressed about the desirability and functions of national news agencies, although it was recognized that some governments had
reduced or discontinued their support. Among important agency functions identified were their services to nation-building, improving flows between cities and rural areas, and supporting informational needs of small to medium client media. Many national news agencies had once been seen as tools of mobilization in the process of national liberation from previous imperial administrations, and as potential counter-weights to the influence of western-based international news agencies (although their effectiveness in this latter regard has been questioned by some academic studies). Many continue to enjoy privileged status for access to sources in government and society, and as favored suppliers of news services to government institutions and media.

Despite the profusion of news-carrying web-sites - including web-sites of agencies’ client media - and penetration of domestic news markets by international news agencies, it was notable that in several instances where there has been or still is a competing domestic national news agency or agencies, these were dismissed by incumbent national agencies as failed or failing. There was one particular instance, the United News of Bangladesh, of a privately owned national agency offering serious competition to a state agency: although Bangladesh is a poor country, it is also heavily populated and therefore does support many media. There were other instances, as in the case of Kazakhstan, where the local situation was unclear. In some contexts, particularly small and poor countries that have weak to non-existent local media markets, the respective political authorities either cannot or will not continue to subsidize national agencies. Such agencies are under the most severe threat of collapse.

The workshop considered whether loss of official support is itself symptomatic of a declining need for the institution. Explanations mentioned included: absolute shortages of funds, intolerance of an agency’s potential as a source of criticism, preference for broadcast media rather than for the traditional text services of news agencies, perception that the national agency’s contribution to nation-building is less significant once political emancipation has been achieved and consolidated, and the influence of the international financial institutions in encouraging governments to divest themselves of operations that can be made self-sufficient. None of these reasons need undermine the actual usefulness of national news agencies, at least where agencies are funded to a level that permits them to do a competent job. In cases where local market or political support is inadequate, workshop discussion indicated a variety of possible responses. One is further infusion of technical and training support from intergovernmental or non-governmental non-profit organizations (at a time when such support has waned). News agencies may also consider amalgamation of their traditional text-based services with broadcast and multi-media services that give them access to new markets and greater visibility (as illustrated in the cases of CMC or the Khabar agency). Another response is to look at the potential role of news agency groupings or regional news agencies in supporting the operations of national agencies or even substituting for some or all their functions. Such a role might only pertain in a context similar to that of the English-speaking Caribbean, where the member nations are small, and there is political commitment to economic integration. The efficacy of some news-pools, on the other hand, is sometimes undermined by unwillingness of members to pay dues, or by the dominance of one or two strong members, and weak participation by others.
Many state agencies have become or are in transition towards becoming deregulated, commercialized or privatized. Examples include agencies of the Arab world, a region where government-owned and controlled agencies are otherwise the norm. There were references to contributions of management consultants in helping prepare agencies for commercialization (e.g. Bulgaria, Ghana, Indonesia, Jordan, Mongolia). Some state agencies are pushed towards commercialization by necessity, forced upon them by dwindling state subsidies (most dramatically in the case of ANTARA of Indonesia, where the rate of subsidy has declined from 60% to 2%, or BTA of Bulgaria where it declined from 100% to 20%). Some are also pushed in this direction by growing uncertainties affecting the print and broadcast industries, so that agencies question the wisdom of relying exclusively on media clients for revenue. One challenge that agencies face along the road of commercialization is to deal with staffing, and reducing staff numbers to cost-effective levels. All face the challenge of effecting a change in culture towards more ‘managerial’ and/or ‘entrepreneurial’ values, careful management of expenditures, the nurture and reward of initiative, new business and revenue generation. This may be particularly difficult in countries where the very nature and purpose of marketing is only poorly understood.

The move towards commercialization is not everywhere likely to bring complete independence of state ownership, e.g. in the cases of Bulgaria and Ghana. The ambition of preserving a state affiliation while embarking upon greater commercialization demands that goals of self-sustainability and editorial independence be met in a balanced. Efforts to build firewalls between political authority and editorial autonomy often fail to work or simply fail to convince. It is important to monitor and evaluate all such efforts so that information about workable solutions is disseminated widely. In the case of developing world agencies, certainly, there is evidence that commercialization and autonomy have lessened the expectation of political authorities that national agencies exist primarily to place a positive spin on their activities.

Both state and media-owned agencies experience pressures towards commercialization. South Africa’s SAPA exhibits many of the problems of media-owned agencies that are identified in the background paper. The SAPA case demonstrates that cooperative ways of working between agency and member-clients are breaking down as the market becomes more competitive for retail media; this places even greater pressure on news agencies’ scarce newsgathering resources.

The Internet was recognized both as threat and as opportunity, though possibly more opportunity than threat. On the plus side, the Internet offers cheap and direct distribution to clients, and enhances available tools for news-gathering and news-exchange. The Internet facilitates greater specialization and customization of services, easy extension of the range of languages of distribution, and greatly extends the reach of national agencies, geographically and in terms of client categories. Given its greater geographical reach, the Internet opens the possibility that agency web-sites could become important sources for individuals and organizations across the globe that have a need for timely information about given countries. Greater reach presents a challenge to agencies to re-vamp or re-invent brand identity. This is especially important for agencies that have had less than high visibility on retail markets, or which, because of current or previous association with discredited regimes,
have a negative brand identity. Which is ever more crucial in more competitive market conditions as agencies move from complete dependence on traditional media markets to a broader client base. As visits to web-sites increase, the potential for advertising revenue is enhanced, but first accounts suggest that no substantial pool of advertising revenue has yet been found.

On the downside, the Internet does not in itself tell agencies which services they should be providing for whom. It is no magic answer to how agencies should diversify. The Internet makes the business environment more competitive, pitting agencies against their own media clients and owners who themselves are struggling to position themselves in cyberspace. It makes available a lot of information that is free of charge and this might be sufficient to persuade some clients, especially poorer media clients (given that the Internet is an information environment weakly protected by international copyright legislation) to withdraw their subscriptions to agency services. For the time being, this does not appear to be a significant problem for national agencies, but paradoxically it is mentioned as a problem by IPS, an alternative news agency attempting to meet information needs that are not met by mainstream media. The communications advantages of the Internet for retail media undercut some ancillary sources of revenue previously available to alternative (as well as mainstream) agencies, for example carrier services. While the Internet saves on some costs, it increases others. It requires scarce, specialist human resource, and new training requirements. For clients in poor countries it is a mixed blessing, as Internet access is difficult and expensive because of poor local connectivity and access charges.

Most national agencies appear to have strong ties with one or more of the international agencies. The range includes western, Soviet and Chinese international agencies, as well as various news-exchange agreements with other national agencies. Dependence on western-based international agencies for international news is in all probability still high, especially given that self-sustainability often requires the abandonment of overseas correspondents and bureaus. There were indications that more flexible arrangements with international agencies might be of service to the worldwide system of news-flow: for example, more favorable terms of supply, and more opportunities for business alliances in fields such as financial news.

The workshop demonstrated the diversity of the worldwide news agency industry, and the range of important trends and issues that affect it. The most important of these have to do with:

- relations between agencies and their owners - whether the owners are states, media cooperatives or other private interests;
- the impact of globalization on local and international markets;
- trends towards commercialization, diversification and privatization;
- the challenge of new technologies, in particular the Internet.
In conclusion, the participants agreed that there were many significant needs in the areas of technology and training assistance and that it was important that all agencies review the full range of potential information markets accessible to them and the different ways in which such market needs can be serviced. One outcome of lower communications costs and, therefore, lower market entry costs, was that agencies must increasingly compete in quality of product and service. Finally, workshop participants recognized that there exists a cluster of agencies that are currently in severe crisis and for whom some form of intervention from UNESCO or other donor organizations would be of service to their respective nations and to the quality of world news flows.

10 Study Group Reports:

10.1 Diversification of News Agencies Services.

By Vijay Satokar

The very theme of the panel - "News Agencies and the Internet" - was one area into which news agencies could diversify in order to identify new avenues of income generation.

PTI's arrangement with a Mumbai-based IT company was cited as an example through which arrangements were made for the purchase of PTI's content, stored it on its archives and sold it to subscribers after tagging and storing it in various folders that ranged from agriculture to science, politics. While the news agency could do the job for itself, this would have required investment in infrastructure and replacement of staff. The Mumbai-based IT company was paying PTI a fixed yearly royalty plus share of profits from the sale of PTI's content.

It was pointed out that news agencies could offer personalized services to Internet users by exploiting the flexibility of the technology to earn extra income revenues from customization. Participants noted that Reuters was one agency that had diversified the most. Less than five per cent of Reuters' revenue was generated from the sale of general news to traditional news media; the rest came from its specialized services, especially in the money, commodities and securities markets.

In considering whether news agencies could venture into financial services, it was argued that Reuters had made such inroads in this field that it was just impossible for smaller news agencies to capture market share, even in the context of their own domestic markets. An alternative view was that in spite of Reuters' strong presence, potential still remained for other news agencies in financial services.

Another possibility was that smaller news agencies could begin cooperating in exchanges of news, especially in the economic field, to generate reports of mutual interest to cooperative members. This could be done at a cost that would enable the news agencies to sell their product at a rate that would be very competitive compared with the rates charged by agencies such as Reuters.
To achieve this, however, it was felt that the news agencies had to become more professional. As one panelist observed: "If you have to professionalize, you have to invest". The issue of diversification was essentially linked to professionalism.

A further observation was that archiving the content and sale of news represented a potential source of revenue to news agencies. This could be done through sale of CDs containing six monthly or a year’s output of the news agency's files. The subscriber base for the product could include universities, research institutions, students, government agencies and departments as well as diplomatic missions.

In the same connection, it was noted that some South African newspapers were offering news/articles from their archives to people, on payment.

Additionally, it was suggested that given the tremendous interest in sports, the world over, news agencies could investigate the scope for special sports services. It was however observed that the launch of special sports services required a level of investment that many agencies would find it difficult to raise. It was also noted that there was tremendous competition from the established agencies in this field, as well as from sports channels such as ESPN.

The discussion came back again to the point of cooperation among news agencies in areas that could provide potential for revenue generation. As one panelist opined, "The solution to problems of additional revenues was cooperation among the agencies".

A final contribution noted that news agencies could do more to attract advertising to their web sites for generating additional income.

### 10.2 Ownership and Management of News Agencies.

*By Dr. Oliver Boyd-Barrett*

The panel came to the conclusion that there was one thing that most of the agencies did have in common, and this was that there are features of ownership and management that impede the development of an entrepreneurial and managerial culture within news agencies. Members of the panel were inclined to believe that in principle, at least, the development of an entrepreneurial culture would be beneficial for news agencies.

In the case of many national agencies of the Arab World it was noted that the agencies are typically led by director generals who are recommended at ministerial level, not necessarily on the basis of journalistic or other media skills, and accountable to the minister of information. Agencies have little discretion to do other than that which they are required to do by the ministries of Information, on fear of sanction, though some, such as the Kuwait News Agency, or even the news agency of Morocco, may occasionally publish opposition views (which presumes, therefore, tolerance for a measure of political freedom in the first place). Many, if not all Arab agencies, are 100% state funded. Even MENA (Egypt), which
does not like to be described as an official agency, is financially dependent on the state. Given their captive markets, there is neither requirement nor incentive for many agencies of the Arab world to concern themselves with strategies of commercialization that is often forbidden. Even if such agencies were privatized, it was argued, there might be insufficient media revenue available to allow them to become viable enterprises. Where major clients are primarily state-owned media, there would be little prospect that newly privatized agencies would usher in a new era of editorial freedom. It was noted that in Jordan, where the national agency, PETRA, must by law, provide all its services free of charge, the government has embarked on a legislative path that will likely privatize the for to have the freedom to develop commercial strategies. In the United Arab Emirates, Dubai has led the way in the development of a ‘media city’ free trade zone on which Jordan’s own planning is based.

In other parts of the Arab world, is there any potential advantage that might lead to a different business model for news agencies? Possibly. In the first place, Arab news agencies and their governments care about credibility. Perhaps over time there will surface some interest in alternative ways of articulating the relations between agencies and governments, although this may be unlikely in the absence of democratic structures. Secondly, Arab nations have become increasingly aware of the business potential of advanced communications, including satellite television, mobile communications and the Internet. They have economic motivation, therefore, to attract investment in advanced communications enterprises that, in turn, can be linked to strategies for the enhancement of regional trade flows. This sometimes comes about in the form of free trade zones. In these circumstances, it is difficult for Arab nations on the one hand to promote the very latest forms of communication while on the other hand attempting to exercise strict control over content and over the business strategies and aspirations of particular media. Thirdly, from within the agencies themselves there is a thirst for professionalization at all levels, including the technical, editorial and managerial. Such agencies may exist, first, to serve the goals of their respective regimes. However, an important part of being professional is being enthusiastic about innovations that promise to enhance credibility, efficiency, quality and prosperity. Innovative practices are more likely to be adopted effectively by staff that are suitably skilled and appropriately motivated and rewarded. There may be a case, even in the context of state agencies, for more attention to the role of incentives and remuneration in fostering initiative and a desire for excellence.

In contrast with the phenomenon of wealthy national agencies that have little freedom to grow, we also have the phenomenon of agencies that, though they may be nominally free, do not have adequate resources to exercise that freedom. Inadequate resourcing of agencies by governments, in the case of state-owned agencies, may reflect particular relationships between important holders of power. One quoted instance concerned national news agencies which were essentially departments within civil service structures, often headed by relatively low-ranking civil servants. These are so under-capitalized that even if they were privatized there would certainly be no interested buyers. In order for these agencies to be profitably operational, they would have to be re-capitalized and their missions redefined. The preceding applies for example to some small southern African states (Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland) and small island states in the Caribbean. In this context, then, privatization may not be an appropriate answer to achievement of financial independence and a commercial
culture. Small improvements may be possible: for example, by leveraging the pressure on government of political opposition. Alternatively, government may be persuaded to invest more when it can be shown that national and/or government interest is served.

Quite a different context is presented by the case of SAPA, which is owned by the daily newspapers of South Africa. SAPA is not enjoined to make a profit, but is interested in containing cost. There are at least three concerns: Some owners are insufficiently loyal to the agency (for example, the Independent group has tried, without much success, to establish its own agency). Secondly, many owners do not fulfill the terms of the cooperative arrangement and do not provide local news feeds to the agency - with the result that SAPA’s own newsgathering costs are increased. Thirdly, the owners do not invest sufficiently in the agency, they resist increases in subscriptions or negotiate for them to be reduced, and they do not encourage the agency to exploit its natural advantages of brand identity and national networking by adapting the Internet for more commercial ventures. As a result, the agency is seriously understaffed. The owners fear that the agency might undermine their own attempts to establish Internet presence. Working within such constraints, SAPA has made advances, for example making use of its own internal talent to help provide internal training and training for client media and others. It also undertakes reporting and dissemination on behalf of individual clients. SAPA is a good example of both the strengths and the problems of cooperatively owned news agencies. There may be practical solutions (for example trading lower subscription rates for greater commercial autonomy), but they require a sufficient measure of consensus amongst the owners, and this is difficult to achieve. The agency can continue to do what it can by developing activities that are not threatening to the business interests of the owners, and by persuading owners of the benefits that come from an adequately funded national reporting network and from highly motivated staff.

The position of the Caribbean Media Corporation is similar to that of SAPA and of many cooperatively owned agencies. Under the terms of its legal title, it is meant only to cover its costs; it is not expected to generate excessive profits. Any profits that are made must be reinvested in the agency. Its scope for commercial activity is therefore constrained. An important part of the agency’s mission is to serve as a developmental tool for the nations of the Caribbean and this does provide a basis for the agency to identify initiatives that go beyond the normal routine of news reporting and distribution and that serve its developmental mission. It enjoys excellent networks with ministries of information within the region, and with local and international media and international funding bodies, on which it might build to help it fund additional initiatives. Mr. Richard Johnson, representing the Caribbean agency, noted that strategic alliances with external partners might be one way around the limitations imposed by the agency’s legal title on commercial activity. Another strategy would be for the agency to set up a subsidiary company that is enjoined to act entrepreneurially.

The case of the Bulgarian News Agency is very different yet again. It is owned by the State as a whole, but is accountable to Parliament. It is neither a corporation, nor any other kind of legal entity, although it is an economical institution. Its actual legal status is somewhat unclear, and that is why the Agency has submitted a draft law which, should it be approved by the Parliament, would grant the BTA the status of a corporation. This would facilitate its
economic activities (not that they are now restricted, but there are some complex legal arguments on the subject). Financial support for the agency from the State has dramatically been reduced since the communist times, to the point that the proportion of subsidy now represents only 25% of total revenue, and the agency is required to make money for its recurrent costs. The director general is appointed by Parliament: Therefore a parliamentary majority has the power, to elect a director general sympathetic to it. The possibility of management abuse is checked and limited not only by the existence of a free press but also by the democratic and pluralistic representation of different political forces in Parliament.

A more pressing and fundamental concern has to do with the quality of management, since BTA is run by personnel who have journalistic and not managerial backgrounds. There is scope, therefore, for initiatives that focus on the improvement of business and management skills. This might be achieved through forms of business or management training for agency employees who have management responsibilities. Another approach would be some form of external review by management consultants and/or outsourcing of management tasks to external agencies.

It was noted that although BTA sometimes suffers from its previous association with Communist regimes, it retains a strong brand identity and this is important in explaining the agency’s continued survival.

The United News of Bangladesh is not inhibited in identifying and developing commercial strategies. It currently has more clients than the official national agency, and its news services are cheaper than those of its competition. Unlike official agencies that worry about the challenge, their official status poses for their wider credibility to the general public, United News worries that it is not taken seriously enough because it is not an official agency. A significant challenge to United News is to secure access to major news sources even though it is not an official agency. It achieves this in part through the establishment of a network of advisers and these connect the agency to important centers of power, including the military and even the official news agency (BSS) itself.

Despite the very different circumstances of the news agencies represented in the working group, a number of common strategies could be identified. The working group recognizes that commercial activities can be of benefit by helping agencies to achieve greater sufficiency of funding, greater financial and possibly editorial independence, and helping them compete against private agencies and other sources of competition. At the same time, the working group recognizes that commercial activities should not impede in any way the basic mission of news agencies: which is to provide credible and comprehensive news coverage of the nation and for the nation, for the benefit of both domestic and international clients, both media and non-media.

Specific recommendations of the panel are:

- Improvement of management and business skills through management consultant reports and training courses;
• Introduction of flexible systems of incentive and reward to help motivate staff to develop initiative and to achieve excellence;

• Review and experimentation, as far as local circumstances allow, with new and more effective methods of articulation between the owners of cooperatively owned news agencies and the executives of those news agencies, methods that will provide agencies with greater commercial autonomy, while enjoining them to continue to serve the best interests of their owners and the public. It is envisaged that commercial autonomy will benefit owners by relieving them of the financial responsibility of supporting their news agencies through high subscription rates.

• Where local markets for news services are weak, there is a continuing necessity for government assistance. In this event it is important that government funding should be adequate, to ensure that the basic mission of a national news agency is fulfilled - which is to report on and to distribute news about the nation as a whole, for the benefit of local and international news consumers. Inadequate financing undermines the usefulness of the news product, and undermines the credibility of both the news agency and the government whose responsibility it is, in these circumstances, to support it. The working group recommends that agencies that are in the position of persistent and possibly fatal under-funding should be identified as among the most deserving targets of any campaign to encourage outside donors to support the work of national agencies.

10.3 Marketing and Client Relations

By Dr Daya Thussu

A wide variety of national and regional news agencies was represented at the meeting of the discussion panel. In geographical terms, it ranged from Central Asia to the Balkans, from Indonesia to Palestine and from the Caribbean to Bangladesh. The agencies represented also varied from television (Kazakhstan) to print-based features services (India) and to a combination of print and broadcast media (the Caribbean).

The panel members agreed that there was a need to retain the existing client base and acquire new subscribers. There was also widespread agreement among panel members about the need to employ a coherent marketing strategy to achieve this. The experiences, though, varied widely.

Consider the case of the Khabar Broadcasting Agency, the largest broadcasting corporation in Kazakhstan, and one with a potential audience of 64 million viewers in the region. A free-to-air operation, with little domestic competition, the agency is partly subsidized by the State. Advertising covers the remainder of its operational cost. There is a marketing department that studies viewers’ interests and preferences and these reports are used for the rating of various programmes. Based on these studies, Khabar forms its broadcasting policy, and purchases various TV products and films at the international TV markets. At present the Khabar Agency is the only TV company in Central Asia that participates in the international
TV markets in Monaco (Monte Carlo), Russia, Hungary, USA - Khabar presents its own productions and buy foreign ones. Usually it gives preference to “A” category feature films. The Khabar Agency is an enterprise of mixed ownership: 50% - state and 50% private. The agency is obliged to fulfill certain State imposed obligations, mainly relating to the production of certain TV programme, and the State subsidizes these activities, covering about 60% of the annual budget of the agency. The rest of the agency’s budget is formed from the proceeds of advertising and commercial activity. So there are two sources of financing: state budget and advertising-commercial.

The marketing department of the Indonesian news agency, ANTARA, has traditionally focused on the domestic market. As it deliberates whether it should continue to be a state-run agency or corporatise its operations, with a long-term goal of total privatization, the need to for new clients will be felt more acutely, especially given the increasing competition it faces from Internet-based companies. As ANTARA prepares to become an Internet Service Provider, it will also have to rethink its marketing strategy to cater to a new constituency, particularly business and corporate clients.

The Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) has no marketing department, and its journalists often double as managers – the Director General of the agency is a former journalist. Given its brand name within the country and being the only news agency in Bulgaria, it could afford not to have a marketing department, up until now. However, the agency is increasingly recognizing, given increasing market pressure and its rather small domestic media base that it will have to look for new clients, including broadcast, Internet and non-media clients. (in addition to the 150 non-media clients that it currently serves). Already, it has used some innovative methods to increase its revenue base by renting space to non-media clients in its headquarters in Sofia. The roof of the building, for example, has been rented on lease to a telecommunications company for installing satellite antenna and cellular equipment. BTA considered whether to allow the use of billboards on the building and decided against, since to do so could prove harmful to the agency’s brand name and identity, and might create confusion as to whom the building belonged.

The New Delhi-based Women’s Feature Service has a small marketing department, which uses its network of contacts to ensure that client satisfaction is maintained. Among the strategies used, and found effective, was one to offer free use of features for a month; also, to allow flexibility in payment terms. There was a need for a more active marketing strategy. Especially important in this regard is the need to constantly monitor web-based clients. These can as easily be lost as acquired, given the fluid situation of many Internet-only media operations.

The case of the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC), which has evolved out of the merger of the commercial operations of the Caribbean News Agency (CANA) and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), is different. CMC has taken a more explicit pro-market approach than many agencies, regarding the new technologies as an opportunity. It periodically undertakes market surveys, using the email, to assess the needs of its subscribers. As part of its marketing strategy, it has occasionally provided free services to subscribers, for example, providing coverage of a regional or international summit. It has a dedicated marketing
department with a staff of six, plus representation in all the Caribbean countries. Given the agency’s plans to run daily radio and television services, marketing needs are paramount.

Another private news organization, represented in the Working Group was United News of Bangladesh, which, despite tough competition from the state-run news agency, Sambad, has created a successful place for itself in the Bangladesh media scene. Its marketing strategy is to reach out to the lucrative markets among the Bengali diaspora, having already initiated a tie-up with the UK-based Bangla TV.

In contrast to the drive to commercialization as described above, is the case of many agencies in the Arab world which, as the representative of the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA) pointed out, do not yet have marketing departments. The members of FANA – all state-run agencies, with their budgets approved by their respective Ministries of Information - have not considered it necessary to think in terms of marketing strategy, given that they have captive domestic markets. The FANA representative stated that for many media personnel in the Arab world, the idea of marketing news is itself relatively novel. WAFA, the news agency of Palestine, is another agency that has no marketing department – it provides its news free to newspapers and other media in the Arab world and to Western media outlets. The volatile political situation in Palestine, which restricts the agency to successful operation as a professional organization, was emphasized by the representative from WAFA, Mr. Ziad Abdel Fattah.

The issue of using new technology such as the Internet for client feedback through email and web-based interaction was also discussed. It was noted that among many news agencies there was not a developed culture of responsiveness to subscribers, since often the agencies had a captive market. However, if news agencies are to remain financially viable in the longer term, given the pressures of globalization, deregulation, privatization, and the appearance of new technologies, coherent marketing strategies are likely to constitute a vital element in any survival strategy. This is also likely to require more systematic approaches to agency-client dialogue and feedback, with a view to improving responsiveness to client needs and to changes in the market environment.

10.4 Implementation of Internet Strategies

By Dr. Anthony Giffard

The two main questions considered by the panel were:

- What Internet strategies they had used had worked, and why;
- What had not succeeded, and why.

Virtually all the agencies represented had some presence on the Internet. Many launched Web services in the past four or five years and now are offering their materials free of charge to
end-users. Now, however, several agencies are under pressure to become self-supporting and need to replace state subsidies with revenue from sale of their services.

As a result, they are paying increasing attention to the possibility of deriving revenue from their Web sites. However, only two of the agencies represented on the panel already are making money from Web operations. The rest are distributing stories to clients or downloading material from the Web to enhance their editorial product. They are using Web sites as a way of establishing a presence in the new medium and perhaps establishing a brand image – or perhaps merely because everyone else is doing it. They see their sites as providing a service to users, rather than as a source of revenue.

Two main constraints have prevented their making money from the Web.

Personnel constraints include:

• Staff do not get adequate training in use of the new media;

• Those who do are lured away by higher salaries in the private sector;

• Older employees do not feel comfortable with the new technology and prefer to stick with familiar routines.

Technological constraints include:

• Agencies lack the resources to buy up-to-date equipment, or to maintain and upgrade what they have;

• Telecommunication links are often slow and unreliable;

• Some potential clients lack the equipment or connectivity to access Web material.

Among other difficulties is the fact that Web users expect to get information free of charge and are reluctant to pay for subscriptions. This is exacerbated by lack of effective marketing; potential subscribers do not always know what is available. Agencies do not have adequate statistics on who is using their Web sites, or what kinds of information they are retrieving. Data of this kind could guide editorial choices and help target niche markets.

Despite these constraints, some agencies have found ways of presenting and selling their material to subscribers. The panel recommended the following as promising approaches:

• Packaging specific kinds of news – local, national, international, sports, business – and selling them separately;

• Selling material from archives, either online or on CD ROMs. There are firms that will package and index the material for a fee;
• Offering photographs and graphics to illustrate current news events, or from archives, on a subscription basis or per item;
• Providing audio feeds for Web-based radio stations;
• Packaging spot news for hand-held computers or cell phones;
• Providing updates for existing Web sites;
• Designing and hosting Web sites for other organizations or businesses;
• Developing statistical reports on client use of web-sites
• Developing revenue from sale of advertising space on sites and from establishing links to commercial sites.

Some of these services already are being successfully implemented.

10.5 Personnel Training, Professional Development, and Professionalism

By Vijay S. Satokar

The panel discussed the following issues:

(a) What is the recruitment criterion in the news agency?
(b) Are the salaries of news agencies’ journalists comparable to those in newspapers?
(c) What are the promotional avenues?
(d) What are the opportunities to journalists to improve their journalistic career?

The panel began its discussion noting the recruitment procedures of the Press Trust of India (PTI). The agency had regular recruitment of journalists. Applications are invited through advertisements in newspapers, these are screened the applications are scanned, and selected applicants invited for written tests. Those who pass the tests are invited for interviews and those passing are appointed as trainees for an initial period of one year. After the training period, they are evaluated on the basis of performance and given another test for appointment as probationary journalists.

In India providing ample opportunities for students to opt for a career in journalism. There exist several courses in mass communication in universities

The situation, however, differed in Ghana where there was the problem of comparatively lower wages paid by the news agency. This resulted in best staff opting for newspapers, which generally pay better wages. The agency has no training facilities. The need for training facilities for the journalists was noted during the recent reorganization of the Ghana
news agency. Indeed, systematic training for agency staff typically occurs only when there is training support from multilateral funding sources.

The meeting observed that no journalists should not be forced to give up journalism and take up executive appointments elsewhere, merely to secure adequate wages. Journalists should have opportunities for better remuneration even if they wanted to continue working in news agencies.

The Jordanian News Agency PETRA recruited staff as and when the need arose. There were universities in Jordan that provide courses leading to degrees in mass communication. It was pointed out by the PETRA participant that although newspapers paid better wages to journalists than PETRA, journalists in newspapers had to work harder and for longer hours. PETRA provided specialized training for journalists in use of computers, English language, and translation but the budget for training was too small to achieve the results hoped for. Sometimes training was organized internally, using instructors from among staff.

The SAPA delegate said that the apartheid regime had prevented blacks from accessing specialized education. He noted that those who had learnt through hard work demonstrated more commitment than those who were recruited because of academic qualifications. However, there was a critical need for more training in specialized fields.

In Syria, the situation was similar to that faced by the Jordanian agency, PETRA. The Syrian News Agency, being a government agency, had significantly more staff than needed. Lower wages, however, resulted in the best-qualified staff moving on to organizations paying better salaries. There was no special budget for training of the staff, although there was a need of a long-term policy for training.

In Mongolia, there were training institutions with courses in mass communication. There are no regular training facilities except those provided by multilateral organizations. The Mongolian delegate said that the agency now had decided to invite experts from foreign countries to give training to the agency staff. The agency had training arrangements with Itar-Tass and Xinhua.

Dr. Boyd-Barrett (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona) noted that he was leading the efforts of a consortium that represented the California State University, the London School of Economics and Science and other universities, in establishing a news agency research and training network. This would include training in a variety of formats, including distance education. Funding was currently being sought for this project. Dr. Boyd-Barrett was particularly interested to hear from agencies in the developing world that would be interested in working with the consortium to raise the necessary funding.

The meeting concluded by noting that the news agencies failed to attract sufficiently qualified personnel, as wages were lower than those offered by newspapers or other media organizations. In addition, there were no training facilities for journalists, and agencies mostly utilized opportunities offered by other organizations for training media personnel. Almost no agency had any budget for providing in-house training to the staff. Although promotional avenues did exist, they were not attractive enough to hold back journalists who were lured by higher wages to other organizations.
10.6 News Agencies Networking

By Richard Cox

There was wide variation in the level on networking that the various members of the panel had experienced. The different experiences with networking included bilateral, multilateral relations, agency federations and collaboration within UNESCO projects. For some agencies, networking involved a mere notional contact with an organization in the country of operations while for others, networking was a significant part of strategies that sought to achieve financial and other assistance from established entities.

10.6.1 BULGARIA

In the case of Bulgaria, the delegate said that BTA supported in principle the idea of bilateral and multilateral contacts, for example:

BTA is a Member of the European Alliance of Press Agencies and of the Association of Balkan News Agencies. In the past, members of the ABNA have shared training and observation visits, although these have now been discontinued.

BTA maintains a relationship with the Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA), and has around 20 contracts with other agencies, in the form of collaborative arrangements that allow for exchange of information at a reduced price, shared training courses and mutual observation visits.

There is a solid relationship with agencies such as UNESCO in the form of training and financial assistance.

10.6.2 KAZAKHSTAN

Multilateral relations were much in evidence for the news agency, including ties with national corporations as well as inter-governmental agencies. Although Khabar belongs to one of the transition economies emerging out of the former Soviet Union, the agency's representative, Ms. Dina Bukayeva, noted that the government did not instruct the agency. One manner of networking is through the exchange of videos between various media companies that share mutual interests, and there is evidence of some training. It was pointed out that the Turkish information media IKHLAS has in the past provided footage and stories. In an effort to boost its operational capability, the agency is a member of the Asia Broadcasting Union (ABU) with which it exchanges news videos, and which organizes training workshops with other Asian journalists.

10.6.3 INDONESIA

Although ANTARA recognizes the value of contacts with similar organizations outside its regional federation, and has thus many relationships with similar agencies on both a bilateral and multilateral basis, in reality it feels that bilateral relationships are more effective than multilateral. Examples would include the relationship between ANTARA and Bernama, the Malaysia national news agency that will soon open its marketing office in Jakarta, and the
relationship between ANTARA and Xinhua, the Chinese national news agency that has been selling its information products in Indonesia through ANTARA's network. ANTARA is a member of NANAP. ANTARA enjoys a good relationship with UNESCO, which is supporting and funding ANTARA in the publication of "Earth Wire", one of ANTARA's information products on environmental issues.

10.6.4 BANGLADESH
United News, a private organization has solid relationships with 20 organizations and is the sole representative for the Associated Press there. The delegate mentioned that UNESCO, supported it financially and so has the World Bank.

10.6.5 INDIA
With regard to the Women's Feature Service in India, there are working relationships with News Network of Bangladesh, and China Features. Additionally, linkages exist with other women’s networks and non-governmental organizations that are of specific relevance to the mission of WFS, especially when there are major international workshops. Some universities in India use the archives of the WFS as a resource base especially in connection with gender research. WFS is now in the process of negotiating with PTI-Bhasha, the Hindi service of the Press Trust of India (India's largest news agency), the production of at least one Hindi feature a week which would be distributed on the agency's network. With the launching of the WFS web site - expected in February 2001 - the organization expected to significantly expand both its marketing and networking capacity.

10.6.6 MIDDLE EAST
In the case of WAFA there are solid contacts with all the news agencies of the Arab world. There is also contact with socialist news organizations around the world.

The Federation of Arab News Agencies, represented by Dr Farid Ayar, has contracted arrangements with international bodies on behalf of all its 18 member agencies. This is done with the aim of enhancing the members’ operating efficiencies and exploring future possibilities for the commercialization of their activities. FANA has contracted with an expert of the Friederich-Ebert Stiftung, who has undertaken to conduct surveys of seven of the member agencies.

10.6.7 CARIBBEAN MEDIA CORPORATION
The Caribbean Media Corporation, headquartered in Barbados, has traditionally sustained relationships with many international news and information organizations to continually upgrade and expand its technical and human resource capability. Partners include Reuters News Agency, UNDP, ITU, UNESCO and the EU.

What emerged from the discussion is that there is wide variation in the operation and intention of news agencies. It is clear that there is urgent need for financial and human resource assistance and the preeminent recommendation is that there should be increased assistance from organizations within the United Nations.
There is also need for a greater exchange of information among agencies in the developing world and, as the BTA representative pointed out, more training in the area of news management as well as in marketing and sales.

11 The Future of National News Agencies

By Oliver Boyd-Barrett

In his introduction to this panel session, Dr. Oliver Boyd-Barrett said that while nearly all national news agencies faced challenges and problems, there were some agencies for whom the problems may very well prove fatal. The purpose of this session, therefore, was to focus on those news agencies whose problems appear to be life-threatening, to see whether we could identify the reasons for their state, and to identify potential solutions. He invited Mr. Quarmyne and Mr. Moyo, on whose initiative this session had been arranged, to speak to this issue. Mr. Moyo referred to twelve of the national agencies that had formed part of UNESCO’s SEANAD project. He was greatly concerned that in the case of these agencies previously well-trained staff had left, equipment had degenerated, and that the agencies may almost be moribund and in need of resuscitation. The original goal of sustainability had not been achieved. It was first necessary to undertake a review and appraisal of each of these agencies and then to determine what action would be necessary.

In the course of the discussion, it was noted that many state-owned national news agencies appear to have lost the support of their respective governments. They had been established just after independence, and were seen to have an important role to play in nation building and in developing support for ruling parties. However, today the need is not so great. Many national agencies do not provide television news, yet television news holds most of the interest in media among politicians, and yet it is television to which most people are most directly exposed. National news agencies are relatively unknown to the majority of the people, and their problems do not attract the same intensity of concern as problems of broadcast media.

Mr. Mogale (SAPA) suggested that what was now needed, is a campaign of advocacy education to persuade influential persons in countries not to abandon national news agencies since these do have an important role to play. Regular meetings could be arranged in each country between such influential persons, including media representatives, and politicians, and at which the reasons for the importance of safeguarding the national news agency could be advanced. One argument that needs to be made is that commercial agencies do not take over from state news agencies (there is either an insufficient commercial market, or commercial agencies do not provide as comprehensive a range of service); and that major retail news media are not substitutes for national news agencies acting in the national interest. The essential message should be that there is no substitute for a national agency. Commercial agencies and major retail media tend not to support rural or impoverished populations. Yet, for many years, to come, the majority of Africans will be rural dwellers. Mr. Giffard urged the desirability of collecting hard data that could demonstrate the usefulness
of national news agencies as sources of news in retail media, both in domestic and international markets. Even if the importance of national agencies was self-evident at national level, such data would be important in discussions with intergovernmental and other international sources of funding and support.

It was observed during the discussion suggested that the workshop should take into account the full complexity of the problem, and the need for news agencies to demonstrate both sustainability and credibility. Some countries still have no national news agencies, or government information services have taken over the functions of national news agencies. It would be impractical to say that action be taken against privatization. Account should be taken of the fact that in some countries governments no longer care very much about national agencies. The case of the News Agency of Nigeria, which came into existence only after a long period of UNESCO canvassing, and even now NAN is inclined to come back to UNESCO for further funding assistance in its support. In addition, in many countries national news agencies are simply not performing the tasks that would be expected of them, such as the establishment of web-sites for national news, leaving the initiative to retail news media.

In some parts of the world it may be that the original role envisaged for the national news agency is best performed by a regional news agency, such as in the Caribbean. The issue was stressed that national news agencies were never intended to be the mouth-pieces of governments but should in some senses be supra-national, working in the overall and long-term interests of the nation, and offering objective analysis of social conditions.

It was also highlighted that the workshop move away from the classic model of a national news agency, one that is completely owned and controlled by the government. Rather it should consider alternative models that might retain the government as a partner but working in collaboration with public and private media, and possibly with other client groupings, and which would be encouraged to become self-sufficient while continuing to serve the basic mission or objectives of a national news agency. This prompted further discussion in which it was noted that there was scope for re-defining the mission of a national news agency less narrowly than in the past. This should be done in a way that would preserve the original developmental and nation-building role of national news agencies, but be more open to other, subsidiary functions, that would better facilitate economic sustainability.

In summary, the panel reached broad consensus on the following observations and recommendations:

- Some national news agencies are in grave danger, and may not be able to survive. The Working Group specifically calls upon UNESCO and multilateral agencies propose strategies to launch a rescue mission for such news agencies in order to conduct a review and help save or resuscitate them.

- Some countries are still without national news agencies. The Working Group recommends that UNESCO should continue its efforts in helping to ensure that all countries benefit from the services of national news agencies.
• National news agencies can and do provide important functions that benefit governments, media and nations, and these functions are not easily substitutable by other institutions.

• The traditional model of a developing country national news agency, one that is wholly owned and controlled by the State, may now be dated or inappropriate in some circumstances.

• In place of the traditional model, there are alternative models that need to be identified and considered. These would include agencies in which the government collaborates with public and private media and other client groups. They would include agencies that, though they might be heavily supported by governments, are protected by effective mechanisms that prevent direct government intervention in their operations. Ghana’s National Media Commission offers one possible model. Consideration should also be given to the potential of regional news services, for example along the lines of the Caribbean Media Corporation.

• Agencies that combine effective public service functions with services that facilitate self-sustainability are well placed to achieve widespread credibility in a way that the traditional model of national news agency often has not.

• Many agencies have been constitutionally or legally inhibited from introducing commercial enhancements to existing services, or new commercial services, or simply from making a profit over and above operating requirements. Such impediments need to be reviewed and if possible removed, always provided that national news agencies continue to perform public service functions in the interests of the nation and the nation’s media, to a high degree of excellence.

• In this context it is timely to review and possibly re-conceptualize the original mission of news agencies in a manner that fully acknowledges the wide range of activities that agencies already or may in the future undertake, and with reference to the increasingly complex technological, business, political and global contexts in which national news agencies must today operate.

• It is timely to compile data that may demonstrate how and to what extent the services of national news agencies are used by their important clients.

For the immediate future, an advocacy campaign is advisable, one that will help bring together influential people in those countries whose national agencies are threatened, to urge on them an appreciation of the benefits of national news agencies.

There is still considerable scope for the enhancement of training provision to promote the technical, editorial and management skills of national news agencies. This is particularly important in the case of news agencies whose financial viability is threatened. Such training may be delivered in a variety of forms, including distance education.
The Future of National News Agencies

Oliver Boyd-Barrett, PhD
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The purpose of this paper is to provide relevant background and orientation for UNESCO’s Amman workshop in January 2001, and to facilitate consideration of the potential of new technologies, in particular the Internet, for the future of national news agencies. The paper discusses the current climate or context within which national news agencies must operate, the main challenges that they face, some of the available strategies for resolution of difficulties, and the place of the Internet within such strategies. The essential point I wish to make is that adoption of Internet strategies should be incorporated within a broader vision that addresses key problems and challenges of the industry. In addition, the paper raises the question: just how important is it that national news agencies should survive?

The first part of the paper itemizes some of the events that have occurred within the business of national and international news agency journalism in the recent past. These events have been chosen for the cues or glimpses that they offer for an understanding of the current state of the industry.

(i) Some Recent Developments

Each of the following events or developments is revealing of the complex challenges that confront national and international news agencies. The events are arranged chronologically. In each case, I briefly say why I think the event is in some way revealing about the current state of the industry or profession.

September 2000 - Agence France Presse. The chairman of the French news agency, Eric Giuly, resigned after 18 months of a three-year position, because the government had rejected his expansion plans for 2001 and the following years. Giuly had proposed running a deficit in his 2001 budget partly to allow the company to capitalize on the ‘historic opportunity’ offered by the Internet. The AFP’s statutes state that spending in a given year must match receipts.

Significance: This item is indicative, firstly, of the growing importance that news agency executives attach to the Internet. Secondly, it illustrates the difficulties that agencies face when they seek support for infra-structural investment from government, even when they have had historic ties with government. Thirdly, it illustrates how the constitutional status of news agencies may sometimes impede timely response to business opportunities.
September 2000 - Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) and the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) in conjunction with the Union des Editeurs de Press d'Afrique Centrale (the Union of Press Editors in Central Africa, UEPAC) propose the creation of an African press network of the 21 century (Reseau Africain pour la presse du XX1e siecle, RAP 21). It would take the form of an Internet delivered information and communications exchange between publications, press agencies, and private and public radio and television stations.

**Significance:** This item illustrates the potential for the development of additional and perhaps even alternative methods of news dissemination and information exchange among media, something that is greatly facilitated by the Internet.

August 2000 - AP. Wall Street Journal reports that AP has faced criticism from some of its members, especially larger newspapers who complain about the agency's increasing sales of AP news to web-sites. AP argues that it has a commitment to members to keep annual assessment increases below the rate of inflation (and therefore needs to earn additional revenues in order to defray costs of service development). Revenue from web-sites has helped AP add 50 editorial positions in the last few years. Some members are also concerned about the way in which links between their web-sites and that of AP's may tend to draw readers away from members' web-sites into other AP linkages.

**Significance:** This item illustrates how news agencies, perhaps especially cooperative news agencies, may encounter opposition from their media owners (or 'members') or clients where the latter believe that the agency's exploitation of the Internet may compete with their own 'retail' publications or activities, whether on-line or off-line, and compete with their attempts to establish or enhance brand identity on the Internet.

August 2000 - Armenpress. Employees of Armenpress, supervised by the government department of information and book publishing, went on a one-day strike on August 7 to protest the government's continuing failure to pay their salaries. The agency staff had not been paid since March. The agency was also owed large sums of money from many local publications.

**Significance:** This item illustrates the continuing difficulties that are faced by government agencies in developing countries that lack the means to offer an acceptably reliable basis of support for their own employees, let alone other expenses. While agencies fulfill demonstrably useful functions for nations and for governments, these functions do not rank among the highest of state priorities, and agencies are often expected, sometimes unrealistically, to generate their own alternative sources of revenue to make good any shortfall from state sources.

August 2000 - Alliance-Press. It was announced that a new agency, Alliance-Press, launched in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, receiving initial financial aid from a non-profit organization based in the U.K., would publish two national newspapers.

**Significance:** Notwithstanding the difficulties encountered by agencies such as Armenpress, this item illustrates both the continuing demand for news agencies in newly emerged states,
and the continuing potential availability of non-profit and other such means of initial financial support. It suggests that some non-profits recognize there are public service goals that they believe news agencies can fulfill. The item also seems to hint at new business models for news agencies that cross the border between 'wholesale' and 'retail' activities.

July 2000 - Reuters. Reuters' chief executive, Peter Job, said in the company's half-year report, July 2000, that 'our strategy to make Reuters fully Internet ready is gaining great momentum'. And: 'We see the Internet as a fast and deep current running through all our activities...Whereas we have historically dealt with customers in the hundreds of thousands, we will now be able to serve tens or even hundreds of millions of people'. In the company's 1999 annual report, Job had referred to Reuters' 'strategy to accelerate its use of Internet technologies, open new retail markets, and migrate its core business to an Internet-based model'. Hoover’s Online report for Reuters in August 2000 noted that the company had recently announced that it would invest $800 million over four years for the conversion of its core business to an Internet model.

Significance: This item demonstrates that the Internet has moved, within the space of a few years, from being a perceived threat to news agencies, to being a central core of strategies for growth and profit in the case of at least some major and not-so-major agencies. Agencies are possibly among the best positioned among media to make money from the Internet. This is at a time when the Internet ventures of many 'retail' media have been judged a failure (see The Economist, The Failure of New Media, August 17, 2000).

Almost none of the World Wide Web’s roughly 32,000 news sites - mainly subsisting on advertising revenue are earning a profit. Even the Wall Street Journal’s Internet site with 461,000 paying subscribers has lost money in all but one month of its five years in operation. Total web advertising revenues have risen to $4.6 billion in 1999, but competition for that revenue had increased even more sharply (Piller, 2000).

April 2000  Croat News Agency: Croatian journalists urged the government and the parliament to take emergency measures to help the state-run news agency HINA overcome financial problems and serious conflicts with its management. Funds for the agency had almost been frozen, a HINA branch of the Croatian Journalists’ Association (HND) said in a letter sent to Prime Minister Ivica Racan and parliamentary speaker Zlatko Tomicic. The HND said it rejected a proposal by HINA management to suspend part-time workers' contracts and to close foreign bureaus.

Significance: This is another example of how indigent government-owned or controlled agencies in many cases depend on government support for the survival of even basic services, and how financial restraint impacts on agency workers. Inevitably, as the story reveals, this creates the potential for sharp divisions between management and employees.

March, 2000 - Malaysia.  Deputy Information Minister Datuk Khalid Yunus encourages foreign news agencies to set up bureaus in Kuala Lumpur, to help turn the city into a regional news and information hub.
Significance: This item shows how the presence of foreign news agencies is sometimes seen as a symbol of modernity that may enhance the image of a nation and support the location there of other communications industries.

February 2000 The Press Association. The national news agency of the United Kingdom (and Ireland) announces the sale of ANANOVA, its Internet and new media business. The PA’s chairman, Sir Harry Roche, is quoted as saying: ‘Notwithstanding the sale of Ananova Limited (and its realization of value for shareholders) PA will continue to enjoy a strong revenue stream from PA Enterprises and subsidiary companies with further innovations to come in its business to business markets. Great credit is due to Robert Simpson who not only led the management team that developed and expanded the PA new media business successfully but also ensured that a commercially innovative culture was in place across a whole spectrum of PA activity’ (PA Press Release, Feb. 9, 2000). Ananova received 1.6 million unique visitors in the first month of worldwide Internet circulation (May, 2000).

Significance: This news item is indicative of the success that a news agency in a developed world market can achieve through the cultivation of new electronic information services for non-traditional markets: to the point that an agency cannot only develop successful new products, but also has the confidence to sell them in order to raise capital for other ventures. Two of the preconditions for this success are identifiable: One was a deal between the agency’s management and the agency’s owners that the agency would be allowed freedom of maneuver on the market in return for a reduced subscription for owner-clients of the agency’s news services. The other was the establishment of an entrepreneurial culture, generally an outcome that is achieved over a period of time, in this case aided by the physically proximate example of Reuters on Fleet Street.

January 2000: Montenegro’s Minister for Information, Bozidasr Jaredic tells media that preparations are complete for the launch of Montenegro’s national news agency. ‘Montenegro needs a modern news agency to address the meager flow of information about Montenegro reaching the world through other agencies’

Significance: This item tells us that new nations, or at least the governments of new nations, still find that they need news agencies, and that one of the reasons for this is that governments find agencies to be useful conduits for the flow of information about their countries to the outside world, helping to correct what might otherwise be a vacuum in the availability of information. Moreover, why would a new country believe this to be important? I can think of two main reasons: one, to ‘correct’ or provide an alternative political perspective to the information about a country that is available through other sources or channels over which the government has no influence; two, to provide a satisfactory basis of economic information of interest to potential investors. Being a government agency, is this something of which we should disapprove or ignore? I would say not: what is bad is the absence of diversity of sources; within a context of diversity I think it is absolutely essential that the government’s voice and articulation of priorities get to be heard.
January 2000: ZIANA, the national news agency of Zimbabwe in which the Government of Zimbabwe has a 51% stake (the rest is owned by newspapers), is reported to be in trouble, and said to have been ‘bailed out’ temporarily by an international news agency (it owes its creditors $US 40 million). Its staff of 60 is being reduced. A significant reason for the Government’s unwillingness to do more to help save the agency is thought to be the fierce independence of the agency’s journalists.

Significance: Some existing states, especially in countries where there is not a strong domestic media market, may find it difficult to sustain the economic investment that is required to keep national agencies afloat. Their inclination to do so is reduced where they also believe that the national agency is less than completely loyal to the regime in power. This attitude is all too common in regimes in which democratic procedures are not securely established. At the same time, this story is telling us that national agencies are vulnerable at times of political transition, and that it should be recognized that national agencies are sometimes important sources of original and potentially critical journalism, a status that is certainly of interest to larger, international news agencies who sometimes look to national agencies as primary sources.

January, 2000: MTI, the national news agency of Hungary, is reported to be operating with a staff of 430 (compared to 1400 10 years previously), has faced off competition from independent news agencies and specialist news agencies (e.g. there are now three English-language on-line news sites, including one run by the Budapest Business Journal, and there are various television and radio stations that have established Internet sites), and from domestic Hungarian news services established by Reuters and AFP. MTI is owned by MTI Rt., founded by Parliament, which is represented by the Owners’ Advisory Body whose members are elected by Parliament on four-year terms. It maintains a market lead, is thought by some sources to be a ‘balanced and reliable source’, but finds it difficult to raise subscriptions (because the local Hungarian press is insufficiently robust: note that soon all major Hungarian newspapers will be foreign-owned) and must turn to the government for relief from debt pressures and for capital to overcome its technology deficit. It expects to remain dependent on subsidy for 40-50% of its income in the near future.

Significance: There are a number of points to notice here. First is the considerable diversity of sources that is available in countries where previous structures of regulation of information has given way to a more deregulated environment. Diversity, of course, provides competition to once secure national news agencies, although it is difficult to be sure just how ‘diverse’ this diversity actually is, we need more information about the reporting strengths of these different sources, both domestically and internationally. Some of this competition is extremely well resourced, having the benefit of prestigious sponsors, including international agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press. The competition is not simply from other news agencies, but also from the web sites of local and international media, some of whom may also be subscribers to the national agency. The agency has done much to adjust to new economic conditions, as the considerable reduction in staffing demonstrated. Nonetheless, where the state is committed to the preservation of a national agency, this does still give it considerable advantage and official status. Problems of credibility, which are severe for most state-subsidized national agencies, can be reduced where there are trustworthy mechanisms
in place to distance the agency from specific political interests or pressures. A further consideration here is the dynamics of ownership of local media, which are important sources of revenue, notwithstanding government subsidy. With reference to local media, there are two important considerations. One is the economic health of local media, which both influences their ability to sustain subscriptions to the national agency service, but also influences the extent of their dependence on external sources of information. Another is whether local media are locally owned and controlled. Globalization increases foreign ownership and control; this in turn has implications for the extent to which the local news agenda is being set by local or by foreign interests, and the extent to which the national news agency is in business to serve the ‘national interest’ or foreign interests. Finally, of course, this is an example of how state news agencies have good reason to continue to nurture financial links with a state apparatus wherever they face conditions of considerable financial uncertainty.

December 1999: 16 independent news agencies in Central and Eastern Europe attend a three-day meeting organized by the International Press Institute and the Slovak news agency SITA. They form an alliance (‘The days of the state agencies are over. Some will disappear’ one representative says), but fail to agree on a system of news exchange (the more prosperous news agencies resist empowering the weaker ones). ‘To compete against global agencies in reporting from the CEE region is a challenge’, says one. Some worry less about competition from state agencies and more about the prospect of someone like Murdoch buying a ‘privatized’ state agency with the resources to create a market-driven service. AFP’s Claude Moisy says that the new wave of ‘independent’ news agencies (not all of them independent of their respective governments) seem less interested in covering the news than in catering to private companies. Russia’s Interfax would be one example: claiming 1,000 people in 70 bureaus around the world, it targets private business; impoverished Russian newspapers cannot afford ‘good news services’.

Significance: Independent news agencies contribute to a growing diversity of supply at local level but who, exactly, are they independent of? Not necessarily independent of government; not independent, often, of business interests; nor independent of particular media groups. However, independent, usually, of the established national news agency. They are sufficient in number to establish collaborative formations, although competing interests between individual agencies may limit the extent of cooperation. The formation of such alliances, none the less, suggests the potential for new formations in parallel with those of national news agencies. Note the role of a media association, IPI, in fostering opportunities for the emergence of new business models in agency journalism. Note also the precariousness of independent agencies that face, in addition to the established strength of the national agency, the local presence of international agencies.

December 1999: Baltic News Service, part of the Interfax Group, claims to have overtaken state agencies in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia by doing better business reporting and serving private companies with improved software and Internet portals. In Estonia, the state agency is ENA, the Estonian News Agency, which was established in 1920. With an editorial staff of 40 people, its clients include approximately 90% of the Estonian media, also government, and financial and diplomatic representatives. It buys news from Reuters, DPA and RIA-Novosti amongst others. Services are provided in four languages.
Significance: This item is another that alludes to the potential of independent news agencies for competition to national news agencies, perhaps especially in the case of electronic services customized for the benefit of individual companies.

November 1999: PANA, the Pan-African News Agency, began operation as a privatized continental news agency - as PANA PRESS Ltd. It is ‘now a commercially-oriented, competitive and free news enterprise’, according to a press release from the shareholders’ General Assembly. A PANA Foundation is planned. This will be composed of a board of trustees of eminent African personalities who will act as interface between PANA PRESS, the OAU (previous owner), and other African institutions. The Foundation will not interfere in the management and control of PANA. Capital shares will be transferred from countries to ‘national news agencies, similar public, or private institutions’.

The share-out is unequal. Large shareholders include South Africa, Cameroon, Egypt, Libya, and Senegal. However, national agencies will hold only 25% of the total. Other shares will be held by African investors, African companies. The goal is: private media (20%), financial organizations (15%), African individuals in the private sector (10%), NGOs and private nationals of OAU states (15%), telecommunications companies (15%), national news agencies (25%).

Significance: The re-modeling of PANA is indicative of a major change of perspective on regional news strategies, away from reliance on intergovernmental subsidies and controls that also privilege the participation of national news agencies in management, and away from reliance on member states or agencies as sources of funding, and towards more diverse ownership, and a more commercial and entrepreneurial orientation.

July, 1999: TT, the Swedish news agency, one of the continent’s oldest cooperatives, ceases to be so, in face of the decision of some previous members to set up their own news services. Two national newspaper groups in collaboration with some regional newspapers now own TT. Staffing falls from 143 to 106.

Significance: This item is symptomatic of some of the troubles that have afflicted older-style news agency cooperatives. It is the result of a number of pressures. These include: the transnationalization of ownership of some media members of cooperatives; the desire on the part of some members to focus their resources solely on meeting their own news needs; and conflicts of interest between cooperative news agency managements and their respective owners, including conflicts about how best to exploit the Internet.

June 1999: Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye declares Shihata, the national news agency of Tanzania, on the verge of extinction. James Mpinga writes for The East African (Nairobi) that Mr. Daudi Mwakawago, Minister for Information when Shihata was first established in 1976, gave the agency its first misplaced definition: “What is required of our media is the making of great efforts at offering news items which will help in advancing the ruling party’s aspirations and policies” he had told Shihata regional bureau chiefs.
Significance: Shihata was notoriously underfunded. Its credibility was weakened by its links to the ruling party and the state. Its news services were found unsatisfactory to many of the country’s media clients. In all these respects, it mirrored difficulties faced by many other national news agencies, especially in the developing world.

June, 1998: STA, the Slovene Press Agency, established in June 1991, government owned up to 96%, claims itself ‘accurate, independent and neutral’. Over 50% of income is secured by annual contracts with state institutions, one third from the Slovene media market, and the rest from services to enterprises, banks and embassies in Slovenia and abroad. Competition is considered to be national radio (with a well-developed network of correspondents in Slovenia and abroad), Reuters, and other foreign press agencies, including AFP, AP and dpa.

Significance: This item is another that tells us that there is still space for government agencies, not least in recently emerged countries; that even a government controlled agency can attract a wide range of funding sources; that in developing as well as developed countries there is evidence of increased diversity of news sources.

December 1997: PAP, the Polish Press Agency, is transformed into a public corporation, by an Act of Parliament of July 1997. In addition to a Supervisory Board, which is appointed by the Treasury, and an Executive Board, it has an Advisory Board made up of media from all kinds of political orientation. As a public company (owned by Parliament, which is considering whether to reduce its share to 51% from 2001) PAP is enjoined to maintain objectivity and impartiality and to inform about official statements of the state authorities. Although it has been hitherto dependent on state subsidies for 25% of its total budget, its goal now is to balance the books, and the rate of subsidy was 18% in 1999. The agency’s president says ‘we are drawing on the experience and good example of such tested-by-time news organizations like BBC, AFP, Reuters’. Official announcements will provide the content for a special channel; separate from the agency’s other journalistic content. It is expected that despite a richer profusion of news sources in Poland (including Reuters Poland, mainly for business customers) PAP will maintain a fairly strong position on the media market in Poland for the near future. It opened its Internet Newspaper service in 1997.

Significance: This item is a further illustration of the dramatic transitions that have occurred in East and Central Europe following the end of Communism, and the development of new and more transparent mechanisms of control even in the case of agencies which continue to be owned by the state and to be dependent, to an extent, on state subsidy. This case asserts an ambition to reduce dependence on state subsidy, even while retaining an obligation to disseminate state information, to find an appropriate and transparent balance between its obligations to the state and its obligations to media and other clients.

October 1996: Canadian Press, having had 500 employees in 1990 is down to 300. Conrad Black, chair of Southam newspapers, owned by his media conglomerate Hollinger, secured the resignation of CP president David Jolley, who was replaced by the president of Sterling Newspapers, a Hollinger group. Black, at that time, having just acquired majority ownership of the Southam group, controlled 60 of Canada’s 104 daily newspapers, reaching 43% of the national total circulation. In several provinces, Black owned all chains. (Reference also New Zealand Press Association)
Significance: This item is now somewhat dated, given that Black placed most of his Hollinger newspaper holdings on the market earlier in the year 2000. However, it illustrates what can happen when a single media magnate or corporation acquires great power in a single national media market: namely, the source of that power also acquires considerable influence over the national news agency. An institution that is widely perceived as having a general public-service role is thus in danger of becoming the creature of a special interest.

August, 1996: IPI Round Table on ‘News Agencies in Transition’, comprising representatives of news agencies and of professional organizations, announces the ‘Warsaw Declaration on News Agencies’. This includes ten principles, among them the principle that ‘State-owned news agencies must be granted full journalistic independence. Any guidelines for journalistic practices should be developed by the journalists themselves and applied only by the news media organization, without interference from governments, political parties or other interest groups’.

Significance: This item is an acknowledgement by a leading press association of the significance of national news agencies, and the importance of editorial autonomy. It specifies political sources of interference, but not commercial.

(ii) National News Agencies: Do They Count?

If the institution of national news agency is facing a crisis, this need not mean that every national news agency is in crisis. Such is not the case. There are some very successful news agencies. These would include, for example, the Press Association of the United Kingdom, or dpa of Germany. They would include some agencies that may not be particularly successful financially, but which manage to command sufficient respect and support of the state, and sufficient credibility among clients, that they could be said to be stable. These might include the French news agency, AFP, or the Spanish news agency EFE. However, it is also clear that a number of national agencies are in distress. The signs are mostly included in the first section to this paper. They include: news agency closure or the threat of closure; dysfunctional economic problems that threaten the normal operation of an agency, such as inability to pay staff; rifts between agency owners, be they politicians, bureaucrats or media managers, and agency executives; conflicts of interest between agencies and their own members and clients, about such matters as subscription fees, or access to new or traditional services for new clients; increasing competition from independent agencies, from international agencies, from other media systems that are going ‘wholesale’ in some way; difficulty in raising finance for electronic or Internet web services or simply for support of adequate levels of news coverage. And so on.
Given this formidable list of problems (and the list is certainly not exhaustive) we do have to ask whether national news agencies are significant, and if so, how.

Here are some of the reasons for thinking that national agencies are significant, bearing in mind that not all these reasons will apply in all cases:

news agencies provide domestic and international news to retail news media at a more affordable price than the cost to such media of providing such news for themselves; this convenience in turn reduces the cost of news provision, through retail media, to the public. This is a ‘positive’ if we assume that at least some of the news content meets public interest goals such as government accountability, empowerment, and citizenship.

news agencies are generally concerned to establish a portfolio of news (traditionally print, increasingly audio and video and Internet) that represents to a reasonably comprehensive degree the major different geographical, political, economic and cultural constituencies of the nation-state. This portfolio of news contributes to the construction of a ‘national semiotic’ - but we should also acknowledge that this is not necessarily the same thing as a popular national semiotic. Like nation states themselves, news agencies often reflect the dominant ethnic, class, and gender coalition that controls the nation. To the extent that the portfolio favors some interests over others, the more likely it is - governments permitting - that rival agencies will be established to help redress the balance. The portfolios of national news agency news are supplied to both provincial and to capital city media, and these are significant sources of news for agencies.

national news agencies are important sources of news to political, economic and financial institutions. Although they may be somewhat conservative in their news choices and portfolios, their status as national news agencies, their close access to state sources and, in some cases, their links to major news media through ownership and management, sometimes enhance their credibility as news sources.

news agencies have often been important conduits for news flow from international news agencies to local domestic media, so they have also played a role in the local construction of an ‘international semiotic’ and are therefore important players in enabling nations to speak to nations.

news agencies, whether state-owned, media-owned, privately owned or a mixture, tend to be more comprehensive in their news range than individual retail media and less directly driven by goals of audience maximization, and rarely involved in the sale of advertising. More often than not, news agencies subscribe to a western ideology of news gathering which stresses accuracy, impartiality and balance, although there may sometimes be negative implications of such an approach for such considerations as depth, attention to processes as well as outcomes, attention to non-official sources. All news agencies demonstrate forms of at least quantitative selectivity, often in terms of geographical reference, and in references to different topic categories.
news agencies have been regarded as significant tools available to governments for the dissemination of official opinion, and for the dissemination of positive national image in overseas markets; this is a particularly important consideration for states that attract the attention of international media rarely, or, when they do, attract only negative or distorted attention.

news agencies are sometimes regarded as significant sources of national news for the international news agencies, with which they have often collaborated in unequal relationship. This is significant in at least three, respects. If an international agency trusts a national news agency as source then this may reduce the cost of news coverage of a nation for the international news agency; it may enhance the play that a nation receives in the wires of the international agency; and it may in general enhance the power of local media to influence the news agenda about their own country in international media.

(iii) Is There a Crisis of the National News Agencies (and if so, does it matter)?

Enough has been said to suggest that the term 'crisis' in relation to news agencies is not far-fetched, even if some news agencies continue to do very well. Nor is this merely the opinion of an interested outsider. Opening the 1999 annual seminar of the European Alliance of Press Agencies, Secretary-General Rudi de Ceuster had this to say:

"In world where contracts for the purchase of news services can no longer be restricted within national boundaries, and hence existing preferential contracts become obsolete (e.g. because of the Internet), in a media landscape where media concerns are no longer national companies but are developing into international conglomerates, and in a world where there is no longer national and regional news, but simply European and regional news, the days of the national media-owned news agencies as they have existed and survived in the past, are numbered. If the current owners do not allow the agency Management to recognize this fact and act upon it, or if the managements of the national news agencies fail to identify this challenge and act upon it, I foresee a bleak future for these agencies"

The major sources of concern are as follows: -

Low excess income or profit potential. The average turnover for the member agencies of the European Alliance of Press Agencies (EAPA), as reported to the EAPA annual seminar in 1999 was a modest 16.5 m. Euro and average profit before tax was a mere 150,000 Euro, in respect of organizations which comprised an average 200 staff, of whom 132 were journalists. These figures may be artificially low: on the one hand, some agencies have begun to set up subsidiaries within which to ring-fence entrepreneurial activity; and on the other, some agencies are constituted as non-profits and are not expected to demonstrate profits. It is quite clear upon closer inspection, that some agencies run dangerously close to the bone; that some operate in cultures that are not sympathetic to the idea that agencies can be or even should be profitable, and that some are accustomed to turning for help to their respective governments or other sources of support. All this has obvious implications for the availability of resources to respond flexibly and quickly to emergent challenges, such as are posed by political, economic and technology developments. Organizations that lack the means to
invest in their own future are also less likely to be able to nurture entrepreneurial cultures or to keep entrepreneurial personnel. This is not simply the outcome of agencies that are financially unsuccessful. Some cooperative news agencies have survived a very long time because they have been supported by the subscription income of media clients who have also been owners. So long as expenditure did not exceed subscription income or whatever could be anticipated in subscription increases the following year, the agency operated successfully and met the needs of its clients. However, that kind of steady state, zero balance, approach has sometimes not been conducive to product innovation and market boldness. For example, among the member agencies of the European ‘Group 39’ alliance in 1999, an average of 80% of revenue, in terms of category of product, derived from general news sales, 18% from special information services (including data-bases and archives, OTS, ready-made pages, and other) and 2% from technical services. In terms of category of client, 51% of revenue derived from printed media, 27% from electronic media, and 22% from non-media. Increasingly it is considered within the Group 39 agencies that the proportion of revenue from non-media sources needs to increase.

**Trends among traditional media clients that threaten or challenge agency activities.** The effects of these are not everywhere clear, and research that is more systematic is required. Newspaper concentrations reduce the number of titles. Large groups are more likely than small to consider setting up independent ‘in-house’ agencies, even to set up agencies that compete with the established national agencies. Large groups, particularly those that form part of publicly-owned multi-industrial conglomerates may take a narrow, bottom-line approach to their assessment of news needs, and to the way in which they exercise their influence or voting power within cooperative or participative structures. Conglomerates are more likely to be international, and may therefore assign a lower priority to meeting the news needs of particular national markets.

The globalization of finance and of communications is itself feeding the ambitions of media conglomerates to aspire to international markets, and one consequence of this is growing competition on local markets from foreign media organizations; this includes the presence of international agency news services on local national news markets which may once have been served by means of an exclusive partnership between the international and a national news agency.

Concentration, however, is not everywhere the problem. The transition to democracy in many parts of the developing world, or to post-communist regimes in the old communist world, was sometimes accompanied by a radical downsizing in the markets of previously powerful media, and the proliferation of many new titles, most of them financially fragile.

Another trend is evident, for example, in the broadcast media of the United States, or wherever ‘public-service’ media have declined in favor of new, private and more commercial media, and that is a process of ‘dumbing-down’ of content, with a corresponding reduction in the quantity and scope of news that is provided. This may lead to client impatience with news agencies that have previously prided themselves on comprehensive national and international news portfolios.
Throughout the world, news media (and other organizations) are developing web-sites that include news. The news may come from the news media themselves, it may come from news agencies. However, the net effect is one of proliferation of both news sites, and news sources, and this presents a major competitive challenge to traditional national news agencies. A significant part of this process is the reductions in cost that the Internet affords for the development of on-line news services. News becomes cheaper to collect, process and disseminate, more so where there is no strict observance of international copyright agreements. Increasingly, therefore, the critical competitive edge is quality: the scope, immediacy, relevance, accessibility of the news that is collected, the availability of multi-media links and background as required, and the clarity and visual display of display. But what is most important of all this is the realization that the central business model that has underwritten news agency operations for over one hundred and fifty years, namely the principle of news agencies as ‘wholesalers’ selling primarily to ‘retailers’ (though sometimes to other ‘wholesalers’) is itself under threat. ‘Retail’ media such as CNN and the BBC increasingly are hawking their news products to other media as well as to retail end-users, individual news consumers. In addition, the agencies themselves are increasingly looking to the potential growth of direct news provision to news consumers, by-passing the traditional ‘retailer’ route.

One response, as we have seen in the case of Associated Press and Reuters, is for agencies to position themselves as the most competitive providers of news to web-sites, and indeed it may even be the case that in this role the news agencies are among the media most likely to realize the profit potential of the Internet. In this, some agencies are helped where they have the benefit of established and successful still-photo, sound, graphics and moving-image production operations that can easily be incorporated into video-streaming and other online formats. However, on the downside, it is precisely because agency clients want to build their own brands on the web, they are reluctant that the agencies themselves should get too much of the credit. In the case of cooperative news agencies, in particular, there is a tension between agency managements that want to explore a variety of traditional and innovative online services, and news agency media proprietors who are reluctant to allow their agencies to sweep up any of the income that they, the proprietors, could be earning directly.

One justification for state subsidy for news agency operations in the past has been precisely that this provides a level of financial security for an agency to concentrate on public service goals of a broad, nationwide scope that may sometimes also accommodate a developmental mission, or a state information/dissemination function. A more commercially driven agency, or an agency that is driven to serve mainly commercial clients, may have less financial freedom or motivation to meet such public service interests. But the same pressures that have helped bring about deregulation and privatization of media, where these had once been state protected or controlled, are also in some countries reducing the interest of the state in providing subsidies to news agencies.
(iv) Why national news agencies may matter: -

If national news agencies were not to survive, would it really matter? From a neo-liberal point of view, the only concern is whether market needs are met; who meets those needs is irrelevant. Except of course it is not irrelevant when we are talking about products that are culturally and politically sensitive, and when the products may also have implications for the economic health of particular countries.

Is the future of news agencies a general public concern or is it a specialist, industry concern? If agencies do not now constitute a proper subject of general public concern, then that should determine the desirability of state, intergovernmental or non-profit involvement. The answer need not be the same in every part of the world, but a generalized global answer is 'probably, yes, the agencies do constitute a matter for public concern'. One clue, as we have seen, is that most countries have seen fit to have a national news agency, and that newly formed countries are also quick to see the need for a national agency. What follows is a list of some of the reasons why we should not lightly give up on the need for national news agencies.

**Issues of source fragmentation and security**: Global processes of deregulation, privatization, conglomerate, commercialization and globalization have considerably reduced the voice of states in international news flow, and have reduced the extent to which international news flow is governed by agendas that are articulated in terms of public service as opposed to goals of entertainment and profit. It is not necessary to make a value judgment about private, commercial media to recognize that there are potential security hazards about a world in which special and unknown interests have greater power to dictate information agendas, and where the benefits of diversity on the one hand, are to some extent counterbalanced by the dangers of fragmentation. National news agencies generally have the power to fashion news portfolios for domestic consumption, control networks of correspondents throughout their respective national territories, draw on a range of known and identifiable international news sources, are a significant news source for international media, are often in part controlled by national media groups, are highly visible, having relatively transparent links with state and with media sponsors and clients. They contribute to a global news system whose net output can be assessed against in-depth information as to its sources, working practices and interests. In the absence of any other system that is as transparent, it is therefore a system that is probably worth preserving, as much as any intelligent observer would want to see it improved.

**Issues of 'public sphere'**: Some of the above already touches on considerations of the 'global public sphere'. The 'public sphere' as described by Habermas is defined in terms of its independence of state and capital, its internal lack of hierarchy, its availability as a forum for all voices and within which reason is the only legitimate arbiter of value. The global news system as described above is not independent of state or capital, but some of its parts and much of its product does demonstrably contribute to an informational infrastructure that facilitates the possibility of a public sphere. For example, national news agencies typically provide relatively comprehensive services of international and national news to provincial and poorer media that would otherwise not be able to support the costs of such newsgathering.
They constitute one channel through which certain developmental objectives can easily be realized: for example, by incorporating news items that pertain to the interests and welfare of minority or oppressed groups. They are a means whereby the government may, directly or indirectly, communicate with itself, and with its people. Issues of public sphere then raise significant ethical and constitutional questions about the nature of the agency's relationship with the state, capital, other media systems, and with 'civil society'. All these are clients, all these are potential and often actual owners (though not typically 'civil society'), and all these are the worthy and proper subjects about which news agencies report. The nature of the agency's relationship with each category is usually catapulted to public debate only at times of major political transition, such as in Eastern and Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, and these debates are important to monitor because they can help generate new models of articulation of an agency's relationships with other sectors of society.

**Issues of national identity:** In discussion of globalization, notions of the 'nation' or 'national identity' are sometimes talked about as retrogressive. That may be justifiable, especially where national identity is articulated non-inclusively in the image of a single dominant or powerful ethnic group, or where discourses of national identity are fig-leaves that disguise major civil unrest, or the dominance of multinational enterprise activity throughout the territory and affairs of a supposedly autonomous nation-state, or an all-pervasive supra-regional authority. But in globalization it is often the national identities of weak and poor states that are most under threat from aggressive cultural and economic activities of stronger states, these latter combining the advantages of robust economies and highly-articulated notions of national identity.

These considerations then raise questions about the manner of representation of nation-states, the ways in which a national agency represents the nation, and the influence of those representations on other media, national and international. In many countries, national agencies field more correspondents 'in the field' than any other domestic or international media, although domestic national broadcasters are sometimes close competitors. As such, they control informational networks that are often of unique value, and that are probably under-exploited in international news flow. Representations are inevitably selective constructions, but when they are the construction of powerful forces. they may take on the appearance of inevitable and sufficient facts. Globalization highlights this role of the national news agency: nations whose economic, political and cultural sovereignty is under perceived or actual threat are arguably those most in need of a retaliatory 'national semiotic'. While we should not overlook arguments that the nation-state is an outmoded concept in a global economy, with the implication therefore that national agencies are redundant vanities, the reality is that it is scarcely possible to understand the world without conceding considerable importance to nation states. The explanatory importance, for example, of nation-states such as the United States of America, or China, or Spain, would be difficult to contest.
(v) Solutions to the Crisis:

(a) Diversification

Throughout their history, agencies have found it difficult to sustain operations solely based on straight news services for retail clients. From the very beginning of its history, Reuters earned a substantial share of its revenues from sales of news to the finance community. That has increased dramatically in recent decades to the point that less than 5% of the agency’s revenues are attributable to traditional media clients. Other agencies, such as the French Havas (predecessor to the modern Agence France Presse) looked to government subventions, whether direct or indirect, to help support their operations. Not even Reuters was exempt from that trend, as for many years before and after the Second World War, its earnings from British government and colonial government sources were higher than could have been commercially justified. In many cases of course, dependence on governments was a political imposition as much as or more than an economic necessity. Some agencies, as we have seen, enjoyed security as the creatures of cooperatives of newspapers that regarded them as a means of reducing newsgathering costs.

Cooperative owners had a vested interest in low subscriptions; governments were often less than generous benefactors. Pressures of competition sometimes convert into pressure to adopt new technologies in order to maintain competitiveness in speed of news delivery, and have tended to reduce surplus revenue to modest levels. Hence there has been considerable interest on the part of news agencies, in diversification, and this takes three principal forms: diversification of product for news media clients; diversification of product for non-media clients, and diversification of technology for the gathering and dissemination of news. Thus, the process of diversification is intimately connected with the origination of new technologies, or the innovative adaptation of existing technologies. The dimension of technological innovation should not be underestimated, and the largest agencies, notably Reuters and Associated Press have invested heavily in research and development activity. Diversification of product to news media clients has included the generation of photographic services for print clients, graphics services for print and broadcast clients, voice services for radio clients, audio-visual moving-image services for television clients, automatic teletypesetting services for print clients, brokerage of advertising space on behalf of clients and, more recently, provision of news for client Internet services. Diversification of product for non-media clients has occurred most notably in relation to political and economic or industry clients; Reuters has probably been the most innovative in this context, innovating a wide range of specialist information packages for brokers, banks, stock exchanges, commodity markets, companies and the like, extending to the innovation of hardware and software delivery systems for such information, and even going beyond the mere provision of information to the creation of electronic market-places for the buying and selling of money, commodities and services, and the development of added-value by allowing clients to analyze and manipulate or customize historical statistical information. Its focus in this area has always been on institutions, and this continues to be very largely the case. However, applications of Internet technology suggest that Reuters may increasingly provide services that are available directly to individual investors and other information consumers.
Diversification in itself raises important issues. These include, in particular, the possibility of conflicts of interest where the goal of earning additional revenues may be seen to compromise the commitment of agencies to accuracy and impartiality in the provision of information. Such conflicts of interest can occur too within media markets (e.g. where an agency is dependent on a single media client for a substantial amount of its revenue), but their likelihood increases when agencies become involved in the delivery of both general and customized services to non-media clients. Another and related issue has to do with the introduction of a culture of entrepreneurship to what may previously have been a non-entrepreneurial climate. Such was the case for example with the introduction of a new range of computerized economic and financial news services in Reuters during the 1960s and 1970s, which occasioned much tension between ‘general news’ and ‘economic news’ reporters, on the one hand, and between reporters and technologists and marketing people, on the other.

A third dimension to diversification is that it typically complicates the mission of an agency, its relationship with its owners and traditional clients, its internal structure, and its financial needs, and this in turn has an important impact on the agency’s demand for management, technological and professional skills.

Forms of diversification include: multi-media news-feeds to client web-sites; brokering advertising space, including classifieds; dissemination of state, financial, sports data and statistics; specialized country, county, issue, industry, sports and other topic/theme news; consultancy services to other agencies or to retail media; media management services; the dissemination of public relations wires on behalf of clients to media; screen-ready publishing services; teletext news; financial services (share prices, performance graphs, unit trusts, company information and graphics, investment analysis); weather services (national, regional international weather graphics, symbol charts, text forecasts and reports, comparative data, detailed analysis, world temperature tables, satellite pictures); radio/TV listings; special features in response to customer requests; different language news services.

The Press Association is an example of a national agency that has achieved considerable diversification. Its services in 1999 included: NewsFile Service; PA Weathercentre; PA Listings; Pixelect (digital picture publicity service: distributes publicity photos to media; provides on-line library to corporate clients); PA Photos; Ananova Internet (new media, virtual newscaster): to be sold; Tellex Monitors: media monitoring company (sold to Taylor Nelson Sofres plc); Eventselector online ticketing (in conjunction with handbag.com; and available to AOL subscribers); PA Sport dedicated sports news and information division; Evening Newspaper Services; PA New Media (files interactive news and information services to web-sites); Online shopping information services; Online Feature Syndication Service (for weekly newspapers); Totalbet: on-line betting service in conjunction with Tote; New Media Subscription and E-commerce services; Storecast: a specialist service designed to help retailers boost the sales of products affected by weather; Two-Ten Communications support direct marketing campaigns from start to finish; Racing Pages, in conjunction with Weatherbys, supplies fully-produced horse racing pages direct to national and regional newspapers; Canada Newswire: news release service.
(b) Training and Professional Development

The struggle for institutional stability and growth, as we have seen, is an increasingly complex task. The principal areas of concern are professional, managerial and technical. Professional skills of news-gathering, editing and dissemination must now take account of the need for multi-media flexibility, and of the potential for immediate local, regional, national and international dissemination that the Internet makes possible, both in wholesaler and retailer mode. The possibility of retail address opens up a wide new range, almost infinite, of service and revenue possibilities, which are limited only by the competition, what clients are prepared to pay, the potential for advertising, the agency’s own constitution, and what its owners are prepared to allow. Managerial talents are equally stretched to encompass both the traditional, politically astute, public service ethos of a national news agency, and the entrepreneurial profit-driven ethos that must be fast, responsive and financially and technically savvy. This is not to say that the public service mission is itself simple; far from it, for with the trends towards greater globalization and, in many countries, democratization, there is ever more pressure on agencies to address the news needs of an interdependent world of giant media corporations, multi-national corporations, multiple interest groups that incorporate a growing swathe of non-governmental organizations and state enterprises.

Technological skills increasingly focus on the Internet and on multi-media newsgathering and dissemination equipment. Approaches to training in these contexts cannot stop at initial training, but must involve a serious and dedicated commitment to career-long professional development. They must be international and well-networked, in the range of training sources on which they draw. They must be open to a variety of different means of training delivery, including on-line courses, special seminars and training events. This in turn requires a systematic approach internationally to news agency training, and to the building of a corpus of training materials of wide applicability, and available online for both synchronous and asynchronous delivery. This requires systematic analysis and study of the industry itself, and study can help provide a basis for comprehensive assessments and evaluations of agency content, and of the development and operation of different business models. In both research and training, there is a role for institutions of higher education. However, academic research has tended to focus on the major international news agencies, it has largely ignored the national and other more local or specialized agencies, and has been sporadic and fragmented.

The California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, with the support of the European Alliance of Press Agencies, in collaboration with the London School of Economics and Political Science, and with the University of San Francisco, has recently drafted a proposal for a News Agency Research and Training Institute. Its primary functions would be:

• undertaking pure and applied research relating to news agencies and their contribution to media and to society, democracy and development, regionally, nationally and world-wide;

• contributing publications on news agencies and news agency research;
• development of courses for news agency journalists, managers and technical staff, using a variety of means of delivery arrangement of special events, seminars, workshops, exhibitions relating to news agency work contributing modules on news agencies to general communications and other university courses the development of information and other resources about news agencies, world-wide;

• development of networks of journalists, managers and researchers in common goals of enhancement and sharing of information, research and training

In its first phase, NARTI would concentrate on major issues that confront news agency professions worldwide. These include:

• identification of factors that contribute to organizational survival and success
• identification of patterns of successful diversification
• assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of particular forms of ownership,
• identification and accumulation of case study demonstrations of principles of excellence in news agency management
• charting the changing contributions of news agencies to the organizational and economic health of news media
• charting the contributions of news agencies to public information and democracy
• specification and implementation of frameworks of evaluation for news services
• analysis of educational and training needs of news agency staffs
• appropriate forms of NGO and other support for news agencies that cannot be sustained solely on the basis of the revenues which they earn from direct media clients

NARTI could act as a clearinghouse of information to be made accessible to national and international news agencies on request. It would be available to support investigations that are of general value to the community of news agencies, their clients and consumers, and would search for funding support of such investigations.

(c) Networking

News agencies have historically been well networked. This relates in part to the days of the nineteenth century news agency cartel which networked a small core of leading, international agencies, in symbiotic if unequal relationship with a much larger band of national news agencies which themselves had struggled to achieve national status through a process of competition and exclusion. Later on, the drive to networking came about through the recognition of common interests, as in the case of Group 39 in Europe, and in the case of national agencies in virtually all countries that were keen to foster bilateral and multilateral relations with the agencies of other states with which they had some bond or interest in common. Regional alliances were formed (e.g. European Alliance of Press Agencies, Federation of Arab News Agencies, Association of Mediterranean Agencies, Association of Balkan News Agencies), and in some cases regional news agencies (e.g. PANA, CANA). There is potential for more representation of news agency issues through international publisher and journalistic associations, including such bodies as the International Press Institute, InterNews, the
European Journalism Center, the World Association of Newspapers, the Southeast Asian Press Alliance, Pacific Islands News Association, and many others. These are and/or could be useful for the exploration of issues to do with new technologies, relations between agencies and clients, the future directions for news agencies, training and professional development, and in representation to governmental, intergovernmental and non-profit sponsors. Future strategies for survival will inevitably require networking also: including the pooling of experiences, of news and other content, the sharing of resources (e.g. overseas correspondents, communications facilities), and other approaches to mutual aid. Networking solutions may also include new alliances between traditional ‘wholesale’ and ‘retail’ media, between traditional news agencies and newer forms of electronic news dissemination such as the African News Service, and between national and international news agencies: (e.g. AFP’s AFX in collaboration with Bloomberg, dpa, ATS and possibly others, including the Financial Times and Bertelsmann; Romania’s news agency cooperation with the Austrian Press Agency in transmission of photos from remote locations). In addition, they may include alliances between news agencies and large telecommunications and other multi-media mega-giants - for news agencies are the proprietors of highly valuable information resources in a content-hungry broadband world, although inevitably any such interlinkages will raise concerns about independence and diversity of viewpoint.

(d) Re-Articulation of Relations with the State, Capital and Civil Society

National agencies that have been and continue to be financially dependent on the state-as-sponsor or the state-as-client, can look to a variety of models from West and East for governing the natural tensions between the two, agencies and states, enabling the first to be autonomous while also accountable. Major political transitions as in the transition from communism in central and Eastern Europe may have helped generate new solutions to the agency-state relationship. For example, in the case of CTK, the Czech national agency, a supervisory council that elects the chair person and general manager directs the public organization. The members of the council are appointed by parliament, not government. Council members cannot belong to political parties nor can they have financial interests in media. The constitutional bedrock for CTK is financial independence. The agency owns its own property and the state is not responsible for its liabilities. In Africa, democratic developments have provided a suitable context for a reformulation of PANA, the regional African news agency. Re-structuring in 1996 opened its share capital to private investors. Its output has since increased considerably, as has the number of its Africa-based and overseas correspondents; it has incorporated Internet dissemination;

Independent agencies, agencies that are supported by non-governmental institutions, including media and other commercial institutions, often represent interests that are very different from those of national agencies. These too, their governing structures, and their mechanisms, if any, for the guarantee of professional autonomy and commitment to the public good, deserve scrutiny and analysis. A systematic re-evaluation of cooperative news agencies is probably long overdue. All agencies now have the opportunity to address wider publics than just media or government or institutions, and can benefit from the recent growth of the Internet, and the widening range of services that agencies can offer directly to the public. However, to realize these gains may require a re-negotiation or re-positioning
The title of the Amman workshop highlights the role of the Internet. This paper has attempted to place the relationship between news agencies and the Internet in a broader context, a context of growing uncertainty worldwide about the appropriate mission and function of national news agencies. As we have seen, the sources of that uncertainty are only in part technological; there are also more profound issues at stake. None the less, the Internet presents a critical challenge to news agencies. It offers the possibility of a significant reduction in telecommunications costs; it gives instant access and often more convenient access, to a wide diversity of news sources; it is available as a channel for the dissemination of news sources; it considerably eases the possibility of reaching a wider variety of different audiences, both institutional and individual; it permits a degree and ease of interactivity between journalists and sources; between agency and clients, that would otherwise be difficult; it allows unparalleled ease of connectivity to other news sites and to archival sources; it is very easily updatable. Furthermore, and in principle, news agencies have some distinctive advantages when it comes to exploitation of the Internet. In the first instance, they are not bound, like their traditional 'retail' clients, to product models that are based on the notion that content must be enveloped within a physical and programming package for client consumption, as in the case of newspapers and broadcasting. Their history as 'wholesalers' is such that they have no overriding investment in particular forms of delivery, only that the delivery facilitates universality of reach, accuracy and speed and that it is affordable. The Internet lends itself to multi-media presentations that incorporate the printed word, voice, still image, moving image, giving agencies the possibilities of combining a variety of different modes of communication depending on client need and communicational function. This in turn permits the development of a product or service that is potentially highly attractive, aesthetically, to the user, as well as being very convenient. Because many if not most agencies have established strong names and identities, sometimes over decades, and now even centuries, they are also theoretically well-placed to exploit the power of their 'brand image' on the Internet in competition with other, less well-known names. The 'brand' is often associated with a very specialized product - the news of a given nation or territory, and this in turn may help delimit the range of potential competitors. Services can be supplied on an open-access basis, free of charge and possibly supported by advertising revenue, or on a subscription basis, or different services can be delivered according to different principles of access.

On the downside, it is precisely this list of advantages that attracts new players into the business of news and information provision. Hence, the world of the Internet is very competitive. In addition, the competitors are both domestic and international. Domestic sources may seem more likely competitors for the supply of 'national' news, especially if they are rooted in existing media organizations, some of whom will also have established 'brand names'. In addition, some international suppliers, such as the major international news agencies, will have the resources to develop national news services. Some of them have done that for many years already in certain lucrative markets. Given the advantages of the Internet, they may be tempted to establish more national services in more territories. They
do not necessarily have to provide comprehensive news services to compete; in fact, by providing very selective news services, they reduce their costs, and they combine what they do provide with other services that are imported from other markets. Some of the competition will have drawn on financial, content and personnel resources that far exceed anything that is available to some of the smaller national news agencies. The brand identity of some national agencies may not be sufficiently strong to compete against newcomers, especially if the brand has been associated with discredited or unpopular government regimes, and if the newcomers are regarded as more popular vehicles, free of association with government. Although there are many ways in which online models for the news business are less expensive, there is substantial cost involved in transitioning to new methods of delivery (or broadening the existing range of means of delivery); there are technical issues of ensuring compatibility of content with client delivery systems, and considerable challenge in creating appropriate software and content that appropriately exploits the capability of the medium and is competitive with other sources. The new environment is one that highlights the importance of quality of content, appearance, technical flexibility and client responsiveness. Finally, as we have seen, some agencies, particularly cooperative agencies, are likely to encounter difficulties where they are offering services through the Internet that are seen by traditional clients to compete with their own services. The Internet is likely to be a significant factor as agencies position themselves strategically for a new more competitive, digital and multimedia era. However, in itself it is not a solution. It becomes a solution only when located appropriately within a broader strategic vision that takes account of the full range of issues that have been identified and discussed within this paper.
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14 Annex III: Programme

Sunday 28th January 2001

08.00 - 8.30 Registration
08.30 - 9.30 Official opening ceremony by Dr. Taleb Rifai, Jordan Minister of Information
09.30 - 10.00 Coffee Break with Guest of Honour

14.1.1 National news agencies in a global context
10.00 - 11.00 Presentation and discussion of background paper: Is there a future for national news agencies: Prof. Oliver Boyd-Barrett, California State University (Followed by discussion).

14.1.2 News Agencies a historical perspectives
11.00 –12.00 Presentation by: Mr. Ed. Moyo, Mr. A Quarymne, Mr. C. Sy: CANAD. WANAD, SEANAD. The objectives and achievements: historical perspectives.
12.00 –13.30 Lunch Break

14.1.3 The National News Agency in the fire of technological, economic and political change
13.30 – 15.30 Presentation of National Case studies and discussion:
South Africa Press Association
United News, Bangladesh
Indonesia ANTARA
Palestinian News Agency (WAFA)
15.30. -16.00 Coffee break
16.00 - 17.30 Continuation of presentation of national case studies
Press Trust of India
Bulgarian Telegraph Agency
Ghana News Agency
Khabar News Agency (Kazakhstan)
Syrian News Agency
18.00 - 19.30 Cocktail

Monday 29th January 2001

14.1.4 Local and global: some strategic choices
09.00 - 10.00 Presentations by
Professor Daya Thussu (University of North London)
Professor Anthony Giffard (University of Washington)
14.1.5 Should national agencies give way to regional news agencies?
10.00 – 11.30 Presentation of Regional case studies and discussions
The Caribbean News Agency.
The Federation of Arab News Agencies
The Women’s Feature Service (New Delhi)
(Followed by discussions)
11.30 – 12.00 Tea break

14.1.6 Agencies, Technology and Development
12.00 – 13.00 Presentations by
The General Manager of SEDCO Nepras
The General Manager of PETRA News Agency
The General Manager of WAFA News Agency
11.30-13.30 Lunch

14.1.7 Study Groups
14.00 – 16.00 Participants will split into two study groups on
Issues of news agency ownership and management
Diversification of services

Tuesday 30th January 2001

14.1.8 Study Groups
09.00 – 11.30 Continuation of discussions in study groups
1130 – 12.00 Tea break

14.1.9 Continuation of study groups
12.00 - 13.30 Continuation of study group discussion
Networking: bi-lateral, multi-lateral relations, agency federations
Personnel training, professional development, professionalism
13. 30 - 14.30 Lunch Break
Free afternoon

Wednesday 31st January 2001

14.1.10 The Future of National News Agencies
09.00 -11.00 Discussion of study group reports
11.00 - 11.30 Tea break
11.30 - 13.30 Adoption of the Final Report of the workshop.