Long Session Report: Global Solutions

Session Title: Investigating corruption: the new muckrakers
How are new funding models and cross-border collaborations for investigative journalism affecting investigative journalism’s ability to combat corruption

Date & Time: Friday 04th September 11.00 – 13.00

Report prepared by: Alison Coleman, EU project manager, TI EU

Session coordinated by: Deborah Unger, TIS

Moderated by: Deborah Unger, TIS

Experts:

- Ms Eva Constantaras, Data Journalism Advisor, Internews Network
- Ms Yolanda Ma Jinxin, Co-Founder, Data Journalism China
- Mr. David Kaplan, Executive Director, Global Investigative Journalism Network
- Mr. Paul Radu, Executive Director, Organized Crime and Corruption
- Mr. Ron Nixon, Washington Correspondent for the New York Times, Chairman of the board of 100Reporters, USA

What were the aims of the session and corruption risks?

Governments are criminalising journalism around the world, while investigators face intimidation, threats, abuse etc. More than a 1000 journalists have been murdered since 1990. There is a war out there on independent media and they need help.

Mainstream media continues to back away from funding long-form investigative journalism and are developing partnerships with non-profit news organisations like ProPublica, ICIJ and 100Reporters. These new models (mostly funded by US foundations) are also often in collaboration with civil society organisations (also foundation and sometimes government funded). There are more cross border collaborations too and great reporting has been done.

This session explored both the sustainability of this model for investigative journalism and the financial and ethical pitfalls in this approach. Questions that were looked at in this session included:
Is this a golden age for investigative journalists uncovering corruption? 
Will foundations keep up their funding? 
Will working with CSOs, who have their own agendas, skew the journalism? 
Is this different from the days of media barons setting the agenda

Summary of panellists’ contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

The Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) site is visited by journalists from 80 different countries a day. GIJN is very interested in corruption stories. It links 500 journalists worldwide.

100Reporters pairs investigative reporters with whistleblowers to create stories. It has a special encrypted page to allow for safe communications. But funding this work remains an issue. It is looking into new funding models such as digital subscriptions and other things but it is currently heavily dependent on donor funding. Donors taste and topics change regularly – the fear is that the current commitment by donors to investigative reporting won’t last. Also funding is project specific but new start ups need general support.

OCCRP (Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) is one of the largest investigative journalism organisations in the world. They follow the money across borders. Investigative reporting is paying off. More than US$1.2 billion of assets have been frozen due to investigative journalism by OCCRP. An average story costs US$20,000. “We are only able to investigate very little amounts of the crime and corruption that is out there,” said Paul Radu because OCCRP doesn’t have enough people. It also trains other stakeholders with skills in investigative skills.

- If investigative journalism has helped recover US$1.2 billion in assets, they why can’t they get a slice of this. That is the question it is asking for future funding.

Eva Constantaras spoke of how Investigative journalism is moving online in niche organisations and that this has meant that although they are doing great work the people on the ground do not know about them. So is online the way forward if it can’t help push policy change? She works for Internews and has trained data journalists in Kenya and instead of creating an online platform actually reverted to broadsheet format which has had a big impact. Stories of corruption have produced public outrage, damaged political image, donors outraged about use of the funds etc. Her point:

- Donors are only funding these niche online platforms – “If we really want to engage the public in the democratic movement we have to reach out to them over the channels they use. Such as radio, TV, print etc,” said Constantaras.

Yolanda Ma Jinxin spoke of how traditional media are still doing investigative stories in China, but online media and activism is also rising. Hong Kong and Taiwan do have a free media. There are a number of investigative outlets in these countries, some are crowdfunded, some supported by foundations etc. some have set themselves up as foundations.

NGOs have also been doing investigations for years such as Global Witness which often collaborates with investigative journalists on stories. If they work with editors that have backed the projects the stories are more likely to reach the front page. Recently Global Witness hired two journalists to sit within the team and they have the freedom to choose what they want to work on. The law treats media and NGOs differently. NGOs are not as protected on issues such as protecting sources etc. Sometimes collaborations can be difficult – it’s not just NGOs who can have an agenda.

- Thomson Reuters Foundation is trying to set up for-profit news organisations in Africa. The project is called Wealth of Nations. It is looking at a number of models for not for profit media outlets. Some media outlets are funding their work by selling their other skills or functions.
Some new media outlets are looking at subscription models – however these do not always work. The main one discussed was Propublica, which although it has won a Pulitzer prize is still very much reliant on foundation funding.

Main outcomes of session (include the highlights and interesting questions from the floor)

- **Safety is a rising concern for both NGOs and journalists. Is there anything we can do together to improve on this?**

OCCRP outlined the three types of threats that journalists face. First come legal threats, (OCCRP have libel insurance to cover these threats), then physical threats (OCCRP uses the network to protect its journalists – they share information so that the information is out there with trusted people), finally there are cyber threats (OCCRP works with hackers to improve their systems). But recently one of the OCCRP network was jailed in Azerbaijan and they were not able to get her freed.

It’s really important that international organisations etc. protect investigative journalists. Could look at trying to get the same protection for journalists as you have for human rights defenders.

*International organisations such as the UN must work together to protect investigative journalists.*

- **Networking**

Journalists really don’t like working together. But you can show how data and investigative journalists can **work together on practical projects**. Afterwards if this initial project has been successful then networking becomes easier.

- **What do people think about Buzzfeed as a model?**

Buzzfeed are now funding investigative journalism, and are reaching a very wide audience. More so than any other investigative journalism outlet. And new news media like Vice may be a source of future funding.

- **How can you do data journalism in a country where they do not have records or where there are no Freedom of Information rules?**

There is always interesting data out there. Even if it’s of the low hanging variety, such as health or education data, the problem is finding a way to get these stories printed. You need to **use local reporters and focus on local issues to try and influence policy change on the ground.**

Supply of data is not the problem but demand – demand by consumers etc. If we really want to engage the public and the demand for investigative and data journalism then we must **reach out over the media channels that they use such as radio, TV, print etc.**

- **How much of the same investigative work is being done by NGOs and the media. Have you seen interesting collaborations?**

A lot of colleagues from the media world have gone to work with NGOs and at the same time some media outlets are working like NGOs. A major challenge for collaboration can be basic skills – **training for journalists is needed.**

Trust is a big issue between NGOs and the media. There is a need to work on this. The goals of an NGO may be different from the goals of a journalist who simply wants a good story.
There is a deficit in real returns from investigative stories, sometimes nothing happens after a story is realised. An NGO however wants to use the information to create policy change or hold the guilty accountable.

Impact is growing – but in different ways. Law enforcement may not pick up on the story but others can. For example, the New Zealand authorities shut down companies that were linked to corruption in media stories that had originated in the Balkans. The OCCRP makes all of its information and background to a story available and this leads to other types of impact such as stopping the corrupt being able to continue business as usual in different parts of the world.

- **Data journalism, like the OCCRP dashboard, can help play a role in bringing the corrupt to face justice**

- **Cross border stories are a good example of this and there is a market for this type of information in national news media.**

Open data movement is not that great – *real open, raw data is needed to do good data journalism work.*

Sometimes good investigative journalism can make it harder for others: once the power of data is understood, those who control data take steps to make it less accessible. Also you have to be sceptical about data – data can lie.

Finding a *financially sustainable funding model* is hard. No one has the answers yet.

**Key recommendations and concrete follow-up actions**

1. **International organisations such as the UN must work together to protect investigative journalists.**

   - Journalists should have the same protection as human rights defenders.
   
   - There is a need for journalists to collaborate so that those outside a country where journalists are under threat can help those working under restrictive regimes

2. **Journalists, NGOs and news organisations should work together on practical projects.**

3. **Use local reporters and focus on local issues to try and influence policy change on the ground.**

4. **Reach out over the media channels that people use such as radio, TV, print etc. Not everyone has the Internet!**

   - **Don’t just use niche online sites for reporting on investigative and data journalism**

5. **There should be more training for journalists, particularly in less developed countries.**

6. **There needs to be greater access to and tools to use real open, raw data**

7. **More work needs to be done to find financially sustainable funding models for investigative journalism.**

   - Greater diversity of funding is needed and better business models for investigative reporting. Organisations need to find creative ways to monetise their work.
   
   - If investigative journalism has helped recover US$1.2 billion in assets, why can’t the media get a slice of this? When assets are repatriated and it is because of good
We value your assessment following the outputs of the session, if you need to, please get feedback from the session coordinator or the moderator for this component.

Key Insights for the future of the anti-corruption agenda (including Game Changing ideas/ suggestions/ actions from the session)

Key game changing ideas included:

- Increasing protection for investigative journalists to be on par with human rights defenders
- Donating a percentage of recovered assets to investigative journalism (if a story sparked the recovery)
- Use all communication channels not just niche online ones (tailor it to affected local communities)

Rapporteur’s name and date submitted
Alison Coleman, September 15 2015